

The Last Of The Barons, Volume 9.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK IX.

THE WANDERERS AND THE EXILES.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE GREAT BARON BECOMES AS GREAT A REBEL.

Hilyard was yet asleep in the chamber assigned to him as his prison, when a rough grasp shook off his slumbers, and he saw the earl before him, with a countenance so changed from its usual open majesty, so dark and sombre, that he said involuntarily, "You send me to the doomsman,--I am ready!"

"Hist, man! Thou hatest Edward of York?"

"An it were my last word, yes!"

"Give me thy hand--we are friends! Stare not at me with those eyes of wonder, ask not the why nor wherefore! This last night gave Edward a rebel more in Richard Nevile! A steed waits thee at my gates; ride fast to young Sir Robert Welles with this letter. Bid him not be dismayed; bid him hold out, for ere many days are past, Lord Warwick, and it may be also the Duke of Clarence, will join their force with his. Mark, I say not that I am for Henry of Lancaster,--I say only that I am against Edward of York. Farewell, and when we meet again, blessed be the arm that first cuts its way to a tyrant's heart!"

Without another word, Warwick left the chamber. Hilyard at first could not believe his senses; but as he dressed himself in haste, he pondered over all those causes of dissension which had long notoriously subsisted between Edward and the earl, and rejoiced that the prophecy that he had long so shrewdly hazarded was at last fulfilled. Descending the stairs he gained the gate, where Marmaduke awaited him, while a groom held a stout haquenee (as the common riding-horse was then called), whose points and breeding promised speed and endurance.

"Mount, Master Robin," said Marmaduke; "I little thought we should ever ride as friends together! Mount!--our way for some miles out of London is the same. You go into Lincolnshire, I into the shire of Hertford."

"And for the same purpose?" asked Hilyard, as he sprang upon his horse, and the two men rode briskly on.

"Yes!"

"Lord Warwick is changed at last?"

"At last!"

"For long?"

"Till death!"

"Good, I ask no more!"

A sound of hoofs behind made the franklin turn his head, and he saw a goodly troop, armed to the teeth, emerge from the earl's house and follow the lead of Marmaduke. Meanwhile Warwick was closeted with Montagu.

Worldly as the latter was, and personally attached to Edward, he was still keenly alive to all that touched the honour of his House; and his indignation at the deadly insult offered to his niece was even more loudly expressed than that of the fiery earl.

"To deem," he exclaimed, "to deem Elizabeth Woodville worthy of his throne, and to see in Anne Nevile the only worthy to be his leman!"

"Ay!" said the earl, with a calmness perfectly terrible, from its unnatural contrast to his ordinary heat, when but slightly chafed, "ay! thou sayest it! But be tranquil; cold,--cold as iron, and as hard! We must scheme now, not storm and threaten--I never schemed before! You are right,--honesty is a fool's policy! Would I had known this but an hour before the news reached me! I have already dismissed our friends to their different districts, to support King Edward's cause--he is still king,--a little while longer king! Last night, I dismissed them--last night, at the very hour when--O God, give me patience!" He paused, and added in a low voice, "Yet--yet--how long the moments are how long! Ere the sun sets, Edward, I trust, will be in my power!"

"How?"

"He goes, to-day, to the More,--he will not go the less for what hath chanced; he will trust to the archbishop to make his peace with me,--churchmen are not fathers! Marmaduke Nevile hath my orders; a hundred armed men, who would march against the fiend himself, if I said the word, will surround the More, and seize the guest!"

"But what then? Who, if Edward, I dare not say the word--who is to succeed him?"

"Clarence is the male heir."

"But with what face to the people proclaim--"

"There--there it is!" interrupted Warwick. "I have thought of that,--I have thought of all things; my mind seems to have traversed worlds since daybreak! True! all commotion to be successful must have a cause that men can understand. Nevertheless, you, Montagu--you have a smoother tongue than I; go to our friends--to those who hate Edward--seek them, sound them!"

"And name to them Edward's infamy?"

"S death, dost thou think it? Thou, a Monthermer and Montagu: proclaim to England the foul insult to the hearth of an English gentleman and peer! feed every ribald Bourdour with song and roundel of Anne's virgin shame! how King Edward stole to her room at the dead of night, and wooed and pressed, and swore, and--God of Heaven, that this hand were on his throat! No, brother, no! there are some wrongs

we may not tell,--tumours and swellings of the heart which are eased not till blood can flow!"

During this conference between the brothers, Edward, in his palace, was seized with consternation and dismay on hearing that the Lady Anne could not be found in her chamber. He sent forthwith to summon Adam Warner to his presence, and learned from the simple sage, who concealed nothing, the mode in which Anne had fled from the Tower. The king abruptly dismissed Adam, after a few hearty curses and vague threats; and awaking to the necessity of inventing some plausible story, to account to the wonder of the court for the abrupt disappearance of his guest, he saw that the person who could best originate and circulate such a tale was the queen; and he sought her at once, with the resolution to choose his confidant in the connection most rarely honoured by marital trust in similar offences. He, however, so softened his narrative as to leave it but a venial error. He had been indulging over-freely in the wine-cup, he had walked into the corridor for the refreshing coolness of the air, he had seen the figure of a female whom he did not recognize; and a few gallant words, he scarce remembered what, had been misconstrued. On perceiving whom he had thus addressed, he had sought to soothe the anger or alarm of the Lady Anne; but still mistaking his intention, she had hurried into Warner's chamber; he had followed her thither, and now she had fled the palace. Such was his story, told lightly and laughingly, but ending with a grave enumeration of the dangers his imprudence had incurred.

Whatever Elizabeth felt, or however she might interpret the confession, she acted with her customary discretion; affected, after a few tender reproaches, to place implicit credit in her lord's account, and volunteered to prevent all scandal by the probable story that the earl, being prevented from coming in person for his daughter, as he had purposed, by fresh news of the rebellion which might call him from London with the early day, had commissioned his kinsman Marmaduke to escort her home. The quick perception of her sex told her that, whatever license might have terrified Anne into so abrupt a flight, the haughty earl would shrink no less than Edward himself from making public an insult which slander could well distort into the dishonour of his daughter; and that whatever pretext might be invented, Warwick would not deign to contradict it. And as, despite Elizabeth's hatred to the earl, and desire of permanent breach between Edward and his minister, she could not, as queen, wife, and woman, but be anxious that some cause more honourable in Edward, and less odious to the people, should be assigned for quarrel, she earnestly recommended the king to repair at once to the More, as had been before arranged, and to spare no pains, disdain no expressions of penitence and humiliation, to secure the mediation of the archbishop. His mind somewhat relieved by this interview and counsel, the king kissed Elizabeth with affectionate gratitude, and returned to his chamber to prepare for his departure to the archbishop's palace. But then, remembering that Adam and Sibyll possessed his secret, he resolved at once to banish them from the Tower. For a moment he thought of the dungeons of his fortress, of the rope of his doomsman; but his conscience at that hour was sore and vexed. His fierceness humbled by the sense of shame, he shrank from a new crime; and, moreover, his strong common-sense assured him that the testimony of a shunned and abhorred wizard ceased to be of weight the moment it was deprived of the influence it took from the protection of a king. He gave orders for a boat to be in readiness by the gate of St. Thomas, again

summoned Adam into his presence, and said briefly, "Master Warner, the London mechanics cry so loudly against thine invention for lessening labour and starving the poor, the sailors on the wharfs are so mutinous at the thought of vessels without rowers, that, as a good king is bound, I yield to the voice of my people. Go home, then, at once; the queen dispenses with thy fair daughter's service, the damsel accompanies thee. A boat awaits ye at the stairs; a guard shall attend ye to your house. Think what has passed within these walls has been a dream,--a dream that, if told, is deathful, if concealed and forgotten hath no portent!"

Without waiting a reply, the king called from the anteroom one of his gentlemen, and gave him special directions as to the departure and conduct of the worthy scholar and his gentle daughter. Edward next summoned before him the warder of the gate, learned that he alone was privy to the mode of his guest's flight, and deeming it best to leave at large no commentator on the tale he had invented, sentenced the astonished warder to three months' solitary imprisonment,--for appearing before him with soiled hosen! An hour afterwards, the king, with a small though gorgeous retinue, was on his way to the More.

The archbishop had, according to his engagement, assembled in his palace the more powerful of the discontented seigneurs; and his eloquence had so worked upon them, that Edward beheld, on entering the hall, only countenances of cheerful loyalty and respectful welcome. After the first greetings, the prelate, according to the custom of the day, conducted Edward into a chamber, that he might refresh himself with a brief rest and the bath, previous to the banquet.

Edward seized the occasion, and told his tale; but however softened, enough was left to create the liveliest dismay in his listener. The lofty scaffolding of hope upon which the ambitious prelate was to mount to the papal throne seemed to crumble into the dust. The king and the earl were equally necessary to the schemes of George Nevile. He chid the royal layman with more than priestly unction for his offence; but Edward so humbly confessed his fault, that the prelate at length relaxed his brow, and promised to convey his penitent assurances to the earl.

"Not an hour should be lost," he said; the only one who can soothe his wrath is your Highness's mother, our noble kinswoman. Permit me to despatch to her grace a letter, praying her to seek the earl, while I write by the same courier to himself."

"Be it all as you will," said Edward, doffing his surcoat, and dipping his hands in a perfumed ewer; "I shall not know rest till I have knelt to the Lady Anne, and won her pardon."

The prelate retired, and scarcely had he left the room when Sir John Ratcliffe, [Afterwards Lord Fitzwalter. See Lingard (note, vol. iii. p. 507, quarto edition), for the proper date to be assigned to this royal visit to the More,--a date we have here adopted, not, as Sharon Turner and others place (namely, upon the authority of Hearne's *Fragm.*, 302, which subsequent events disprove), after the open rebellion of Warwick, but just before it; that is, not after Easter, but before Lent.] one of the king's retinue, and in waiting on his person, entered the chamber, pale and trembling.

"My liege," he said, in a whisper, "I fear some deadly treason awaits

you. I have seen, amongst the trees below this tower, the gleam of steel; I have crept through the foliage, and counted no less than a hundred armed men,--their leader is Sir Marmaduke Nevile, Earl Warwick's kinsman!"

"Ha!" muttered the king, and his bold face fell, "comes the earl's revenge so soon?"

"And," continued Ratcliffe, "I overheard Sir Marmaduke say, 'The door of the Garden Tower is unguarded,--wait the signal!' Fly, my liege! Hark! even now I hear the rattling of arms!"

The king stole to the casement; the day was closing; the foliage grew thick and dark around the wall; he saw an armed man emerge from the shade,--a second, and a third.

"You are right, Ratcliffe! Flight--but how?"

"This way, my liege. By the passage I entered, a stair winds to a door on the inner court; there I have already a steed in waiting. Deign, for precaution, to use my hat and manteline."

The king hastily adopted the suggestion, followed the noiseless steps of Ratcliffe, gained the door, sprang upon his steed, and dashing right through a crowd assembled by the gate, galloped alone and fast, untracked by human enemy, but goaded by the foe that mounts the rider's steed, over field, over fell, over dyke, through hedge, and in the dead of night reined in at last before the royal towers of Windsor.

CHAPTER II.

MANY THINGS BRIEFLY TOLD.

The events that followed the king's escape were rapid and startling. The barons assembled at the More, enraged at Edward's seeming distrust of them, separated in loud anger. The archbishop learned the cause from one of his servitors, who detected Marmaduke's ambush, but he was too wary to make known a circumstance suspicious to himself. He flew to London, and engaged the mediation of the Duchess of York to assist his own. [Lingard. See for the dates, Fabyan, 657.]

The earl received their joint overtures with stern and ominous coldness, and abruptly repaired to Warwick, taking with him the Lady Anne. There he was joined, the same day, by the Duke and Duchess of Clarence.

The Lincolnshire rebellion gained head: Edward made a dexterous feint in calling, by public commission, upon Clarence and Warwick to aid in dispersing it; if they refused, the odium of first aggression would seemingly rest with them. Clarence, more induced by personal ambition than sympathy with Warwick's wrong, incensed by his brother's recent slights, looking to Edward's resignation and his own consequent accession to the throne, and inflamed by the ambition and pride of a wife whom he at once feared and idolized, went hand in heart with the earl; but not one lord and captain whom Montagu had sounded lent

favour to the deposition of one brother for the advancement of the next. Clarence, though popular, was too young to be respected: many there were who would rather have supported the earl, if an aspirant to the throne; but that choice forbidden by the earl himself, there could be but two parties in England,--the one for Edward IV., the other for Henry VI.

Lord Montagu had repaired to Warwick Castle to communicate in person this result of his diplomacy. The earl, whose manner was completely changed, no longer frank and hearty, but close and sinister, listened in gloomy silence.

"And now," said Montagu, with the generous emotion of a man whose nobler nature was stirred deeply, "if you resolve on war with Edward, I am willing to renounce my own ambition, the hand of a king's daughter for my son, so that I may avenge the honour of our common name. I confess that I have so loved Edward that I would fain pray you to pause, did I not distrust myself, lest in such delay his craft should charm me back to the old affection. Nathless, to your arm and your great soul I have owed all, and if you are resolved to strike the blow, I am ready to share the hazard."

The earl turned away his face, and wrung his brother's hand.

"Our father, methinks, hears thee from the grave!" said he, solemnly, and there was a long pause. At length Warwick resumed: "Return to London; seem to take no share in my actions, whatever they be; if I fail, why drag thee into my ruin?--and yet, trust me, I am rash and fierce no more. He who sets his heart on a great object suddenly becomes wise. When a throne is in the dust, when from St. Paul's Cross a voice goes forth to Carlisle and the Land's End, proclaiming that the reign of Edward the Fourth is past and gone, then, Montagu, I claim thy promise of aid and fellowship,--not before!"

Meanwhile, the king, eager to dispel thought in action, rushed in person against the rebellious forces. Stung by fear into cruelty, he beheaded, against all kingly faith, his hostages, Lord Welles and Sir Thomas Dymoke, summoned Sir Robert Welles, the leader of the revolt, to surrender; received for answer, that Sir Robert Welles would not trust the perfidy of the man who had murdered his father!--pushed on to Erpingham, defeated the rebels in a signal battle, and crowned his victory by a series of ruthless cruelties, committed to the fierce and learned Earl of Worcester, "Butcher of England." [Stowe. "Warkworth Chronicle"--Cont. Croyl. Lord Worcester ordered Clapham (a squire to Lord Warwick) and nineteen others, gentlemen and yeomen, to be impaled, and from the horror the spectacle inspired, and the universal odium it attached to Worcester, it is to be feared that the unhappy men were still sensible to the agony of this infliction, though they appear first to have been drawn, and partially hanged,--outrage confined only to the dead bodies of rebels being too common at that day to have excited the indignation which attended the sentence Worcester passed on his victims. It is in vain that some writers would seek to cleanse the memory of this learned nobleman from the stain of cruelty by rhetorical remarks on the improbability that a cultivator of letters should be of a ruthless disposition. The general philosophy of this defence is erroneous. In ignorant ages a man of superior acquirements is not necessarily made humane by the cultivation of his intellect, on the contrary, he too often learns to look upon the uneducated herd as things of another clay. Of this

truth all history is pregnant,--witness the accomplished tyrants of Greece, the profound and cruel intellect of the Italian Borgias. Richard III. and Henry VIII. were both highly educated for their age. But in the case of Tiptoft, Lord Worcester, the evidence of his cruelty is no less incontestable than that which proves his learning--the Croyland historian alone is unimpeachable. Worcester's popular name of "the Butcher" is sufficient testimony in itself. The people are often mistaken, to be sure, but can scarcely be so upon the one point, whether a man who has sat in judgment on themselves be merciful or cruel.]

With the prompt vigour and superb generalship which Edward ever displayed in war, he then cut his gory way to the force which Clarence and Warwick (though their hostility was still undeclared) had levied, with the intent to join the defeated rebels. He sent his herald, Garter King-at-arms, to summon the earl and the duke to appear before him within a certain day. The time expired; he proclaimed them traitors, and offered rewards for their apprehension. [One thousand pounds in money, or one hundred pounds a year in land; an immense reward for that day.]

So sudden had been Warwick's defection, so rapid the king's movements, that the earl had not time to mature his resources, assemble his vassals, consolidate his schemes. His very preparations, upon the night on which Edward had repaid his services by such hideous ingratitude, had manned the country with armies against himself. Girt but with a scanty force collected in haste (and which consisted merely of his retainers in the single shire of Warwick), the march of Edward cut him off from the counties in which his name was held most dear, in which his trumpet could raise up hosts. He was disappointed in the aid he had expected from his powerful but self-interested brother-in-law, Lord Stanley. Revenge had become more dear to him than life: life must not be hazarded, lest revenge be lost. On still marched the king; and the day that his troops entered Exeter, Warwick, the females of his family, with Clarence, and a small but armed retinue, took ship from Dartmouth, sailed for Calais (before which town, while at anchor, Isabel was confined of her first-born). To the earl's rage and dismay his deputy Vauclerc fired upon his ships. Warwick then steered on towards Normandy, captured some Flemish vessels by the way, in token of defiance to the earl's old Burgundian foe, and landed at Harfleur, where he and his companions were received with royal honours by the Admiral of France, and finally took their way to the court of Louis XI. at Amboise.

"The danger is past forever!" said King Edward, as the wine sparkled in his goblet. "Rebellion hath lost its head,--and now, indeed, and for the first time, a monarch I reign alone!" [Before leaving England, Warwick and Clarence are generally said to have fallen in with Anthony Woodville and Lord Audley, and ordered them to execution, from which they were saved by a Dorsetshire gentleman. Carte, who, though his history is not without great mistakes, is well worth reading by those whom the character of Lord Warwick may interest, says, that the earl had "too much magnanimity to put them to death immediately, according to the common practice of the times, and only imprisoned them in the castle of Wardour, from whence they were soon rescued by John Thornhill, a gentleman of Dorsetshire." The whole of this story is, however, absolutely contradicted by the "Warkworth Chronicle" (p. 9, edited by Mr. Halliwell), according to which authority Anthony Woodville was at that time commanding a fleet upon

the Channel, which waylaid Warwick on his voyage; but the success therein attributed to the gallant Anthony, in dispersing or seizing all the earl's ships, save the one that bore the earl himself and his family, is proved to be purely fabulous, by the earl's well-attested capture of the Flemish vessels, as he passed from Calais to the coasts of Normandy, an exploit he could never have performed with a single vessel of his own. It is very probable that the story of Anthony Woodville's capture and peril at this time originates in a misadventure many years before, and recorded in the "Paston Letters," as well as in the "Chronicles."--In the year 1459, Anthony Woodville and his father, Lord Rivers (then zealous Lancastrians), really did fall into the hands of the Earl of March (Edward IV.), Warwick and Salisbury, and got off with a sound "rating" upon the rude language which such "knaves' sons" and "little squires" had held to those "who were of king's blood."]

CHAPTER III.

THE PLOT OF THE HOSTELRY--THE MAID AND THE SCHOLAR IN THEIR HOME.

The country was still disturbed, and the adherents, whether of Henry or the earl, still rose in many an outbreak, though prevented from swelling into one common army by the extraordinary vigour not only of Edward, but of Gloucester and Hastings,--when one morning, just after the events thus rapidly related, the hostelry of Master Sancroft, in the suburban parish of Marybone, rejoiced in a motley crowd of customers and toppers.

Some half-score soldiers, returned in triumph from the royal camp, sat round a table placed agreeably enough in the deep recess made by the large jutting lattice; with them were mingled about as many women, strangely and gaudily clad. These last were all young; one or two, indeed, little advanced from childhood. But there was no expression of youth in their hard, sinister features: coarse paint supplied the place of bloom; the very youngest had a wrinkle on her brow; their forms wanted the round and supple grace of early years. Living principally in the open air, trained from infancy to feats of activity, their muscles were sharp and prominent, their aspects had something of masculine audacity and rudeness; health itself seemed in them more loathsome than disease. Upon those faces of bronze, vice had set its ineffable, unmistakable seal. To those eyes never had sprung the tears of compassion or woman's gentle sorrow; on those brows never had flushed the glow of modest shame: their very voices half belied their sex,--harsh and deep and hoarse, their laughter loud and dissonant. Some amongst them were not destitute of a certain beauty, but it was a beauty of feature with a common hideousness of expression,--an expression at once cunning, bold, callous, licentious. Womanless through the worst vices of woman, passionless through the premature waste of passion, they stood between the sexes like foul and monstrous anomalies, made up and fashioned from the rank depravities of both. These creatures seemed to have newly arrived from some long wayfaring; their shoes and the hems of their robes were covered with dust and mire; their faces were heated, and the veins in their bare, sinewy, sunburned arms were swollen by fatigue. Each had beside her on the floor a timbrel, each wore at her girdle a long knife in its sheath: well that the sheaths hid the blades, for not one--not even

that which yon cold-eyed child of fifteen wore--but had on its steel
the dark stain of human blood!

The presence of soldiers fresh from the scene of action had naturally brought into the hostelry several of the idle gossips of the suburb, and these stood round the table, drinking into their large ears the boasting narratives of the soldiers. At a small table, apart from the revellers, but evidently listening with attention to all the news of the hour, sat a friar, gravely discussing a mighty tankard of huffcap, and ever and anon, as he lifted his head for the purpose of drinking, glancing a wanton eye at one of the tymbesteres.

"But an' you had seen," said a trooper, who was the mouthpiece of his comrades--"an' you had seen the raptrils run when King Edward himself led the charge! Marry, it was like a cat in a rabbit burrow! Easy to see, I trow, that Earl Warwick was not amongst them! His men, at least, fight like devils!"

"But there was one tall fellow," said a soldier, setting down his tankard, "who made a good fight and dour, and, but for me and my comrades, would have cut his way to the king."

"Ay, ay, true; we saved his highness, and ought to have been knighted,--but there's no gratitude nowadays!"

"And who was this doughty warrior?" asked one of the bystanders, who secretly favoured the rebellion.

"Why, it was said that he was Robin of Redesdale,--he who fought my Lord Montagu off York."

"Our Robin!" exclaimed several voices. "Ay, he was ever a brave fellow--poor Robin!"

"Your Robin,' and 'poor Robin,' varlets!" cried the principal trooper. "Have a care! What do ye mean by your Robin?"

"Marry, sir soldier," quoth a butcher, scratching his head, and in a humble voice, "craving your pardon and the king's, this Master Robin sojourned a short time in this hamlet, and was a kind neighbour, and mighty glib of the tongue. Don't ye mind, neighbours," he added rapidly, eager to change the conversation, "how he made us leave off when we were just about burning Adam Warner, the old nigromancer, in his den yonder? Who else could have done that? But an' we had known Robin had been a rebel to sweet King Edward, we'd have roasted him along with the wizard!"

One of the timbrel-girls, the leader of the choir, her arm round a soldier's neck, looked up at the last speech, and her eye followed the gesture of the butcher, as he pointed through the open lattice to the sombre, ruinous abode of Adam Warner.

"Was that the house ye would have burned?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes; but Robin told us the king would hang those who took on them the king's blessed privilege of burning nigromancers; and, sure enough, old Adam Warner was advanced to be wizard-in-chief to the king's own highness a week or two afterwards."

The friar had made a slight movement at the name of Warner; he now pushed his stool nearer to the principal group, and drew his hood completely over his countenance.

"Yea!" exclaimed the mechanic, whose son had been the innocent cause of the memorable siege to poor Adam's dilapidated fortress, related in the first book of this narrative"--yea; and what did he when there? Did he not devise a horrible engine for the destruction of the poor,--an engine that was to do all the work in England by the devil's help?--so that if a gentleman wanted a coat of mail, or a cloth tunic; if his dame needed a Norwich worsted; if a yeoman lacked a plough or a wagon, or his good wife a pot or a kettle; they were to go, not to the armourer, and the draper, and the tailor, and the weaver, and the wheelwright, and the blacksmith,--but, hey presto! Master Warner set his imps a-churning, and turned ye out mail and tunic, worsted and wagon, kettle and pot, spick and span new, from his brewage of vapour and sea-coal. Oh, have I not heard enough of the sorcerer from my brother, who works in the Chepe for Master Stokton, the mercer!--and Master Stokton was one of the worshipful deputies to whom the old nigromancer had the front to boast his devices."

"It is true," said the friar, suddenly.

"Yes, reverend father, it is true," said the mechanic, doffing his cap, and inclining his swarthy face to this unexpected witness of his veracity. A murmur of wrath and hatred was heard amongst the bystanders. The soldiers indifferently turned to their female companions. There was a brief silence; and, involuntarily, the gossips stretched over the table to catch sight of the house of so demoniac an oppressor of the poor.

"See," said the baker, "the smoke still curls from the rooftop! I heard he had come back. Old Madge, his handmaid, has bought cimnel-cakes of me the last week or so; nothing less than the finest wheat serves him now, I trow. However, right's right, and--"

"Come back!" cried the fierce mechanic; "the owl hath kept close in his roost! An' it were not for the king's favour, I would soon see how the wizard liked to have fire and water brought to bear against himself!"

"Sit down, sweetheart," whispered one of the young tymbesteres to the last speaker--

"Come, kiss me, my darling,
Warm kisses I trade for."

"Avaunt!" quoth the mechanic, gruffly, and shaking off the seductive arm of the tymbestere--"avaunt! I have neither lief nor halfpence for thee and thine. Out on thee!--a child of thy years! a rope's end to thy back were a friend's best kindness!"

The girl's eyes sparkled, she instinctively put her hand to her knife; then turning to a soldier by her side, she said, "Hear you that, and sit still?"

"Thunder and wounds!" growled the soldier thus appealed to, "more respect to the sex, knave; if I don't break thy fool's costard with my sword-hilt, it is only because Red Grisell can take care of herself

against twenty such lozels as thou. These honest girls have been to the wars with us; King Edward grudges no man his jolly fere. Speak up for thyself, Grisell! How many tall fellows didst thou put out of their pain after the battle of Losecote?"

"Only five, Hal," replied the cold-eyed girl, and showing her glittering teeth with the grin of a young tigress; "but one was a captain. I shall do better next time; it was my first battle, thou knowest!"

The more timid of the bystanders exchanged a glance of horror, and drew back. The mechanic resumed sullenly,--"I seek no quarrel with lass or lover. I am a plain, blunt man, with a wife and children, who are dear to me; and if I have a grudge to the nigromancer, it is because he glamoured my poor boy Tim. See!"--and he caught up a blue-eyed, handsome boy, who had been clinging to his side, and baring the child's arm, showed it to the spectators; there was a large scar on the limb, and it was shrunk and withered.

"It was my own fault," said the little fellow, deprecatingly. The affectionate father silenced the sufferer with a cuff on the cheek, and resumed: "Ye note, neighbours, the day when the foul wizard took this little one in his arms: well, three weeks afterwards--that very day three weeks--as he was standing like a lamb by the fire, the good wife's caldron seethed over, without reason or rhyme, and scalded his arm till it rivelled up like a leaf in November; and if that is not glamour, why have we laws against witchcraft?"

"True, true!" groaned the chorus.

The boy, who had borne his father's blow without a murmur, now again attempted remonstrance. "The hot water went over the gray cat, too, but Master Warner never bewitched her, daddy."

"He takes his part!--You hear the daff laddy? He takes the old nigromancer's part,--a sure sign of the witchcraft; but I'll leather it out of thee, I will!" and the mechanic again raised his weighty arm. The child did not this time await the blow; he dodged under the butcher's apron, gained the door, and disappeared. "And he teaches our own children to fly in our faces!" said the father, in a kind of whimper. The neighbours sighed in commiseration.

"Oh," he exclaimed in a fiercer tone, grinding his teeth, and shaking his clenched fist towards Adam Warner's melancholy house, "I say again, if the king did not protect the vile sorcerer, I would free the land from his devilries ere his black master could come to his help."

"The king cares not a straw for Master Warner or his inventions, my son," said a rough, loud voice. All turned, and saw the friar standing in the midst of the circle. "Know ye not, my children, that the king sent the wretch neck and crop out of the palace for having bewitched the Earl of Warwick and his grace the Lord Clarence, so that they turned unnaturally against their own kinsman, his highness? But 'Manus malorum suos bonos breaket,'--that is to say, the fists of wicked men only whack their own bones. Ye have all heard tell of Friar Bungey, my children?"

"Ay, ay!" answered two or three in a breath,--"a wizard, it's true, and a mighty one; but he never did harm to the poor; though they do

say he made a quaint image of the earl, and--"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the friar, "all Bungey did was to try to disenchant the Lord Warwick, whom yon miscreant had spellbound. Poor Bungey! he is a friend to the people: and when he found that Master Adam was making a device for their ruin, he spared no toil, I assure ye, to frustrate the iniquity. Oh, how he fasted and watched! Oh, how many a time he fought, tooth and nail, with the devil in person, to get at the infernal invention! for if he had that invention once in his hands, he could turn it to good account, I can promise ye: and give ye rain for the green blade and sun for the ripe sheaf. But the fiend got the better at first; and King Edward, bewitched himself for the moment, would have hanged Friar Bungey for crossing old Adam, if he had not called three times, in a loud voice, 'Presto pepranxenon!' changed himself into a bird, and flown out of the window. As soon as Master Adam Warner found the field clear to himself, he employed his daughter to bewitch the Lord Hastings; he set brother against brother, and made the king and Lord George fall to loggerheads; he stirred up the rebellion; and where he would have stopped the foul fiend only knows, if your friend Friar Bungey, who, though a wizard as you say, is only so for your benefit (and a holy priest into the bargain), had not, by aid of a good spirit, whom he conjured up in the island of Tartary, disenchanting the king, and made him see in a dream what the villanous Warner was devising against his crown and his people,-- whereon his highness sent Master Warner and his daughter back to their roost, and, helped by Friar Bungey, beat his enemies out of the kingdom. So, if ye have a mind to save your children from mischief and malice, ye may set to work with good heart, always provided that ye touch not old Adam's iron invention. Woe betide ye, if ye think to destroy that! Bring it safe to Friar Bungey, whom ye will find returned to the palace, and journeyman's wages will be a penny a day higher for the next ten years to come!" With these words the friar threw down his reckoning, and moved majestically to the door.

"An' I might trust you!" said Tim's father, laying hold of the friar's serge.

"Ye may, ye may!" cried the leader of the tymbesteres, starting up from the lap of her soldier, "for it is Friar Bungey himself!"

A movement of astonishment and terror was universal. "Friar Bungey himself!" repeated the burly impostor. "Right, lassie, right; and he now goes to the palace of the Tower, to mutter good spells in King Edward's ear,--spells to defeat the malignant ones, and to lower the price of beer. Wax wobiscum!"

With that salutation, more benevolent than accurate, the friar vanished from the room; the chief of the tymbesteres leaped lightly on the table, put one foot on the soldier's shoulder, and sprang through the open lattice. She found the friar in the act of mounting a sturdy mule, which had been tied to a post by the door.

"Fie, Graul Skellet! Fie, Graul!" said the conjurer "Respect for my serge. We must not be noted together out of door in the daylight. There's a goat for thee. Vade, execrabilis,--that is, good-day to thee, pretty rogue!"

"A word, friar, a word. Wouldst thou have the old man burned, drowned, or torn piecemeal? He hath a daughter too, who once sought

to mar our trade with her gittern; a daughter, then in a kirtle that I would not have nimmed from a hedge, but whom I last saw in sarcenet and lawn, with a great lord for her fere." The tymbestere's eyes shone with malignant envy, as she added, "Graul Skellet loves not to see those who have worn worsted and say walk in sarcenet and lawn. Graul Skellet loves not wenches who have lords for their feres, and yet who shrink from Graul and her sisters as the sound from the leper."

"Fegs," answered the friar, impatiently, "I know naught against the daughter,--a pretty lass, but too high for my kisses. And as for the father, I want not the man's life,--that is, not very specially,--but his model, his mechanical. He may go free, if that can be compassed; if not, why, the model at all risks. Serve me in this."

"And thou wilt teach me the last tricks of the cards, and thy great art of making phantoms glide by on the wall?"

"Bring the model intact, and I will teach thee more, Graul,--the dead man's candle, and the charm of the newt; and I'll give thee, to boot, the Gaul of the parricide that thou hast prayed me so oft for. Hum! thou hast a girl in thy troop who hath a blinking eye that well pleases me; but go now, and obey me. Work before play, and grace before pudding!"

The tymbestere nodded, snapped her fingers in the air, and humming no holy ditty, returned to the house through the doorway.

This short conference betrays to the reader the relations, mutually advantageous, which subsisted between the conjuror and the tymbesteres. Their troop (the mothers, perchance, of the generation we treat of) had been familiar to the friar in his old capacity of mountebank, or tregetour, and in his clerical and courtly elevation, he did not disdain an ancient connection that served him well with the populace; for these grim children of vice seemed present in every place, where pastime was gay, or strife was rampant,--in peace, at the merry-makings and the hostelries; in war, following the camp, and seen, at night, prowling through the battlefields to dispatch the wounded and to rifle the slain: in merrymaking, hostelry, or in camp, they could thus still spread the fame of Friar Bungey, and uphold his repute both for terrible lore and for hearty love of the commons.

Nor was this all; both tymbesteres and conjuror were fortune-tellers by profession. They could interchange the anecdotes each picked up in their different lines. The tymbestere could thus learn the secrets of gentle and courtier, the conjuror those of the artisan and mechanic.

Unconscious of the formidable dispositions of their neighbours, Sibyll and Warner were inhaling the sweet air of the early spring in their little garden. His disgrace had affected the philosopher less than might be supposed. True, that the loss of the king's favour was the deferring indefinitely--perhaps for life--any practical application of his adored theory; and yet, somehow or other, the theory itself consoled him. At the worst, he should find some disciple, some ingenious student, more fortunate than himself, to whom he could bequeath the secret, and who, when Adam was in his grave, would teach the world to revere his name. Meanwhile, his time was his own; he was lord of a home, though ruined and desolate; he was free, with his free thoughts; and therefore, as he paced the narrow garden, his step was

lighter, his mind less absent than when parched with feverish fear and hope for the immediate practical success of a principle which was to be tried before the hazardous tribunal of prejudice and ignorance.

"My child," said the sage, "I feel, for the first time for years, the distinction of the seasons. I feel that we are walking in the pleasant spring. Young days come back to me like dreams; and I could almost think thy mother were once more by my side!"

Sibyll pressed her father's hand, and a soft but melancholy sigh stirred her rosy lips. She, too, felt the balm of the young year; yet her father's words broke upon sad and anxious musings. Not to youth as to age, not to loving fancy as to baffled wisdom, has seclusion charms that compensate for the passionate and active world! On coming back to the old house, on glancing round its mildewed walls, comfortless and bare, the neglected, weed-grown garden, Sibyll had shuddered in dismay. Had her ambition fallen again into its old abject state? Were all her hopes to restore her ancestral fortunes, to vindicate her dear father's fame, shrunk into this slough of actual poverty,--the butterfly's wings folded back into the chrysalis shroud of torpor? The vast disparity between herself and Hastings had not struck her so forcibly at the court; here, at home, the very walls proclaimed it. When Edward had dismissed the unwelcome witnesses of his attempted crime, he had given orders that they should be conducted to their house through the most private ways. He naturally desired to create no curious comment upon their departure. Unperceived by their neighbours, Sibyll and her father had gained access by the garden gate. Old Madge received them in dismay; for she had been in the habit of visiting Sibyll weekly at the palace, and had gained, in the old familiarity subsisting, then, between maiden and nurse, some insight into her heart. She had cherished the fondest hopes for the fate of her young mistress; and now, to labour and to penury had the fate returned! The guard who accompanied them, according to Edward's orders, left some pieces of gold, which Adam rejected, but Madge secretly received and judiciously expended. And this was all their wealth. But not of toil nor of penury in themselves thought Sibyll; she thought but of Hastings,--wildly, passionately, trustfully, unceasingly, of the absent Hastings. Oh, he would seek her, he would come, her reverse would but the more endear her to him! Hastings came not. She soon learned the wherefore. War threatened the land,--he was at his post, at the head of armies.

Oh, with what panoply of prayer she sought to shield that beloved breast! And now the old man spoke of the blessed spring, the holiday time of lovers and of love, and the young girl, sighing, said to her mournful heart, "The world hath its sun,--where is mine?"

The peacock strutted up to his poor protectors, and spread his plumes to the gilding beams. And then Sibyll recalled the day when she had walked in that spot with Marmaduke, and he had talked of his youth, ambition, and lusty hopes, while, silent and absorbed, she had thought within herself, "Could the world be open to me as to him,--I too have ambition, and it should find its goal." Now what contrast between the two,--the man enriched and honoured, if to-day in peril or in exile, to-morrow free to march forward still on his career, the world the country to him whose heart was bold and whose name was stainless! and she, the woman, brought back to the prison-home, scorn around her, impotent to avenge, and forbidden to fly! Wherefore?--Sibyll felt her superiority of mind, of thought, of nature,--wherefore the contrast?

The success was that of man, the discomfiture that of woman. Woe to the man who precedes his age; but never yet has an age been in which genius and ambition are safe to woman!

The father and the child turned into their house. The day was declining. Adam mounted to his studious chamber, Sibyll sought the solitary servant.

"What tidings, oh, what tidings? The war, you say, is over; the great earl, his sweet daughter, safe upon the seas, but Hastings--oh, Hastings! what of him?"

"My bonnibell, my lady-bird, I have none but good tales to tell thee. I saw and spoke with a soldier who served under Lord Hastings himself; he is unscathed, he is in London. But they say that one of his bands is quartered in the suburb, and that there is a report of a rising in Hertfordshire."

"When will peace come to England and to me!" sighed Sibyll.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORLD'S JUSTICE, AND THE WISDOM OF OUR ANCESTORS.

The night had now commenced, and Sibyll was still listening--or, perhaps, listening not--to the soothing babble of the venerable servant. They were both seated in the little room that adjoined the hall, and their only light came through the door opening on the garden,--a gray, indistinct twilight, relieved by the few earliest stars. The peacock, his head under his wing, roosted on the balustrade, and the song of the nightingale, from amidst one of the neighbouring copses, which studded the ground towards the chase of Marybone, came soft and distant on the serene air. The balm and freshness of spring were felt in the dews, in the skies, in the sweet breath of young herb and leaf; through the calm of ever-watchful nature, it seemed as if you might mark, distinct and visible, minute after minute, the blessed growth of April into May.

Suddenly Madge uttered a cry of alarm, and pointed towards the opposite wall. Sibyll, startled from her revery, looked up, and saw something dusk and dwarf-like perched upon the crumbling eminence. Presently this apparition leaped lightly into the garden, and the alarm of the women was lessened on seeing a young boy creep stealthily over the grass and approach the open door.

"Hey, child!" said Madge, rising. "What wantest thou?"

"Hist, gammer, hist! Ah, the young mistress? That's well. Hist! I say again." The boy entered the room. "I'm in time to save you. In half an hour your house will be broken into, perhaps burned. The boys are clapping their hands now at the thoughts of the bonfire. Father and all the neighbours are getting ready. Hark! hark! No, it is only the wind! The tymbesteres are to give note. When you hear their bells tinkle, the mob will meet. Run for your lives, you and the old man, and don't ever say it was poor Tim who told you this, for Father would beat me to death. Ye can still get through the garden into the

fields. Quick!"

"I will go to the master," exclaimed Madge, hurrying from the room.

The child caught Sibyll's cold hand through the dark. "And I say, mistress, if his worship is a wizard, don't let him punish Father and Mother, or poor Tim, or his little sister; though Tim was once naughty, and hooted Master Warner. Many, many, many a time and oft have I seen that kind, mild face in my sleep, just as when it bent over me, while I kicked and screamed, and the poor gentleman said, 'Thinkest thou I would harm thee?' But he'll forgive me now, will he not? And when I turned the seething water over myself, and they said it was all along of the wizard, my heart pained more than the arm. But they whip me, and groan out that the devil is in me, if I don't say that the kettle upset of itself! Oh, those tymbesteres! Mistress, did you ever see them? They fright me. If you could hear how they set on all the neighbours! And their laugh--it makes the hair stand on end! But you will get away, and thank Tim too? Oh, I shall laugh then, when they find the old house empty!"

"May our dear Lord bless thee--bless thee, child," sobbed Sibyll, clasping the boy in her arms, and kissing him, while her tears bathed his cheeks.

A light gleamed on the threshold; Madge, holding a candle, appeared with Warner, his hat and cloak thrown on in haste. "What is this?" said the poor scholar. "Can it be true? Is mankind so cruel? What have I done, woe is me! what have I done to deserve this?"

"Come, dear father, quick," said Sibyll, drying her tears, and wakened by the presence of the old man into energy and courage. "But put thy hand on this boy's head, and bless him; for it is he who has, haply, saved us."

The boy trembled a moment as the long-bearded face turned towards him, but when he caught and recognized those meek, sweet eyes, his superstition vanished, and it was but a holy and grateful awe that thrilled his young blood, as the old man placed both withered hands over his yellow hair, and murmured,--

"God shield thy youth! God make thy manhood worthy! God give thee children in thine old age with hearts like thine!" Scarcely had the prayer ceased when the clash of timbrels, with their jingling bells, was heard in the street. Once, twice, again, and a fierce yell closed in chorus,--caught up and echoed from corner to corner, from house to house.

"Run! run!" cried the boy, turning white with terror.

"But the Eureka--my hope--my mind's child!" exclaimed Adam, suddenly, and halting at the door.

"Eh, eh!" said Madge, pushing him forward. "It is too heavy to move; thou couldst not lift it. Think of thine own flesh and blood, of thy daughter, of her dead mother! Save her life, if thou carest not for thine own!"

"Go, Sibyll, go, and thou, Madge; I will stay. What matters my life, --it is but the servant of a thought! Perish master, perish slave!"

"Father, unless you come with me, I stir not. Fly or perish, your fate is mine! Another minute--Oh, Heaven of mercy, that roar again! We are both lost!"

"Go, sir, go; they care not for your iron,--iron cannot feel. They will not touch that! Have not your daughter's life upon your soul!"

"Sibyll, Sibyll, forgive me! Come!" said Warner, conscience-stricken at the appeal.

Madge and the boy ran forwards; the old woman unbarred the garden-gate; Sibyll and her father went forth; the fields stretched before them calm and solitary; the boy leaped up, kissed Sibyll's pale cheek, and then bounded across the grass, and vanished.

"Loiter not, Madge. Come!" cried Sibyll.

"Nay," said the old woman, shrinking back, "they bear no grudge to me; I am too old to do aught but burthen ye. I will stay, and perchance save the house and the chattels, and poor master's deft contrivance. Whist! thou knowest his heart would break if none were by to guard it."

With that the faithful servant thrust the broad pieces that yet remained of the king's gift into the gipsire Sibyll wore at her girdle, and then closed and rebarred the door before they could detain her.

"It is base to leave her," said the scholar-gentleman.

The noble Sibyll could not refute her father. Afar they heard the tramping of feet; suddenly, a dark red light shot up into the blue air, a light from the flame of many torches.

"The wizard, the wizard! Death to the wizard, who would starve the poor!" yelled forth, and was echoed by a stern hurrah.

Adam stood motionless, Sibyll by his side.

"The wizard and his daughter!" shrieked a sharp single voice, the voice of Graul the tymbestere.

Adam turned. "Fly, my child,--they now threaten thee. Come, come, come!" and, taking her by the hand, he hurried her across the fields, skirting the hedge, their shadows dodging, irregular and quaint, on the starlit sward. The father had lost all thought, all care but for the daughter's life. They paused at last, out of breath and exhausted: the sounds at the distance were lulled and hushed. They looked towards the direction of the home they had abandoned, expecting to see the flames destined to consume it reddening the sky; but all was dark,--or, rather, no light save the holy stars and the rising moon offended the majestic heaven.

"They cannot harm the poor old woman; she hath no lore. On her gray hairs has fallen not the curse of men's hate!" said Warner.

"Right, Father! when they found us flown, doubtless the cruel ones dispersed. But they may search yet for thee. Lean on me, I am strong

and young. Another effort, and we gain the safe coverts of the Chase."

While yet the last word hung on her lips, they saw, on the path they had left, the burst of torch-light, and heard the mob hounding on their track. But the thick copses, with their pale green just budding into life, were at hand. On they fled. The deer started from amidst the entangled fern, but stood and gazed at them without fear; the playful hares in the green alleys ceased not their nightly sports at the harmless footsteps; and when at last, in the dense thicket, they sunk down on the mossy roots of a giant oak, the nightingales overhead chanted as if in melancholy welcome. They were saved!

But in their home, fierce fires glared amidst the tossing torch-light; the crowd, baffled by the strength of the door, scaled the wall, broke through the lattice-work of the hall window, and streaming through room after room, roared forth, "Death to the wizard!" Amidst the sordid dresses of the men, the soiled and faded tinsel of the tymbesteres gleamed and sparkled. It was a scene the she-fiends revelled in,—dear are outrage and malice, and the excitement of turbulent passions, and the savage voices of frantic men, and the thirst of blood to those everlasting furies of a mob, under whatever name we know them, in whatever time they taint with their presence,—women in whom womanhood is blasted!

Door after door was burst open with cries of disappointed rage; at last they ascended the turret-stairs, they found a small door barred and locked. Tim's father, a huge axe in his brawny arm, shivered the panels; the crowd rushed in, and there, seated amongst a strange and motley litter, they found the devoted Madge. The poor old woman had collected into this place, as the stronghold of the mansion, whatever portable articles seemed to her most precious, either from value or association. Sibyll's gittern (Marmaduke's gift) lay amidst a lumber of tools and implements; a faded robe of her dead mother's, treasured by Madge and Sibyll both, as a relic of holy love; a few platters and cups of pewter, the pride of old Madge's heart to keep bright and clean; odds and ends of old hangings; a battered silver brooch (a love-gift to Madge herself when she was young),—these, and suchlike scraps of finery, hoards inestimable to the household memory and affection, lay confusedly heaped around the huge grim model, before which, mute and tranquil, sat the brave old woman.

The crowd halted, and stared round in superstitious terror and dumb marvel.

The leader of the tymbesteres sprang forward.

"Where is thy master, old hag, and where the bonny maid who glammers lords, and despises us bold lasses?"

"Alack! master and the damsel have gone hours ago! I am alone in the house; what's your will?"

"The crone looks parlous witchlike!" said Tim's father; crossing himself, and somewhat retreating from her gray, unquiet eyes. And, indeed, poor Madge, with her wrinkled face, bony form, and high cap, corresponded far more with the vulgar notions of a dabbler in the black art than did Adam Warner, with his comely countenance and noble mien.

"So she doth, indeed, and verily," said a hump-backed tinker; "if we were to try a dip in the horsepool yonder it could do no harm."

"Away with her, away!" cried several voices at that humane suggestion.

"Nay, nay," quoth the baker, "she is a douce creature after all, and hath dealt with me many years. I don't care what becomes of the wizard,--every one knows," he added with pride, "that I was one of the first to set fire to his house when Robin gainsayed it! but right's right--burn the master, not the drudge!"

This intercession might have prevailed, but unhappily, at that moment Graul Skellet, who had secured two stout fellows to accomplish the object so desired by Friar Bungey, laid hands on the model, and, at her shrill command, the men advanced and dislodged it from its place. At the same time the other tymbesteres, caught by the sight of things pleasing to their wonted tastes, threw themselves, one upon the faded robe Sibyll's mother had worn in her chaste and happy youth; another, upon poor Madge's silver brooch; a third, upon the gittern.

These various attacks roused up all the spirit and wrath of the old woman: her cries of distress as she darted from one to the other, striking to the right and left with her feeble arms, her form trembling with passion, were at once ludicrous and piteous; and these were responded to by the shrill exclamations of the fierce tymbesteres, as they retorted scratch for scratch, and blow for blow. The spectators grew animated by the sight of actual outrage and resistance; the humpbacked tinker, whose unwholesome fancy one of the aggrieved tymbesteres had mightily warmed, hastened to the relief of his virago; and rendered furious by finding ten nails fastened suddenly on his face, he struck down the poor creature by a blow that stunned her, seized her in his arms,--for deformed and weakly as the tinker was, the old woman, now sense and spirit were gone, was as light as skin and bone could be,--and followed by half a score of his comrades, whooping and laughing, bore her down the stairs. Tim's father, who, whether from parental affection, or, as is more probable, from the jealous hatred and prejudice of ignorant industry, was bent upon Adam's destruction, hallooed on some of his fierce fellows into the garden, tracked the footsteps of the fugitives by the trampled grass, and bounded over the wall in fruitless chase. But on went the more giddy of the mob, rather in sport than in cruelty, with a chorus of drunken apprentices and riotous boys, to the spot where the humpbacked tinker had dragged his passive burden. The foul green pond near Master Sancroft's hostel reflected the glare of torches; six of the tymbesteres, leaping and wheeling, with doggerel song and discordant music, gave the signal for the ordeal of the witch,--

"Lake or river, dyke or ditch,
Water never drowns the witch.
Witch or wizard would ye know?
Sink or swim, is ay or no.
Lift her, swing her, once and twice,
Lift her, swing her o'er the brim,--
Lille--lera--twice and thrice
Ha! ha! mother, sink or swim!"

And while the last line was chanted, amidst the full jollity of laughter and clamour and clattering timbrels, there was a splash in

the sullen water; the green slough on the surface parted with an oozing gurgle, and then came a dead silence.

"A murrain on the hag! she does not even struggle!" said, at last, the hump-backed tinker.

"No,--no! she cares not for water. Try fire! Out with her! out!" cried Red Grisell.

"Aroint her! she is sullen!" said the tinker, as his lean fingers clutched up the dead body, and let it fall upon the margin. "Dead!" said the baker, shuddering; "we have done wrong,--I told ye so! She dealt with me many a year. Poor Madge! Right's right. She was no witch!"

"But that was the only way to try it," said the humpbacked tinker; "and if she was not a witch, why did she look like one? I cannot abide ugly folks!"

The bystanders shook their heads. But whatever their remorse, it was diverted by a double sound: first, a loud hurrah from some of the mob who had loitered for pillage, and who now emerged from Adam's house, following two men, who, preceded by the terrible Graul, dancing before them, and tossing aloft her timbrel, bore in triumph the captured Eureka; and, secondly, the blast of a clarion at the distance, while up the street marched--horse and foot, with pike and banner--a goodly troop. The Lord Hastings in person led a royal force, by a night march, against a fresh outbreak of the rebels, not ten miles from the city, under Sir Geoffrey Gates, who had been lately arrested by the Lord Howard at Southampton, escaped, collected a disorderly body of such restless men as are always disposed to take part in civil commotion, and now menaced London itself. At the sound of the clarion the valiant mob dispersed in all directions, for even at that day mobs had an instinct of terror at the approach of the military, and a quick reaction from outrage to the fear of retaliation.

But, at the sound of martial music, the tymbesteres silenced their own instruments, and instead of flying, they darted through the crowd, each to seek the other, and unite as for counsel. Graul, pointing to Mr. Sancroft's hostelry, whispered the bearers of the Eureka to seek refuge there for the present, and to bear their trophy with the dawn to Friar Bungey at the Tower; and then, gliding nimbly through the fugitive rioters, sprang into the centre of the circle formed by her companions.

"Ye scent the coming battle?" said the arch-tymbestere.

"Ay, ay, ay!" answered the sisterhood.

"But we have gone miles since noon,--I am faint and weary!" said one amongst them.

Red Grisell, the youngest of the band, struck her comrade on the cheek--"Faint and weary, ronion, with blood and booty in the wind!"

The tymbesteres smiled grimly on their young sister; but the leader whispered "Hush!" and they stood for a second or two with outstretched throats, with dilated nostrils, with pent breath, listening to the clarion and the hoofs and the rattling armour, the human vultures

foretasting their feast of carnage; then, obedient to a sign from their chieftainess, they crept lightly and rapidly into the mouth of a neighbouring alley, where they cowered by the squalid huts, concealed. The troop passed on,--a gallant and serried band, horse and foot, about fifteen hundred men. As they filed up the thoroughfare, and the tramp of the last soldiers fell hollow on the starlit ground, the tymbesteres stole from their retreat, and, at the distance of some few hundred yards, followed the procession, with long, silent, stealthy strides,--as the meaner beasts, in the instinct of hungry cunning, follow the lion for the garbage of his prey.

CHAPTER V.

THE FUGITIVES ARE CAPTURED--THE TYMBESTERES REAPPEAR--MOONLIGHT ON THE REVEL OF THE LIVING--MOONLIGHT ON THE SLUMBER OF THE DEAD.

The father and child made their resting-place under the giant oak. They knew not whither to fly for refuge; the day and the night had become the same to them,--the night menaced with robbers, the day with the mob. If return to their home was forbidden, where in the wide world a shelter for the would-be world-improver? Yet they despaired not, their hearts failed them not. The majestic splendour of the night, as it deepened in its solemn calm; as the shadows of the windless trees fell larger and sharper upon the silvery earth; as the skies grew mellower and more luminous in the strengthening starlight, inspired them with the serenity of faith,--for night, to the earnest soul, opens the Bible of the universe, and on the leaves of Heaven is written, "God is everywhere."

Their hands were clasped each in each, their pale faces were upturned; they spoke not, neither were they conscious that they prayed, but their silence was thought, and the thought was worship.

Amidst the grief and solitude of the pure, there comes, at times, a strange and rapt serenity,--a sleep-awake,--over which the instinct of life beyond the grave glides like a noiseless dream; and ever that heaven that the soul yearns for is coloured by the fancies of the fond human heart, each fashioning the above from the desires unsatisfied below.

"There," thought the musing maiden, "cruelty and strife shall cease; there, vanish the harsh differences of life; there, those whom we have loved and lost are found, and through the Son, who tasted of mortal sorrow, we are raised to the home of the Eternal Father!"

"And there," thought the aspiring sage, "the mind, dungeoned and chained below, rushes free into the realms of space; there, from every mystery falls the veil; there, the Omniscient smiles on those who, through the darkness of life, have fed that lamp, the soul; there, Thought, but the seed on earth, bursts into the flower and ripens to the fruit!"

And on the several hope of both maid and sage the eyes of the angel stars smiled with a common promise.

At last, insensibly, and while still musing, so that slumber but

continued the reverie into visions, father and daughter slept.

The night passed away; the dawn came slow and gray; the antlers of the deer stirred above the fern; the song of the nightingale was hushed; and just as the morning star waned back, while the reddening east announced the sun, and labour and trouble resumed their realm of day, a fierce band halted before those sleeping forms.

These men had been Lancastrian soldiers, and, reduced to plunder for a living, had, under Sir Geoffrey Gates, formed the most stalwart part of the wild, disorderly force whom Hilyard and Coniers had led to Olney. They had heard of the new outbreak, headed by their ancient captain, Sir Geoffrey (who was supposed to have been instigated to his revolt by the gold and promises of the Lancastrian chiefs), and were on their way to join the rebels; but as war for them was but the name for booty, they felt the wonted instinct of the robber, when they caught sight of the old man and the fair maid.

Both Adam and his daughter wore, unhappily, the dresses in which they had left the court, and Sibyll's especially was that which seemed to betoken a certain rank and station.

"Awake, rouse ye!" said the captain of the band, roughly shaking the arm which encircled Sibyll's slender waist. Adam started, opened his eyes, and saw himself begirt by figures in rusty armour, with savage faces peering under their steel sallets.

"How came you hither? Yon oak drops strange acorns," quoth the chief.

"Valiant sir," replied Adam, still seated, and drawing his gown instinctively over Sibyll's face, which nestled on his bosom, in slumber so deep and heavy, that the gruff voice had not broken it, "valiant sir! we are forlorn and houseless, an old man and a simple girl. Some evil-minded persons invaded our home; we fled in the night, and--"

"Invaded your house! ha, it is clear," said the chief. "We know the rest."

At this moment Sibyll woke, and starting to her feet in astonishment and terror at the sight on which her eyes opened, her extreme beauty made a sensible effect upon the braves.

"Do not be daunted, young demoiselle," said the captain, with an air almost respectful; "it is necessary thou and Sir John should follow us, but we will treat you well, and consult later on the ransom ye will pay us. Jock, discharge the young sumpter mule; put its load on the black one. We have no better equipment for thee, lady; but the first haquenee we find shall replace the mule, and meanwhile my knaves will heap their cloaks for a pillion."

"But what mean you?--you mistake us!" exclaimed Sibyll. "We are poor; we cannot ransom ourselves."

"Poor!--tut!" said the captain, pointing significantly to the costly robe of the maiden--"moreover his worship's wealth is well known. Mount in haste,--we are pressed." And without heeding the expostulations of Sibyll and the poor scholar, the rebel put his troop into motion, and marched himself at their head, with his lieutenant.

Sibyll found the subalterns sterner than their chief; for as Warner offered to resist, one of them lifted his gisarme, with a frightful oath, and Sibyll was the first to persuade her father to submit. She mildly, however, rejected the mule, and the two captives walked together in the midst of the troop.

"Pardie!" said the lieutenant, "I see little help to Sir Geoffrey in these recruits, captain!"

"Fool!" said the chief, disdainfully, "if the rebellion fail, these prisoners may save our necks. Will Somers last night was to break into the house of Sir John Bouchier, for arms and moneys, of which the knight hath a goodly store. Be sure, Sir John slinked off in the siege, and this is he and his daughter. Thou knowest he is one of the greatest knights, and the richest, whom the Yorkists boast of; and we may name our own price for his ransom."

"But where lodge them while we go to the battle?"

"Ned Porpustone hath a hostelry not far from the camp, and Ned is a good Lancastrian, and a man to be trusted."

"We have not searched the prisoners," said the lieutenant; "they may have some gold in their pouches."

"Marry, when Will Somers storms a hive, little time does he leave to the bees to fly away with much money. Nathless, thou mayest search the old knight, but civilly, and with gentle excuses."

"And the damsel?"

"Nay! that were unmannerly, and the milder our conduct, the larger the ransom,--when we have great folks to deal with."

The lieutenant accordingly fell back to search Adam's gipsire, which contained only a book and a file, and then rejoined his captain, without offering molestation to Sibyll.

The mistake made by the bravo was at least so far not wholly unfortunate that the notion of the high quality of the captives--for Sir John Bouchier was indeed a person of considerable station and importance (a notion favoured by the noble appearance of the scholar and the delicate and highborn air of Sibyll)--procured for them all the respect compatible with the circumstances. They had not gone far before they entered a village, through which the ruffians marched with the most perfect impunity; for it was a strange feature in those civil wars that the mass of the population, except in the northern districts, remained perfectly supine and neutral. And as the little band halted at a small inn to drink, the gossips of the village collected round them, with the same kind of indolent, careless curiosity which is now evinced in some hamlet at the halt of a stage-coach. Here the captain learned, however, some intelligence important to his objects,--namely, the night march of the troop under Lord Hastings, and the probability that the conflict was already begun. "If so," muttered the rebel, "we can see how the tide turns, before we endanger ourselves; and at the worst, our prisoners will bring something of prize-money."

While thus soliloquizing, he spied one of those cumbrous vehicles of the day called whirlicotes [Whirlicotes were in use from a very early period, but only among the great, till, in the reign of Richard II., his queen, Anne, introduced side-saddles, when the whirlicote fell out of fashion, but might be found at different hostelries on the main roads for the accommodation of the infirm or aged.] standing in the yard of the hostelry; and seizing upon it, vi et armis, in spite of all the cries and protestations of the unhappy landlord, he ordered his captives to enter, and recommenced his march.

As the band proceeded farther on their way, they were joined by fresh troops of the same class as themselves, and they pushed on gayly, till, about the hour of eight, they halted before the hostelry the captain had spoken of. It stood a little out of the high road, not very far from the village of Hadley, and the heath or chase of Gladsmore, on which was fought, some time afterwards, the battle of Barnet. It was a house of good aspect, and considerable size, for it was much frequented by all caravanserais and travellers from the North to the metropolis. The landlord, at heart a stanch Lancastrian, who had served in the French wars, and contrived, no one knew how, to save moneys in the course of an adventurous life, gave to his hostelry the appellation and sign of the Talbot, in memory of the old hero of that name; and, hiring a tract of land, joined the occupation of a farmer to the dignity of a host. The house, which was built round a spacious quadrangle, represented the double character of its owner, one side being occupied by barns and a considerable range of stabling, while cows, oxen, and ragged colts grouped amicably together in a space railed off in the centre of the yard. At another side ran a large wooden staircase, with an open gallery, propped on wooden columns, conducting to numerous chambers, after the fashion of the Tabard in Southwark, immortalized by Chaucer. Over the archway, on entrance, ran a labyrinth of sleeping lofts for foot passengers and muleteers; and the side facing the entrance was nearly occupied by a vast kitchen, the common hall, and the bar, with the private parlour of the host, and two or three chambers in the second story. The whirlicote jolted and rattled into the yard. Sibyll and her father were assisted out of the vehicle, and, after a few words interchanged with the host, conducted by Master Porpustone himself up the spacious stairs into a chamber, well furnished and fresh littered, with repeated assurances of safety, provided they maintained silence, and attempted no escape.

"Ye are in time," said Ned Porpustone to the captain. "Lord Hastings made proclamation at daybreak that he gave the rebels two hours to disperse."

"Pest! I like not those proclamations. And the fellows stood their ground?"

"No; for Sir Geoffrey, like a wise soldier, mended the ground by retreating a mile to the left, and placing the wood between the Yorkists and himself. Hastings, by this, must have remarshalled his men. But to pass the wood is slow work, and Sir Geoffrey's crossbows are no doubt doing damage in the covert. Come in, while your fellows snatch a morsel without; five minutes are not thrown away on filling their bellies."

"Thanks, Ned, thou art a good fellow; and if all else fail, why, Sir John's ransom shall pay the reckoning. Any news of bold Robin?"

"Ay, he has 'scaped with a whole skin, and gone back to the North," answered the host, leading the way to his parlour, where a flask of strong wine and some cold meat awaited his guest. "If Sir Geoffrey Gates can beat off the York troopers, tell him, from me, not to venture to London, but to fall back into the marshes. He will be welcome there, I foreguess; for every northman is either for Warwick or for Lancaster, and the two must unite now, I trow."

"But Warwick is flown!" quoth the captain.

"Tush! he has only flown as the falcon flies when he has a heron to fight with,--wheeling and soaring. Woe to the heron when the falcon swoops! But you drink not!"

"No; I must keep the head cool to-day; for Hastings is a perilous captain. Thy fist, friend! If I fall, I leave you Sir John and his girl to wipe off old scores; if we beat off the Yorkists I vow to Our Lady of Walsingham an image of wax of the weight of myself." The marauder then started up, and strode to his men, who were snatching a hasty meal on the space before the hostel. He paused a moment or so, while his host whispered,--

"Hastings was here before daybreak: but his men only got the sour beer; yours fight upon huffcap."

"Up, men! to your pikes! Dress to the right!" thundered the captain, with a sufficient pause between each sentence. "The York lozels have starved on stale beer,--shall they beat huffcap and Lancaster? Frisk and fresh-up with the Antelope banner [The antelope was one of the Lancastrian badges. The special cognizance of Henry VI. was two feathers in saltire.], and long live Henry the Sixth!"

The sound of the shout that answered this harangue shook the thin walls of the chamber in which the prisoners were confined, and they heard with joy the departing tramp of the soldiers. In a short time, Master Porpustone himself, a corpulent, burly fellow, with a face by no means unprepossessing, mounted to the chamber, accompanied by a comely housekeeper, linked to him, as scandal said, by ties less irksome than Hymen's, and both bearing ample provisions, with rich pigment and lucid clary [clary was wine clarified], which they spread with great formality on an oak table before their involuntary guest.

"Eat, your worship, eat!" cried mine host, heartily. "Eat, lady-bird,--nothing like eating to kill time and banish care. Fortune of war, Sir John,--fortune of war, never be daunted! Up to-day, down to-morrow. Come what may--York or Lancaster--still a rich man always falls on his legs. Five hundred or so to the captain; a noble or two, out of pure generosity, to Ned Porpustone (I scorn extortion), and you and the fair young dame may breakfast at home to-morrow, unless the captain or his favourite lieutenant is taken prisoner; and then, you see, they will buy off their necks by letting you out of the bag. Eat, I say,--eat!"

"Verily," said Adam, seating himself solemnly, and preparing to obey, "I confess I'm a hungered, and the pasty hath a savoury odour; but I pray thee to tell me why I am called Sir John. Adam is my baptismal name."

"Ha! ha! good--very good, your honour--to be sure, and your father's

name before you. We are all sons of Adam, and every son, I trow, has a just right and a lawful to his father's name."

With that, followed by the housekeeper, the honest landlord, chuckling heartily, rolled his goodly bulk from the chamber, which he carefully locked.

"Comprehendest thou yet, Sibyll?"

"Yes, dear sir and father, they mistake us for fugitives of mark and importance; and when they discover their error, no doubt we shall go free. Courage, dear father!"

"Me seemeth," quoth Adam, almost merrily, as the good man filled his cup from the wine flagon, "me seemeth that, if the mistake could continue, it would be no weighty misfortune; ha! ha!" He stopped abruptly in the unwonted laughter, put down the cup; his face fell. "Ah, Heaven forgive me!--and the poor Eureka and faithful Madge!"

"Oh, Father! fear not; we are not without protection. Lord Hastings is returned to London,--we will seek him; he will make our cruel neighbours respect thee. And Madge--poor Madge!--will be so happy at our return, for they could not harm her,--a woman, old and alone; no, no, man is not fierce enough for that."

"Let us so pray; but thou eatest not, child."

"Anon, Father, anon; I am sick and weary. But, nay--nay, I am better now,--better. Smile again, Father. I am hungered, too; yes, indeed and in sooth, yes. Ah, sweet Saint Mary, give me life and strength, and hope and patience, for his dear sake!"

The stirring events which had within the last few weeks diversified the quiet life of the scholar had somewhat roused him from his wonted abstraction, and made the actual world a more sensible and living thing than it had hitherto seemed to his mind; but now, his repast ended, the quiet of the place (for the inn was silent and almost deserted) with the fumes of the wine--a luxury he rarely tasted--operated soothingly upon his thought and fancy, and plunged him into those reveries, so dear alike to poet and mathematician. To the thinker the most trifling external object often suggests ideas, which, like Homer's chain, extend, link after link; from earth to heaven. The sunny notes, that in a glancing column came through the lattice, called Warner from the real day,--the day of strife and blood, with thousands hard by driving each other to the Hades,--and led his scheming fancy into the ideal and abstract day,--the theory of light itself; and the theory suggested mechanism, and mechanism called up the memory of his oracle, old Roger Bacon; and that memory revived the great friar's hints in the *Opus magnus*,--hints which outlined the grand invention of the telescope; and so, as over some dismal precipice a bird swings itself to and fro upon the airy bough, the schoolman's mind played with its quivering fancy, and folded its calm wings above the verge of terror.

Occupied with her own dreams, Sibyll respected those of her father; and so in silence, not altogether mournful, the morning and the noon passed, and the sun was sloping westward, when a confused sound below called Sibyll's gaze to the lattice, which looked over the balustrade of the staircase into the vast yard. She saw several armed men, their

harness hewed and battered, quaffing ale or wine in haste, and heard one of them say to the landlord,--

"All is lost! Sir Geoffrey Gates still holds out, but it is butcher work. The troops of Lord Hastings gather round him as a net round the fish!"

Hastings!--that name!--he was at hand! he was near! they would be saved! Sibyll's heart beat loudly.

"And the captain?" asked Porpustone.

"Alive, when I last saw him; but we must be off. In another hour all will be hurry and skurry, flight and chase." At this moment from one of the barns there emerged, one by one, the female vultures of the battle. The tymbesteres, who had tramped all night to the spot, had slept off their fatigue during the day, and appeared on the scene as the neighbouring strife waxed low, and the dead and dying began to cumber the gory ground. Graul Skellet, tossing up her timbrel, darted to the fugitives and grinned a ghastly grin when she heard the news,-- for the tymbesteres were all loyal to a king who loved women, and who had a wink and a jest for every tramping wench! The troopers tarried not, however, for further converse, but, having satisfied their thirst, hurried and clattered from the yard. At the sight of the ominous tymbesteres Sibyll had drawn back, without daring to close the lattice she had opened; and the women, seating themselves on a bench, began sleeking their long hair and smoothing their garments from the scraps of straw and litter which betokened the nature of their resting-place.

"Ho, girls!" said the fat landlord, "ye will pay me for board and bed, I trust, by a show of your craft. I have two right worshipful lodgers up yonder, whose lattice looks on the yard, and whom ye may serve to divert."

Sibyll trembled, and crept to her father's side.

"And," continued the landlord, "if they like the clash of your musicals, it may bring ye a groat or so, to help ye on your journey. By the way, whither wend ye, wenches?"

"To a bonny, jolly fair," answered the sinister voice of Graul,--

"Where a mighty SHOWMAN dyes
The greenery into red;
Where, presto! at the word
Lies his Fool without a head;
Where he gathers in the crowd
To the trumpet and the drum,
With a jingle and a tinkle,
Graul's merry lasses come!"

As the two closing lines were caught by the rest of the tymbesteres, striking their timbrels, the crew formed themselves into a semicircle, and commenced their dance. Their movements, though wanton and fantastic, were not without a certain wild grace; and the address with which, from time to time, they cast up their instruments and caught them in descending, joined to the surprising agility with which, in the evolutions of the dance, one seemed now to chase, now to fly from,

the other, darting to and fro through the ranks of her companions, winding and wheeling,--the chain now seemingly broken in disorder, now united link to link, as the whole force of the instruments clashed in chorus,--made an exhibition inexpressibly attractive to the vulgar.

The tymbesteres, however, as may well be supposed, failed to draw Sibyll or Warner to the window; and they exchanged glances of spite and disappointment.

"Marry," quoth the landlord, after a hearty laugh at the diversion, "I do wrong to be so gay, when so many good friends perhaps are lying stark and cold. But what then? Life is short,--laugh while we can!"

"Hist!" whispered his housekeeper; "art wode, Ned? Wouldst thou have it discovered that thou hast such quality birds in the cage--noble Yorkists--at the very time when Lord Hastings himself may be riding this way after the victory?"

"Always right, Meg,--and I'm an ass!" answered the host, in the same undertone. "But my good nature will be the death of me some day. Poor gentlefolks, they must be unked dull, yonder!"

"If the Yorkists come hither,--which we shall soon know by the scouts,--we must shift Sir John and the damsel to the back of the house, over thy tap-room."

"Manage it as thou wilt, Meg; but thou seest they keep quiet and snug. Ho, ho, ho! that tall tymbestere is supple enough to make an owl hold his sides with laughing. Ah! hollo, there, tymbesteres, ribaudes, tramps, the devil's chickens,--down, down!"

The host was too late in his order. With a sudden spring, Graul, who had long fixed her eye on the open lattice of the prisoners, had wreathed herself round one of the pillars that supported the stairs, swung lightly over the balustrade; and with a faint shriek the startled Sibyll beheld the tymbestere's hard, fierce eyes, glaring upon her through the lattice, as her long arm extended the timbrel for largess. But no sooner had Sibyll raised her face than she was recognized.

"Ho, the wizard and the wizard's daughter! Ho, the girl who glammers lords, and wears sarcenet and lawn! Ho, the nigromancer who starves the poor!"

At the sound of their leader's cry, up sprang, up climbed the hellish sisters! One after the other, they darted through the lattice into the chamber.

"The ronions! the foul fiend has distraught them!" groaned the landlord, motionless with astonishment; but the more active Meg, calling to the varlets and scullions, whom the tymbesteres had collected in the yard, to follow her, bounded up the stairs, unlocked the door, and arrived in time to throw herself between the captives and the harpies, whom Sibyll's rich super-tunic and Adam's costly gown had inflamed into all the rage of appropriation.

"What mean ye, wretches?" cried the bold Meg, purple with anger. "Do ye come for this into honest folk's hostelries, to rob their guests in broad day--noble guests--guests of mark! Oh, Sir John! Sir John!"

what will ye think of us?"

"Oh, Sir John! Sir John!" groaned the landlord, who had now moved his slow bulk into the room. "They shall be scourged, Sir John! They shall be put in the stocks, they shall be brent with hot iron, they--"

"Ha, ha!" interrupted the terrible Graul, "guests of mark! noble guests, trow ye! Adam Warner, the wizard, and his daughter, whom we drove last night from their den, as many a time, sisters, and many, we have driven the rats from charnel and cave."

"Wizard! Adam! Blood of my life!" stammered the landlord, "is his name Adam after all?"

"My name is Adam Warner," said the old man, with dignity, "no wizard-- a humble scholar, and a poor gentleman, who has injured no one. Wherefore, women--if women ye are--would ye injure mine and me?"

"Faugh, wizard!" returned Graul, folding her arms. "Didst thou not send thy spawn, yonder, to spoil our mart with her gittern? Hast thou not taught her the spells to win love from the noble and young? Ho, how daintily the young witch robes herself! Ho, laces and satins, and we shiver with the cold, and parch with the heat--and--doff thy tunic, minion!"

And Graul's fierce gripe was on the robe, when the landlord interposed his huge arm, and held her at bay.

"Softly, my sucking dove, softly! Clear the room and be off!"

"Look to thyself, man. If thou harbourest a wizard against law,--a wizard whom King Edward hath given up to the people,--look to thy barns,--they shall burn; look to thy cattle,--they shall rot; look to thy secrets,--they shall be told. Lancastrian, thou shalt hang! We go! we go! We have friends amongst the mailed men of York. We go,-- we will return! Woe to thee, if thou harbourest the wizard and the succuba!"

With that Graul moved slowly to the door. Host and housekeeper, varlet, groom, and scullion made way for her in terror; and still, as she moved, she kept her eyes on Sibyll, till her sisters, following in successive file, shut out the hideous aspect: and Meg, ordering away her gaping train, closed the door.

The host and the housekeeper then gazed gravely at each other. Sibyll lay in her father's arms breathing hard and convulsively. The old man's face bent over her in silence. Meg drew aside her master. "You must rid the house at once of these folks. I have heard talk of yon tymbesteres; they are awsome in spite and malice. Every man to himself!"

"But the poor old gentleman, so mild, and the maid, so winsome!"

The last remark did not over-please the comely Meg. She advanced at once to Adam, and said shortly,--

"Master, whether wizard or not is no affair of a poor landlord, whose house is open to all; but ye have had food and wine,--please to pay the reckoning, and God speed ye; ye are free to depart."

"We can pay you, mistress!" exclaimed Sibyll, springing up. "We have moneys yet. Here, here!" and she took from her gipsire the broad pieces which poor Madge's precaution had placed therein, and which the bravoës had fortunately spared.

The sight of the gold somewhat softened the housewife. "Lord Hastings is known to us," continued Sibyll, perceiving the impression she had made; "suffer us to rest here till he pass this way, and ye will find yourselves repaid for the kindness."

"By my troth," said the landlord, "ye are most welcome to all my poor house containeth; and as for these tymbesteres, I value them not a straw. No one can say Ned Porpustone is an ill man or inhospitable. Whoever can pay reasonably is sure of good wine and civility at the Talbot."

With these and many similar protestations and assurances, which were less heartily re-echoed by the housewife, the landlord begged to conduct them to an apartment not so liable to molestation; and after having led them down the principal stairs, through the bar, and thence up a narrow flight of steps, deposited them in a chamber at the back of the house, and lighted a sconce therein, for it was now near the twilight. He then insisted on seeing after their evening meal, and vanished with his assistant. The worthy pair were now of the same mind; for guests known to Lord Hastings it was worth braving the threats of the tymbesteres; especially since Lord Hastings, it seems, had just beaten the Lancastrians.

But alas! while the active Meg was busy on the hippocras, and the worthy landlord was inspecting the savoury operations of the kitchen, a vast uproar was heard without. A troop of disorderly Yorkist soldiers, who had been employed in dispersing the flying rebels, rushed helter-skelter into the house, and poured into the kitchen, bearing with them the detested tymbesteres, who had encountered them on their way. Among these soldiers were those who had congregated at Master Sancroft's the day before, and they were well prepared to support the cause of their griesly paramours. Lord Hastings himself had retired for the night to a farmhouse nearer the field of battle than the hostel; and as in those days discipline was lax enough after a victory, the soldiers had a right to license. Master Porpustone found himself completely at the mercy of these brawling customers, the more rude and disorderly from the remembrance of the sour beer in the morning, and Graul Skellet's assurances that Master Porpustone was a malignant Lancastrian. They laid hands on all the provisions in the house, tore the meats from the spit, devouring them half raw; set the casks running over the floors; and while they swilled and swore, and filled the place with the uproar of a hell broke loose, Graul Skellet, whom the lust for the rich garments of Sibyll still fired and stung, led her followers up the stairs towards the deserted chamber. Mine host perceived, but did not dare openly to resist the foray; but as he was really a good-natured knave, and as, moreover, he feared ill consequences might ensue if any friends of Lord Hastings were spoiled, outraged,--nay, peradventure murdered,--in his house, he resolved, at all events, to assist the escape of his guests. Seeing the ground thus clear of the tymbesteres, he therefore stole from the riotous scene, crept up the back stairs, gained the chamber to which he had so happily removed his persecuted lodgers, and making them, in a few words, sensible that he was no longer able to protect them, and that

the tymbesteres were now returned with an armed force to back their malice, conducted them safely to a wide casement only some three or four feet from the soil of the solitary garden, and bade them escape and save themselves.

"The farm," he whispered, "where they say my Lord Hastings is quartered is scarcely a mile and a half away; pass the garden wicket, leave Gladsmore Chase to the left hand, take the path to the right, through the wood, and you will see its roof among the apple-blossoms.

Our Lady protect you, and say a word to my lord on behalf of poor Ned."

Scarce had he seen his guests descend into the garden before he heard the yell of the tymbesteres, in the opposite part of the house, as they ran from room to room after their prey. He hastened to regain the kitchen; and presently the tymbesteres, breathless and panting, rushed in, and demanded their victims.

"Marry," quoth the landlord, with the self-possession of a cunning old soldier—"think ye I cumbered my house with such cattle after pretty lasses like you had given me the inkling of what they were? No wizard shall fly away with the sign of the Talbot, if I can help it. They skulked off I can promise ye, and did not even mount a couple of broomsticks which I handsomely offered for their ride up to London."

"Thunder and bombards!" cried a trooper, already half-drunk, and seizing Graul in his iron arms, "put the conjuror out of thine head now, and buss me, Graul, buss me!"

Then the riot became hideous; the soldiers, following their comrade's example, embraced the grim glee-women, tearing and hauling them to and fro, one from the other, round and round, dancing, hallooing, chanting, howling, by the blaze of a mighty fire,—many a rough face and hard hand smeared with blood still wet, communicating the stain to the cheeks and garb of those foul feres, and the whole revel becoming so unutterably horrible and ghastly, that even the veteran landlord fled from the spot, trembling and crossing himself. And so, streaming athwart the lattice, and silvering over that fearful merry-making, rose the moon.

But when fatigue and drunkenness had done their work, and the soldiers fell one over the other upon the floor, the tables, the benches, into the heavy sleep of riot, Graul suddenly rose from amidst the huddled bodies, and then, silently as ghouls from a burial-ground, her sisters emerged also from their resting-places beside the sleepers. The dying light of the fire contended but feebly with the livid rays of the moon, and played fantastically over the gleaming robes of the tymbesteres. They stood erect for a moment, listening, Graul with her finger on her lips; then they glided to the door, opened and reclosed it, darted across the yard, scaring the beasts that slept there; the watch-dog barked, but drew back, bristling, and showing his fangs, as Red Grisell, undaunted, pointed her knife, and Graul flung him a red peace-sop of meat. They launched themselves through the open entrance, gained the space beyond, and scoured away to the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Sibyll and her father were still under the canopy of heaven, they had scarcely passed the garden and entered the fields,

when they saw horsemen riding to and fro in all directions. Sir Geoffrey Gates, the rebel leader, had escaped; the reward of three hundred marks was set on his head, and the riders were in search of the fugitive. The human form itself had become a terror to the hunted outcasts; they crept under a thick hedge till the horsemen had disappeared, and then resumed their way. They gained the wood; but there again they halted at the sound of voices, and withdrew themselves under covert of some entangled and trampled bushes. This time it was but a party of peasants, whom curiosity had led to see the field of battle, and who were now returning home. Peasants and soldiers both were human, and therefore to be shunned by those whom the age itself put out of the pale of law. At last the party also left the path free; and now it was full night. They pursued their way, they cleared the wood; before them lay the field of battle; and a deeper silence seemed to fall over the world! The first stars had risen, but not yet the moon. The gleam of armour from prostrate bodies, which it had mailed in vain, reflected the quiet rays; here and there flickered watchfires, where sentinels were set, but they were scattered and remote. The outcasts paused and shuddered, but there seemed no holier way for their feet; and the roof of the farmer's homestead slept on the opposite side of the field, amidst white orchard blossoms, whitened still more by the stars. They went on, hand in hand,--the dead, after all, were less terrible than the living. Sometimes a stern, upturned face, distorted by the last violent agony, the eyes unclosed and glazed, encountered them with its stony stare; but the weapon was powerless in the stiff hand, the menace and the insult came not from the hueless lips; persecution reposed, at last, in the lap of slaughter. They had gone midway through the field, when they heard from a spot where the corpses lay thickest piled, a faint voice calling upon God for pardon; and, suddenly, it was answered by a tone of fiercer agony,--that did not pray, but curse.

By a common impulse, the gentle wanderers moved silently to the spot.

The sufferer in prayer was a youth scarcely passed from boyhood: his helm had been cloven, his head was bare, and his long light hair, clotted with gore, fell over his shoulders. Beside him lay a strong-built, powerful form, which writhed in torture, pierced under the arm by a Yorkist arrow, and the shaft still projecting from the wound,--and the man's curse answered the boy's prayer.

"Peace to thy parting soul, brother!" said Warner, bending over the man.

"Poor sufferer!" said Sibyll to the boy; "cheer thee, we will send succour; thou mayest live yet!"

"Water! water!--hell and torture!--water, I say!" groaned the man; "one drop of water!"

It was the captain of the mauraunders who had captured the wanderers.

"Thine arm! lift me! move me! That evil man scares my soul from heaven!" gasped the boy.

And Adam preached penitence to the one that cursed, and Sibyll knelt down and prayed with the one that prayed. And up rose the moon!

Lord Hastings sat with his victorious captains--over mead, morat, and wine--in the humble hall of the farm.

"So," said he, "we have crushed the last embers of the rebellion! This Sir Geoffrey Gates is a restless and resolute spirit; pity he escapes again for further mischief. But the House of Neville, that overshadowed the rising race, hath fallen at last,--a waisall, brave sirs, to the new men!"

The door was thrown open, and an old soldier entered abruptly.

"My lord! my lord! Oh, my poor son! he cannot be found! The women, who ever follow the march of soldiers, will be on the ground to despatch the wounded, that they may rifle the corpses! O God! if my son, my boy, my only son--"

"I wist not, my brave Mervil, that thou hadst a son in our bands; yet I know each man by name and sight. Courage! Our wounded have been removed, and sentries are placed to guard the field."

"Sentries! O my lord, knowest thou not that they wink at the crime that plunders the dead? Moreover, these corpse-riflers creep stealthily and unseen, as the red earth-worms, to the carcass. Give me some few of thy men, give me warrant to search the field! My son, my boy--not sixteen summers--and his mother!"

The man stopped, and sobbed.

"Willingly!" said the gentle Hastings, "willingly! And woe to the sentries if it be as thou sayest! I will go myself and see! Torches there--what ho!--the good captain careth even for his dead!--Thy son! I marvel I knew him not! Whom served he under?"

"My lord! my lord! pardon him! He is but a boy--they misled him! he fought for the rebels. He crossed my path to-day, my arm was raised; we knew each other, and he fled from his father's sword! Just as the strife was ended I saw him again, I saw him fall!--Oh, mercy, mercy! do not let him perish of his wounds or by the rifler's knife, even though a rebel!"

"Homo sum!" quoth the noble chief; "I am a man; and, even in these bloody times, Nature commands when she speaks in a father's voice! Mervil, I marked thee to-day! Thou art a brave fellow. I meant thee advancement; I give thee, instead, thy son's pardon, if he lives; ten Masses if he died as a soldier's son should die, no matter under what flag,--antelope or lion, pierced manfully in the breast, his feet to the foe! Come, I will search with thee!"

The boy yielded up his soul while Sibyll prayed, and her sweet voice soothed the last pang; and the man ceased to curse while Adam spoke of God's power and mercy, and his breath ebbed, gasp upon gasp, away. While thus detained, the wanderers saw not pale, fleeting figures, that had glided to the ground, and moved, gleaming, irregular, and rapid, as marsh-fed vapours, from heap to heap of the slain. With a loud, wild cry, the robber Lancastrian half sprung to his feet, in the paroxysm of the last struggle, and then fell on his face, a corpse!

The cry reached the tymbesteres, and Graul rose from a body from which she had extracted a few coins smeared with blood, and darted to the

spot; and so, as Adam raised his face from contemplating the dead, whose last moments he had sought to soothe, the Alecto of the battlefield stood before him, her knife bare in her gory arm. Red Grisell, who had just left (with a spurn of wrath--for the pouch was empty) the corpse of a soldier, round whose neck she had twined her hot clasp the day before, sprang towards Sibyll; the rest of the sisterhood flocked to the place, and laughed in glee as they beheld their unexpected prey. The danger was horrible and imminent; no pity was seen in those savage eyes. The wanderers prepared for death--when, suddenly, torches flashed over the ground. A cry was heard, "See, the riflers of the dead!" Armed men bounded forward, and the startled wretches uttered a shrill, unearthly scream, and fled from the spot, leaping over the carcasses, and doubling and winding, till they had vanished into the darkness of the wood.

"Provost!" said a commanding voice, "hang me up those sentinels at day-break!"

"My son! my boy! speak, Hal,--speak to me. He is here, he is found!" exclaimed the old soldier, kneeling beside the corpse at Sibyll's feet.

"My lord! my beloved! my Hastings!" And Sibyll fell insensible before the chief.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUBTLE CRAFT OF RICHARD OF GLOUCESTER.

It was some weeks after the defeat of Sir Geoffrey Gates, and Edward was at Shene, with his gay court. Reclined at length within a pavilion placed before a cool fountain, in the royal gardens, and surrounded by his favourites, the king listened indolently to the music of his minstrels, and sleeked the plumage of his favourite falcon, perched upon his wrist. And scarcely would it have been possible to recognize in that lazy voluptuary the dauntless soldier, before whose lance, as deer before the hound, had so lately fled, at bloody Erpingham, the chivalry of the Lancastrian Rose; but remote from the pavilion, and in one of the deserted bowling alleys, Prince Richard and Lord Montagu walked apart, in earnest conversation. The last of these noble personages had remained inactive during these disturbances, and Edward had not seemed to entertain any suspicion of his participation in the anger and revenge of Warwick. The king took from him, it is true, the lands and earldom of Northumberland, and restored them to the Percy, but he had accompanied this act with gracious excuses, alleging the necessity of conciliating the head of an illustrious House, which had formally entered into allegiance to the dynasty of York, and bestowed upon his early favourite, in compensation, the dignity of marquis. [Montagu said bitterly of this new dignity, "He takes from me the Earldom and domains of Northumberland, and makes me a Marquis, with a pie's nest to maintain it withal."--STOWE: Edward IV.--Warkworth Chronicle.] The politic king, in thus depriving Montagu of the wealth and the retainers of the Percy, reduced him, as a younger brother, to a comparative poverty and insignificance, which left him dependent on Edward's favour, and deprived him, as he thought, of the power of active mischief; at the

same time more than ever he insisted on Montagu's society, and summoning his attendance at the court, kept his movements in watchful surveillance.

"Nay, my lord," said Richard, pursuing with much unctious conversation he had commenced, "you wrong me much, Holy Paul be my witness, if you doubt the deep sorrow I feel at the unhappy events which have led to the severance of my kinsmen! England seems to me to have lost its smile in losing the glory of Earl Warwick's presence, and Clarence is my brother, and was my friend; and thou knowest, Montagu, thou knowest, how dear to my heart was the hope to win for my wife and lady the gentle Anne."

"Prince," said Montagu, abruptly, "though the pride of Warwick and the honour of our House may have forbidden the public revelation of the cause which fired my brother to rebellion, thou, at least, art privy to a secret--"

"Cease!" exclaimed Richard, in great emotion, probably sincere, for his face grew livid, and its muscles were nervously convulsed. "I would not have that remembrance stirred from its dark repose. I would fain forget a brother's hasty frenzy, in the belief of his lasting penitence." He paused and turned his face, gasped for breath, and resumed: "The cause justified the father; it had justified me in the father's cause, had Warwick listened to my suit, and given me the right to deem insult to his daughter injury to myself."

"And if, my prince," returned Montagu, looking round him, and in a subdued whisper, "if yet the hand of Lady Anne were pledged to you?"

"Tempt me not, tempt me not!" cried the prince, crossing himself. Montagu continued,--

"Our cause, I mean Lord Warwick's cause, is not lost, as the king deems it."

"Proceed," said Richard, casting down his eyes, while his countenance settled back into its thoughtful calm.

"I mean," renewed Montagu, "that in my brother's flight, his retainers were taken by surprise. In vain the king would confiscate his lands, --he cannot confiscate men's hearts. If Warwick to-morrow set his armed heel upon the soil, trowest thou, sagacious and clear-judging prince, that the strife which would follow would be but another field of Losecote? [The battle of Erpingham, so popularly called, in contempt of the rebel lions runaways.] Thou hast heard of the honours with which King Louis has received the earl. Will that king grudge him ships and moneys? And meanwhile, thinkest thou that his favourers sleep?"

"But if he land, Montagu," said Richard, who seemed to listen with an attention that awoke all the hopes of Montagu, coveting so powerful an ally--"if he land, and make open war on Edward--we must say the word boldly--what intent can he proclaim? It is not enough to say King Edward shall not reign; the earl must say also what king England should elect!"

"Prince," answered Montagu, "before I reply to that question, vouchsafe to hear my own hearty desire and wish. Though the king has

deeply wronged my brother, though he has despoiled me of the lands, which were, peradventure, not too large a reward for twenty victories in his cause, and restored them to the House that ever ranked amongst the strongholds of his Lancastrian foe, yet often when I am most resentful, the memory of my royal seigneur's past love and kindness comes over me,--above all, the thought of the solemn contract between his daughter and my son; and I feel (now the first heat of natural anger at an insult offered to my niece is somewhat cooled) that if Warwick did land, I could almost forget my brother for my king."

"Almost!" repeated Richard, smiling.

"I am plain with your Highness, and say but what I feel. I would even now fain trust that, by your mediation, the king may be persuaded to make such concessions and excuses as in truth would not misbeseem him, to the father of Lady Anne, and his own kinsman; and that yet, ere it be too late, I may be spared the bitter choice between the ties of blood and my allegiance to the king."

"But failing this hope (which I devoutly share),--and Edward, it must be owned, could scarcely trust to a letter,--still less to a messenger, the confession of a crime,--failing this, and your brother land, and I side with him for love of Anne, pledged to me as a bride, --what king would he ask England to elect?"

"The Duke of Clarence loves you dearly, Lord Richard," replied Montagu. "Knowest thou not how often he hath said, 'By sweet Saint George, if Gloucester would join me, I would make Edward know we were all one man's sons, who should be more preferred and promoted than strangers of his wife's blood?'" [Hall.]

Richard's countenance for a moment evinced disappointment; but he said dryly: "Then Warwick would propose that Clarence should be king?--and the great barons and the honest burghers and the sturdy yeomen would, you think, not stand aghast at the manifesto which declares, not that the dynasty of York is corrupt and faulty, but that the younger son should depose the elder,--that younger son, mark me! not only unknown in war and green in council, but gay, giddy, vacillating; not subtle of wit and resolute of deed, as he who so aspires should be!--Montagu, a vain dream!"--Richard paused and then resumed, in a low tone, as to himself, "Oh, not so--not so are kings cozened from their thrones! a pretext must blind men,--say they are illegitimate, say they are too young, too feeble, too anything, glide into their place, and then, not war--not war. You slay them not,--they disappear!" The duke's face, as he muttered, took a sinister and a dark expression, his eyes seemed to gaze on space. Suddenly recovering himself as from a revery, he turned, with his wonted sleek and gracious aspect, to the startled Montagu, and said, "I was but quoting from Italian history, good my lord,--wise lore, but terrible and murderous. Return we to the point. Thou seest Clarence could not reign, and as well," added the prince, with a slight sigh,--"as well or better (for, without vanity, I have more of a king's mettle in me), might I--even I--aspire to my brother's crown!" Here he paused, and glanced rapidly and keenly at the marquis; but whether or not in these words he had sought to sound Montagu, and that glance sufficed to show him it were bootless or dangerous to speak more plainly, he resumed with an altered voice, "Enough of this: Warwick will discover the idleness of such design; and if he land, his trumpets must ring to a more kindling measure. John Montagu, thinkest thou that Margaret of Anjou and the

Lancastrians will not rather win thy brother to their side? There is the true danger to Edward,--none elsewhere."

"And if so?" said Montagu, watching his listener's countenance. Richard started, and gnawed his lip. "Mark me," continued the marquis, "I repeat that I would fain hope yet that Edward may appease the earl; but if not, and, rather than rest dishonoured and aggrieved, Warwick link himself with Lancaster, and thou join him as Anne's betrothed and lord, what matters who the puppet on the throne?--we and thou shall be the rulers; or, if thou reject," added the marquis, artfully, as he supposed, exciting the jealousy of the duke, "Henry has a son--a fair, and they say, a gallant prince--carefully tutored in the knowledge of our English laws, and who my lord of Oxford, somewhat in the confidence of the Lancastrians, assures me would rejoice to forget old feuds, and call Warwick 'father,' and my niece 'Lady and Princess of Wales.'"

With all his dissimulation, Richard could ill conceal the emotions of fear, of jealousy, of dismay, which these words excited.

"Lord Oxford!" he cried, stamping his foot. "Ha, John de Vere, pestilent traitor, plottest thou thus? But we can yet seize thy person, and will have thy head."

Alarmed at this burst, and suddenly made aware that he had laid his breast too bare to the boy, whom he had thought to dazzle and seduce to his designs, Montagu said falteringly, "But, my lord, our talk is but in confidence: at your own prayer, with your own plighted word of prince and of kinsman, that whatever my frankness may utter should not pass farther. Take," added the nobleman, with proud dignity--"take my head rather than Lord Oxford's; for I deserve death, if I reveal to one who can betray the loose words of another's intimacy and trust!"

"Forgive me, my cousin," said Richard, meekly; "my love to Anne transported me too far. Lord Oxford's words, as you report them, had conjured up a rival, and--but enough of this. And now," added the prince, gravely, and with a steadiness of voice and manner that gave a certain majesty to his small stature, "now as thou hast spoken openly, openly also will I reply. I feel the wrong to the Lady Anne as to myself; deeply, burningly, and lastingly, will it live in my mind; it may be, sooner or later, to rise to gloomy deeds, even against Edward and Edward's blood. But no, I have the king's solemn protestations of repentance; his guilty passion has burned into ashes, and he now sighs--gay Edward--for a lighter fere. I cannot join with Clarence, less can I join with the Lancastrians. My birth makes me the prop of the throne of York,--to guard it as a heritage (who knows?) that may descend to mine,--nay, to me! And, mark me well if Warwick attempt a war of fratricide, he is lost; if, on the other hand, he can submit himself to the hands of Margaret, stained with his father's gore, the success of an hour will close in the humiliation of a life. There is a third way left, and that way thou hast piously and wisely shown. Let him, like me, resign revenge, and, not exacting a confession and a cry of peccavi, which no king, much less King Edward the Plantagenet, can whimper forth, let him accept such overtures as his liege can make. His titles and castles shall be restored, equal possessions to those thou hast lost assigned to thee, and all my guerdon (if I can so negotiate) as all my ambition, his daughter's hand. Muse on this, and for the peace and weal of the realm so limit all thy schemes, my lord and cousin!"

With these words the prince pressed the hand of the marquis, and walked slowly towards the king's pavilion.

"Shame on my ripe manhood and lore of life," muttered Montagu, enraged against himself, and deeply mortified. "How sentence by sentence and step by step yon crafty pigmy led me on, till all our projects, all our fears and hopes, are revealed to him who but views them as a foe. Anne betrothed to one who even in fiery youth can thus beguile and dupe! Warwick decoyed hither upon fair words, at the will of one whom Italy (boy, there thou didst forget thy fence of cunning!) has taught how the great are slain not, but disappear! no, even this defeat instructs me now. But right, right! the reign of Clarence is impossible, and that of Lancaster is ill-omened and portentous; and after all, my son stands nearer to the throne than any subject, in his alliance with the Lady Elizabeth. Would to Heaven the king could yet --But out on me! this is no hour for musing on mine own aggrandizement; rather let me fly at once and warn Oxford--imperilled by my imprudence--against that dark eye which hath set watch upon his life."

At that thought, which showed that Montagu, with all his worldliness, was not forgetful of one of the first duties of knight and gentleman, the marquis hastened up the alley, in the opposite direction to that taken by Gloucester, and soon found himself in the courtyard, where a goodly company were mounting their haqueenes and palfreys, to enjoy a summer ride through the neighbouring chase. The cold and half-slighting salutations of these minions of the hour, which now mortified the Nevile, despoiled of the possessions that had rewarded his long and brilliant services, contrasting forcibly the reverential homage he had formerly enjoyed, stung Montagu to the quick.

"Whither ride you, brother Marquis?" said young Lord Dorset (Elizabeth's son by her first marriage), as Montagu called to his single squire, who was in waiting with his horse. "Some secret expedition, methinks, for I have known the day when the Lord Montagu never rode from his king's palace with less than thirty squires."

"Since my Lord Dorset prides himself on his memory," answered the scornful lord, "he may remember also the day when, if a Nevile mounted in haste, he bade the first Woodville he saw hold the stirrup."

And regarding "the brother marquis" with a stately eye that silenced and awed retort, the long-descended Montagu passed the courtiers, and rode slowly on till out of sight of the palace; he then pushed into a hand-gallop, and halted not till he had reached London, and gained the house in which then dwelt the Earl of Oxford, the most powerful of all the Lancastrian nobles not in exile, and who had hitherto temporized with the reigning House.

Two days afterwards the news reached Edward that Lord Oxford and Jasper of Pembroke--uncle to the boy afterwards Henry VII.--had sailed from England.

The tidings reached the king in his chamber, where he was closeted with Gloucester. The conference between them seemed to have been warm and earnest, for Edward's face was flushed, and Gloucester's brow was perturbed and sullen.

"Now Heaven be praised!" cried the king, extending to Richard the

letter which communicated the flight of the disaffected lords. "We have two enemies the less in our roialulme, and many a barony the more to confiscate to our kingly wants. Ha, ha! these Lancastrians only serve to enrich us. Frowning still, Richard? smile, boy!"

"Foi de mon ame, Edward," said Richard, with a bitter energy, strangely at variance with his usual unctious deference to the king, "your Highness's gayety is ill-seasoned; you reject all the means to assure your throne, you rejoice in all the events that imperil it. I prayed you to lose not a moment in conciliating, if possible, the great lord whom you own you have wronged, and you replied that you would rather lose your crown than win back the arm that gave it you."

"Gave it me! an error, Richard! that crown was at once the heritage of my own birth and the achievement of my own sword. But were it as you say, it is not in a king's nature to bear the presence of a power more formidable than his own, to submit to a voice that commands rather than counsels; and the happiest chance that ever befell me is the exile of this earl. How, after what hath chanced, can I ever see his face again without humiliation, or he mine without resentment?"

"So you told me anon, and I answered, if that be so, and your Highness shrinks from the man you have injured, beware at least that Warwick, if he may not return as a friend, come not back as an irresistible foe. If you will not conciliate, crush! Hasten by all arts to separate Clarence from Warwick. Hasten to prevent the union of the earl's popularity and Henry's rights. Keep eye upon all the Lancastrian lords, and see that none quit the realm where they are captives, to join a camp where they can rise into leaders. And at the very moment I urge you to place strict watch upon Oxford, to send your swiftest riders to seize Jasper of Pembroke, you laugh with glee to hear that Oxford and Pembroke are gone to swell the army of your foes!"

"Better foes out of my realm than in it," answered Edward, dryly.

"My liege, I say no more," and Richard rose. "I would forestall a danger; it but remains for me to share it."

The king was touched. "Tarry yet, Richard," he said; and then, fixing his brother's eye, he continued, with a half smile and a heightened colour, "though we knew thee true and leal to us, we yet know also, Richard, that thou hast personal interest in thy counsels. Thou wouldst by one means or another soften or constrain the earl into giving thee the hand of Anne. Well, then, grant that Warwick and Clarence expel King Edward from his throne, they may bring a bride to console thee for the ruin of a brother."

"Thou hast no right to taunt or to suspect me, my liege," returned Richard, with a quiver in his lip. "Thou hast included me in thy meditated wrong to Warwick; and had that wrong been done--"

"Peradventure it had made thee espouse Warwick's quarrel?"

"Bluntly, yes!" exclaimed Richard, almost fiercely, and playing with his dagger. "But" (he added, with a sudden change of voice) "I understand and know thee better than the earl did or could. I know what in thee is but thoughtless impulse, haste of passion, the habit kings form of forgetting all things save the love or hate, the desire

or anger, of a moment. Thou hast told me thyself, and with tears, of thy offence; thou hast pardoned my boy's burst of anger; I have pardoned thy evil thought; thou hast told me thyself that another face has succeeded to the brief empire of Anne's blue eye, and hast further pledged me thy kingly word, that if I can yet compass the hand of a cousin dear to me from childhood, thou wilt confirm the union."

"It is true," said Edward. "But if thou wed thy bride, keep her aloof from the court,—nay, frown not, my boy, I mean simply that I would not blush before my brother's wife!"

Richard bowed low in order to conceal the expression of his face, and went on without further notice of the explanation. "And all this considered, Edward, I swear by Saint Paul, the holiest saint to thoughtful men, and by Saint George, the noblest patron to high-born warriors, that thy crown and thine honour are as dear to me as if they were mine own. Whatever sins Richard of Gloucester may live to harbour and repent, no man shall ever say of him that he was a recreant to the honour of his country [so Lord Bacon observes of Richard, with that discrimination, even in the strongest censure, of which profound judges of mankind are alone capable, that he was "a king jealous of the honor of the English nation"], or slow to defend the rights of his ancestors from the treason of a vassal or the sword of a foreign foe. Therefore, I say again, if thou reject my honest counsels; if thou suffer Warwick to unite with Lancaster and France; if the ships of Louis bear to your shores an enemy, the might of whom your reckless daring undervalues, foremost in the field in battle, nearest to your side in exile, shall Richard Plantagenet be found!" These words, being uttered with sincerity, and conveying a promise never forfeited, were more impressive than the subtlest eloquence the wily and accomplished Gloucester ever employed as the cloak to guile, and they so affected Edward, that he threw his arms around his brother; and after one of those bursts of emotion which were frequent in one whose feelings were never deep and lasting, but easily aroused and warmly spoken, he declared himself really to listen to and adopt all means which Richard's art could suggest for the better maintenance of their common weal and interests.

And then, with that wondrous, if somewhat too restless and over-refining energy which belonged to him, Richard rapidly detailed the scheme of his profound and dissimulating policy. His keen and intuitive insight into human nature had shown him the stern necessity which, against their very will, must unite Warwick with Margaret of Anjou. His conversation with Montagu had left no doubt of that peril on his penetrating mind. He foresaw that this union might be made durable and sacred by the marriage of Anne and Prince Edward; and to defeat this alliance was his first object, partly through Clarence, partly through Margaret herself. A gentlewoman in the Duchess of Clarence's train had been arrested on the point of embarking to join her mistress. Richard had already seen and conferred with this lady, whose ambition, duplicity, and talent for intrigue were known to him. Having secured her by promises of the most lavish dignities and rewards, he proposed that she should be permitted to join the duchess with secret messages to Isabel and the duke, warning them both that Warwick and Margaret would forget their past feud in present sympathy, and that the rebellion against King Edward, instead of placing them on the throne, would humble them to be subordinates and aliens to the real profitters, the Lancastrians. [Comines, 3, c. 5; Hall; Hollinshed] He foresaw what effect these warnings would have upon the

vain duke and the ambitious Isabel, whose character was known to him from childhood. He startled the king by insisting upon sending, at the same time, a trusty diplomatist to Margaret of Anjou, proffering to give the princess Elizabeth (betrothed to Lord Montagu's son) to the young Prince Edward. ["Original Letters from Harleian Manuscripts. Edited by Sir H. Ellis (second series).] Thus, if the king, who had, as yet, no son, were to die, Margaret's son, in right of his wife, as well as in that of his own descent, would peaceably ascend the throne. "Need I say that I mean not this in sad and serious earnest?" observed Richard, interrupting the astonished king. "I mean it but to amuse the Anjouite, and to deafen her ears to any overtures from Warwick. If she listen, we gain time; that time will inevitably renew irreconcilable quarrel between herself and the earl. His hot temper and desire of revenge will not brook delay. He will land, unsupported by Margaret and her partisans, and without any fixed principle of action which can strengthen force by opinion."

"You are right, Richard," said Edward, whose faithless cunning comprehended the more sagacious policy it could not originate. "All be it as you will."

"And in the mean while," added Richard, "watch well, but anger not, Montagu and the archbishop. It were dangerous to seem to distrust them till proof be clear; it were dull to believe them true. I go at once to fulfil my task."

CHAPTER VII.

WARWICK AND HIS FAMILY IN EXILE.

We now summon the reader on a longer if less classic journey than from Thebes to Athens, and waft him on a rapid wing from Shene to Amboise. We must suppose that the two emissaries of Gloucester have already arrived at their several destinations,—the lady has reached Isabel, the envoy Margaret.

In one of the apartments appropriated to the earl in the royal palace, within the embrasure of a vast Gothic casement, sat Anne of Warwick; the small wicket in the window was open, and gave a view of a wide and fair garden, interspersed with thick bosquets and regular alleys, over which the rich skies of the summer evening, a little before sunset, cast alternate light and shadow. Towards this prospect the sweet face of the Lady Anne was turned musingly. The riveted eye, the bended neck, the arms reclining on the knee, the slender fingers interlaced, —gave to her whole person the character of revery and repose.

In the same chamber were two other ladies; the one was pacing the floor with slow but uneven steps, with lips moving from time to time, as if in self-commune, with the brow contracted slightly: her form and face took also the character of revery, but not of repose.

The third female (the gentle and lovely mother of the other two) was seated, towards the centre of the room, before a small table, on which rested one of those religious manuscripts, full of the moralities and the marvels of cloister sanctity, which made so large a portion of the literature of the monkish ages. But her eye rested not on the Gothic

letter and the rich blazon of the holy book. With all a mother's fear and all a mother's fondness, it glanced from Isabel to Anne, from Anne to Isabel, till at length in one of those soft voices, so rarely heard, which makes even a stranger love the speaker, the fair countess said,--

"Come hither, my child Isabel; give me thy hand, and whisper me what hath chafed thee."

"My mother," replied the duchess, "it would become me ill to have a secret not known to thee, and yet, methinks, it would become me less to say aught to provoke thine anger!"

"Anger, Isabel! Who ever knew anger for those they love?"

"Pardon me, my sweet mother," said Isabel, relaxing her haughty brow, and she approached and kissed her mother's cheek.

The countess drew her gently to a seat by her side.

"And now tell me all,--unless, indeed, thy Clarence hath, in some lover's hasty mood, vexed thy affection; for of the household secrets even a mother should not question the true wife."

Isabel paused, and glanced significantly at Anne.

"Nay, see!" said the countess, smiling, though sadly, "she, too, hath thoughts that she will not tell to me; but they seem not such as should alarm my fears, as thine do. For the moment ere I spoke to thee, thy brow frowned, and her lip smiled. She hears us not,--speak on."

"Is it then true, my mother, that Margaret of Anjou is hastening hither? And can it be possible that King Louis can persuade my lord and father to meet, save in the field of battle, the arch-enemy of our House?"

"Ask the earl thymself, Isabel; Lord Warwick hath no concealment from his children. Whatever he doth is ever wisest, best, and knightliest,--so, at least, may his children always deem!"

Isabel's colour changed and her eye flashed. But ere she could answer, the arras was raised, and Lord Warwick entered. But no longer did the hero's mien and manner evince that cordial and tender cheerfulness which, in all the storms of his changeful life, he had hitherto displayed when coming from power and danger, from council or from camp, to man's earthly paradise,--a virtuous home.

Gloomy and absorbed, his very dress--which, at that day, the Anglo-Norman deemed it a sin against self-dignity to neglect--betraying, by its disorder, that thorough change of the whole mind, that terrible internal revolution, which is made but in strong natures by the tyranny of a great care or a great passion, the earl scarcely seemed to heed his countess, who rose hastily, but stopped in the timid fear and reverence of love at the sight of his stern aspect; he threw himself abruptly on a seat, passed his hand over his face, and sighed heavily.

That sigh dispelled the fear of the wife, and made her alive only to

her privilege of the soother. She drew near, and placing herself on the green rushes at his feet, took his hand and kissed it, but did not speak.

The earl's eyes fell on the lovely face looking up to him through tears, his brow softened, he drew his hand gently from hers, placed it on her head, and said in a low voice,--"God and Our Lady bless thee, sweet wife!"

Then, looking round, he saw Isabel watching him intently; and, rising at once, he threw his arm round her waist, pressed her to his bosom, and said, "My daughter, for thee and thine day and night have I striven and planned in vain. I cannot reward thy husband as I would; I cannot give thee, as I had hoped, a throne!"

"What title so dear to Isabel," said the countess, "as that of Lord Warwick's daughter?"

Isabel remained cold and silent, and returned not the earl's embrace.

Warwick was, happily, too absorbed in his own feelings to notice those of his child. Moving away, he continued, as he paced the room (his habit in emotion, which Isabel, who had many minute external traits in common with her father, had unconsciously caught from him),--

"Till this morning I hoped still that my name and services, that Clarence's popular bearing and his birth of Plantagenet, would suffice to summon the English people round our standard; that the false Edward would be driven, on our landing, to fly the realm; and that, without change to the dynasty of York, Clarence, as next male heir, would ascend the throne. True, I saw all the obstacles, all the difficulties,--I was warned of them before I left England; but still I hoped. Lord Oxford has arrived, he has just left me. We have gone over the chart of the way before us, weighed the worth of every name, for and against; and, alas! I cannot but allow that all attempt to place the younger brother on the throne of the elder would but lead to bootless slaughter and irretrievable defeat."

"Wherefore think you so, my lord?" asked Isabel, in evident excitement. "Your own retainers are sixty thousand,--an army larger than Edward, and all his lords of yesterday, can bring into the field."

"My child," answered the earl, with that profound knowledge of his countrymen which he had rather acquired from his English heart than from any subtlety of intellect, "armies may gain a victory, but they do not achieve a throne,--unless, at least, they enforce a slavery; and it is not for me and for Clarence to be the violent conquerors of our countrymen, but the regenerators of a free realm, corrupted by a false man's rule."

"And what then," exclaimed Isabel,--"what do you propose, my father? Can it be possible that you can unite yourself with the abhorred Lancastrians, with the savage Anjouite, who beheaded my grandsire, Salisbury? Well do I remember your own words,--'May God and Saint George forget me, when I forget those gray and gory hairs!'"

Here Isabel was interrupted by a faint cry from Anne, who, unobserved by the rest, and hitherto concealed from her father's eye by the deep

embrasure of the window, had risen some moments before, and listened, with breathless attention, to the conversation between Warwick and the duchess.

"It is not true, it is not true!" exclaimed Anne, passionately.
"Margaret disowns the inhuman deed."

"Thou art right, Anne," said Warwick; "though I guess not how thou didst learn the error of a report so popularly believed that till of late I never questioned its truth. King Louis assures me solemnly that that foul act was done by the butcher Clifford, against Margaret's knowledge, and, when known, to her grief and anger."

"And you, who call Edward false, can believe Louis true?"

"Cease, Isabel, cease!" said the countess. "Is it thus my child can address my lord and husband? Forgive her, beloved Richard."

"Such heat in Clarence's wife misbeseems her not," answered Warwick. "And I can comprehend and pardon in my haughty Isabel a resentment which her reason must at last subdue; for think not, Isabel, that it is without dread struggle and fierce agony that I can contemplate peace and league with mine ancient foe; but here two duties speak to me in voices not to be denied: my honour and my hearth, as noble and as man, demand redress, and the weal and glory of my country demand a ruler who does not degrade a warrior, nor assail a virgin, nor corrupt a people by lewd pleasures, nor exhaust a land by grinding imposts; and that honour shall be vindicated, and that country shall be righted, no matter at what sacrifice of private grief and pride."

The words and the tone of the earl for a moment awed even Isabel; but after a pause, she said suddenly, "And for this, then, Clarence hath joined your quarrel and shared your exile?--for this,--that he may place the eternal barrier of the Lancastrian line between himself and the English throne?"

"I would fain hope," answered the earl, calmly, "that Clarence will view our hard position more charitably than thou. If he gain not all that I could desire, should success crown our arms, he will, at least, gain much; for often and ever did thy husband, Isabel, urge me to stern measures against Edward, when I soothed him and restrained. Mort Dieu! how often did he complain of slight and insult from Elizabeth and her minions, of open affront from Edward, of parsimony to his wants as prince,--of a life, in short, humbled and made bitter by all the indignity and the gall which scornful power can inflict on dependent pride. If he gain not the throne, he will gain, at least, the succession in thy right to the baronies of Beauchamp, the mighty duchy, and the vast heritage of York, the vice-royalty of Ireland. Never prince of the blood had wealth and honours equal to those that shall await thy lord. For the rest, I drew him not into my quarrel; long before would he have drawn me into his; nor doth it become thee, Isabel, as child and as sister, to repent, if the husband of my daughter felt as brave men feel, without calculation of gain and profit, the insult offered to his lady's House. But if here I overgauge his chivalry and love to me and mine, or discontent his ambition and his hopes, Mort Dieu! we hold him not a captive. Edward will hail his overtures of peace; let him make terms with his brother, and return."

"I will report to him what you say, my lord," said Isabel, with cold brevity and, bending her haughty head in formal reverence, she advanced to the door. Anne sprang forward and caught her hand.

"Oh, Isabel!" she whispered, "in our father's sad and gloomy hour can you leave him thus?" and the sweet lady burst into tears.

"Anne," retorted Isabel, bitterly, "thy heart is Lancastrian; and what, peradventure, grieves my father hath but joy for thee."

Anne drew back, pale and trembling, and her sister swept from the room.

The earl, though he had not overheard the whispered sentences which passed between his daughters, had watched them closely, and his lip quivered with emotion as Isabel closed the door.

"Come hither, my Anne," he said tenderly; "thou who hast thy mother's face, never hast a harsh thought for thy father."

As Anne threw herself on Warwick's breast, he continued, "And how camest thou to learn that Margaret disowns a deed that, if done by her command, would render my union with her cause a sacrilegious impiety to the dead?"

Anne coloured, and nestled her head still closer to her father's bosom. Her mother regarded her confusion and her silence with an anxious eye.

The wing of the palace in which the earl's apartments were situated was appropriated to himself and household, flanked to the left by an abutting pile containing state-chambers, never used by the austere and thrifty Louis, save on great occasions of pomp or revel; and, as we have before observed, looking on a garden, which was generally solitary and deserted. From this garden, while Anne yet strove for words to answer her father, and the countess yet watched her embarrassment, suddenly came the soft strain of a Provençal lute; while a low voice, rich, and modulated at once by a deep feeling and an exquisite art that would have given effect to even simpler words, breathed--

THE LAY OF THE HEIR OF LANCASTER

"His birthright but a father's name,
A grandsire's hero-sword,
He dwelt within the stranger's land,
The friendless, homeless lord!"

"Yet one dear hope, too dear to tell,
Consoled the exiled man;
The angels have their home in heaven
And gentle thoughts in Anne."

At that name the voice of the singer trembled, and paused a moment; the earl, who at first had scarcely listened to what he deemed but the ill-seasoned gallantry of one of the royal minstrels, started in proud surprise, and Anne herself, tightening her clasp round her father's neck, burst into passionate sobs. The eye of the countess met that of her lord; but she put her finger to her lips in sign to him to listen.

The song was resumed--

"Recall the single sunny time,
In childhood's April weather,
When he and thou, the boy and girl,
Roved hand in band together."

"When round thy young companion knelt
The princes of the isle;
And priest and people prayed their God,
On England's heir to smile."

The earl uttered a half-stifled exclamation, but the minstrel heard not the interruption, and continued,--

"Methinks the sun hath never smiled
Upon the exiled man,
Like that bright morning when the boy
Told all his soul to Anne."

"No; while his birthright but a name,
A grandsire's hero--sword,
He would not woo the lofty maid
To love the banished lord."

"But when, with clarion, fife, and drum,
He claims and wins his own;
When o'er the deluge drifts his ark,
To rest upon a throne."

"Then, wilt thou deign to hear the hope
That blessed the exiled man,
When pining for his father's crown
To deck the brows of Anne?"

The song ceased, and there was silence within the chamber, broken but by Anne's low yet passionate weeping. The earl gently strove to disengage her arms from his neck; but she, mistaking his intention, sank on her knees, and covering her face with her hands, exclaimed,--

"Pardon! pardon! pardon him, if not me!"

"What have I to pardon? What hast thou concealed from me? Can I think that thou hast met, in secret, one who--"

"In secret! Never, never, Father! This is the third time only that I have heard his voice since we have been at Amboise, save when--save when--"

"Go on."

"Save when King Louis presented him to me in the revel under the name of the Count de F----, and he asked me if I could forgive his mother for Lord Clifford's crime."

"It is, then, as the rhyme proclaimed; and it is Edward of Lancaster who loves and woos the daughter of Lord Warwick!"

Something in her father's voice made Anne remove her hands from her

face, and look up to him with a thrill of timid joy. Upon his brow, indeed, frowned no anger, upon his lip smiled no scorn. At that moment all his haughty grief at the curse of circumstance which drove him to his hereditary foe had vanished. Though Montagu had obtained from Oxford some glimpse of the desire which the more sagacious and temperate Lancastrians already entertained for that alliance, and though Louis had already hinted its expediency to the earl, yet, till now, Warwick himself had naturally conceived that the prince shared the enmity of his mother, and that such a union, however politic, was impossible; but now indeed there burst upon him the full triumph of revenge and pride. Edward of York dared to woo Anne to dishonour, Edward of Lancaster dared not even woo her as his wife till his crown was won! To place upon the throne the very daughter the ungrateful monarch had insulted; to make her he would have humbled not only the instrument of his fall, but the successor of his purple; to unite in one glorious strife the wrongs of the man and the pride of the father,--these were the thoughts that sparkled in the eye of the king-maker, and flushed with a fierce rapture the dark cheek, already hollowed by passion and care. He raised his daughter from the floor, and placed her in her mother's arms, but still spoke not.

"This, then, was thy secret, Anne," whispered the countess; "and I half foreguessed it, when, last night, I knelt beside thy couch to pray, and overheard thee murmur in thy dreams."

"Sweet mother, thou forgivest me; but my father--ah, he speaks not. One word! Father, Father, not even his love could console me if I angered thee!"

The earl, who had remained rooted to the spot, his eyes shining thoughtfully under his dark brows, and his hand slightly raised, as if piercing into the future, and mapping out its airy realm, turned quickly,--

"I go to the heir of Lancaster; if this boy be bold and true, worthy of England and of thee, we will change the sad ditty of that scannel lute into such a storm of trumpets as beseems the triumph of a conqueror and the marriage of a prince!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE HEIR OF LANCASTER MEETS THE KING-MAKER.

In truth, the young prince, in obedience to a secret message from the artful Louis, had repaired to the court of Amboise under the name of the Count de F----. The French king had long before made himself acquainted with Prince Edward's romantic attachment to the earl's daughter, through the agent employed by Edward to transmit his portrait to Anne at Rouen; and from him, probably, came to Oxford the suggestion which that nobleman had hazarded to Montagu; and now that it became his policy seriously and earnestly to espouse the cause of his kinswoman Margaret, he saw all the advantage to his cold statecraft which could be drawn from a boyish love. Louis had a well-founded fear of the warlike spirit and military talents of Edward IV.; and this fear had induced him hitherto to refrain from openly espousing the cause of the Lancastrians, though it did not prevent his

abetting such seditions and intrigues as could confine the attention of the martial Plantagenet to the perils of his own realm. But now that the breach between Warwick and the king had taken place; now that the earl could no longer curb the desire of the Yorkist monarch to advance his hereditary claims to the fairest provinces of France,-- nay, peradventure, to France itself,--while the defection of Lord Warwick gave to the Lancastrians the first fair hope of success in urging their own pretensions to the English throne, he bent all the powers of his intellect and his will towards the restoration of a natural ally and the downfall of a dangerous foe. But he knew that Margaret and her Lancastrian favourers could not of themselves suffice to achieve a revolution,--that they could only succeed under cover of the popularity and the power of Warwick, while he perceived all the art it would require to make Margaret forego her vindictive nature and long resentment, and to supple the pride of the great earl into recognizing as a sovereign the woman who had branded him as a traitor.

Long before Lord Oxford's arrival, Louis, with all that address which belonged to him, had gradually prepared the earl to familiarize himself to the only alternative before him, save that, indeed, of powerless sense of wrong and obscure and lasting exile. The French king looked with more uneasiness to the scruples of Margaret; and to remove these, he trusted less to his own skill than to her love for her only son.

His youth passed principally in Anjou--that court of minstrels--young Edward's gallant and ardent temper had become deeply imbued with the southern poetry and romance. Perhaps the very feud between his House and Lord Warwick's, though both claimed their common descent from John of Gaunt, had tended, by the contradictions in the human heart, to endear to him the recollection of the gentle Anne. He obeyed with joy the summons of Louis, repaired to the court, was presented to Anne as the Count de F----, found himself recognized at the first glance (for his portrait still lay upon her heart, as his remembrance in its core), and, twice before the song we have recited, had ventured, agreeably to the sweet customs of Anjou, to address the lady of his love under the shade of the starlit summer copses. But on this last occasion, he had departed from his former discretion; hitherto he had selected an hour of deeper night, and ventured but beneath the lattice of the maiden's chamber when the rest of the palace was hushed in sleep. And the fearless declaration of his rank and love now hazarded was prompted by one who contrived to turn to grave uses the wildest whim of the minstrel, the most romantic enthusiasm of youth.

Louis had just learned from Oxford the result of his interview with Warwick. And about the same time the French king had received a letter from Margaret, announcing her departure from the castle of Verdun for Tours, where she prayed him to meet her forthwith, and stating that she had received from England tidings that might change all her schemes, and more than ever forbid the possibility of a reconciliation with the Earl of Warwick.

The king perceived the necessity of calling into immediate effect the aid on which he had relied, in the presence and passion of the young prince. He sought him at once; he found him in a remote part of the gardens, and overheard him breathing to himself the lay he had just composed.

"Pasque Dieu!" said the king, laying his hand on the young man's

shoulder, "if thou wilt but repeat that song where and when I bid thee, I promise that before the month ends Lord Warwick shall pledge thee his daughter's hand; and before the year is closed thou shalt sit beside Lord Warwick's daughter in the halls of Westminster."

And the royal troubadour took the counsel of the king.

The song had ceased; the minstrel emerged from the bosquets, and stood upon the sward, as, from the postern of the palace, walked with a slow step, a form from which it became him not, as prince or as lover, in peace or in war, to shrink. The first stars had now risen; the light, though serene, was pale and dim. The two men--the one advancing, the other motionless--gazed on each other in grave silence. As Count de F----, amidst the young nobles in the king's train, the earl had scarcely noticed the heir of England. He viewed him now with a different eye: in secret complacency, for, with a soldier's weakness, the soldier-baron valued men too much for their outward seeming, he surveyed a figure already masculine and stalwart, though still in the graceful symmetry of fair eighteen.

"A youth of a goodly presence," muttered the earl, "with the dignity that commands in peace, and the sinews that can strive against hardship and death in war."

He approached, and said calmly: "Sir minstrel, he who woos either fame or beauty may love the lute, but should wield the sword. At least, so methinks had the Fifth Henry said to him who boasts for his heritage the sword of Agincourt."

"O noble earl!" exclaimed the prince, touched by words far gentler than he had dared to hope, despite his bold and steadfast mien, and giving way to frank and graceful emotion, "O noble earl! since thou knowest me; since my secret is told; since, in that secret, I have proclaimed a hope as dear to me as a crown and dearer far than life, can I hope that thy rebuke but veils thy favour, and that, under Lord Warwick's eye, the grandson of Henry V. shall approve himself worthy of the blood that kindles in his veins?"

"Fair sir and prince," returned the earl, whose hardy and generous nature the emotion and fire of Edward warmed and charmed, "there are, alas! deep memories of blood and wrong--the sad deeds and wrathful words of party feud and civil war--between thy royal mother and myself; and though we may unite now against a common foe, much I fear that the Lady Margaret would brook ill a closer friendship, a nearer tie, than the exigency of the hour between Richard Nevile and her son."

"No, Sir Earl, let me hope you misthink her. Hot and impetuous, but not mean and treacherous, the moment that she accepts the service of thine arm she must forget that thou hast been her foe; and if I, as my father's heir, return to England, it is in the trust that a new era will commence. Free from the passionate enmities of either faction, Yorkist and Lancastrian are but Englishmen to me. Justice to all who serve us, pardon for all who have opposed."

The prince paused, and, even in the dim light, his kingly aspect gave effect to his kingly words. "And if this resolve be such as you approve; if you, great earl, be that which even your foes proclaim, a man whose power depends less on lands and vassals--broad though the

one, and numerous though the other--than on well-known love for England, her glory and her peace, it rests with you to bury forever in one grave the feuds of Lancaster and York! What Yorkist who hath fought at Towton or St. Albans under Lord Warwick's standard, will lift sword against the husband of Lord Warwick's daughter? What Lancastrian will not forgive a Yorkist, when Lord Warwick, the kinsman of Duke Richard, becomes father to the Lancastrian heir, and bulwark to the Lancastrian throne? O Warwick, if not for my sake, nor for the sake of full redress against the ingrate whom thou repentest to have placed on my father's throne, at least for the sake of England, for the healing of her bleeding wounds, for the union of her divided people, hear the grandson of Henry V., who sues to thee for thy daughter's hand!"

The royal wooer bent his knee as he spoke. The mighty subject saw and prevented the impulse of the prince who had forgotten himself in the lover; the hand which he caught he lifted to his lips, and the next moment, in manly and soldierlike embrace, the prince's young arm was thrown over the broad shoulder of the king-maker.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTERVIEW OF EARL WARWICK AND QUEEN MARGARET.

Louis hastened to meet Margaret at Tours; thither came also her father Rene, her brother John of Calabria, Yolante her sister, and the Count of Vaudemonte. The meeting between the queen and Rene was so touching as to have drawn tears to the hard eyes of Louis XI.; but, that emotion over, Margaret evinced how little affliction had humbled her high spirit, or softened her angry passions: she interrupted Louis in every argument for reconciliation with Warwick. "Not with honour to myself and to my son," she exclaimed, "can I pardon that cruel earl, the main cause of King Henry's downfall! in vain patch up a hollow peace between us,--a peace of form and parchment! My spirit never can be contented with him, ne pardon!"

For several days she maintained a language which betrayed the chief cause of her own impolitic passions, that had lost her crown. Showing to Louis the letter despatched to her, proffering the hand of the Lady Elizabeth to her son, she asked if that were not a more profitable party [See, for this curious passage of secret history, Sir H. Ellis's "Original Letters from the Harleian Manuscripts," second series, vol. i., letter 42.], and if it were necessary that she should forgive,--whether it were not more queenly to treat with Edward than with a twofold rebel?

In fact, the queen would perhaps have fallen into Gloucester's artful snare, despite all the arguments and even the half-menaces [Louis would have thrown over Margaret's cause if Warwick had demanded it; he instructed MM. de Concessault and du Plessis to assure the earl that he would aid him to the utmost to reconquer England either for the Queen Margaret or for any one else he chose (on pour qui il voudra): for that he loved the earl better than Margaret or her son.--BRANTE, t. ix. 276.] of the more penetrating Louis, but for a counteracting influence which Richard had not reckoned upon. Prince Edward, who had lingered behind Louis, arrived from Amboise, and his persuasions did

more than all the representations of the crafty king. The queen loved her son with that intenseness which characterizes the one soft affection of violent natures. Never had she yet opposed his most childish whim, and now he spoke with the eloquence of one who put his heart and his life's life into his words. At last, reluctantly, she consented to an interview with Warwick. The earl, accompanied by Oxford, arrived at Tours, and the two nobles were led into the presence of Margaret by King Louis.

The reader will picture to himself a room darkened by thick curtains drawn across the casement, for the proud woman wished not the earl to detect on her face either the ravages of years or the emotions of offended pride. In a throne chair, placed on the dais, sat the motionless queen, her hands clasping, convulsively, the arms of the fauteuil, her features pale and rigid; and behind the chair leaned the graceful figure of her son. The person of the Lancastrian prince was little less remarkable than that of his hostile namesake, but its character was distinctly different. ["According to some of the French chroniclers, the Prince of Wales, who was one of the handsomest and most accomplished princes in Europe, was very desirous of becoming the husband of Anne Nevile," etc.--Miss STRICKLAND: Life of Margaret of Anjou.] Spare, like Henry V., almost to the manly defect of leanness, his proportions were slight to those which gave such portly majesty to the vast-chested Edward, but they evinced the promise of almost equal strength,--the muscles hardened to iron by early exercise in arms, the sap of youth never wasted by riot and debauch. His short purple manteline, trimmed with ermine, was embroidered with his grandfather's favourite device, "the silver swan;" he wore on his breast the badge of St. George; and the single ostrich plume, which made his cognizance as Prince of Wales, waved over a fair and ample forehead, on which were even then traced the lines of musing thought and high design; his chestnut hair curled close to his noble head; his eye shone dark and brilliant beneath the deep-set brow, which gives to the human countenance such expression of energy and intellect,--all about him, in aspect and mien, seemed to betoken a mind riper than his years, a masculine simplicity of taste and bearing, the earnest and grave temperament mostly allied in youth to pure and elevated desires, to an honourable and chivalric soul.

Below the dais stood some of the tried and gallant gentlemen who had braved exile, and tasted penury in their devotion to the House of Lancaster, and who had now flocked once more round their queen, in the hope of better days. There were the Dukes of Exeter and Somerset, their very garments soiled and threadbare,--many a day had those great lords hungered for the beggar's crust! [Philip de Comines says he himself had seen the Dukes of Exeter and Somerset in the Low Countries in as wretched a plight as common beggars.] There stood Sir John Fortescue, the patriarch authority of our laws, who had composed his famous treatise for the benefit of the young prince, overfond of exercise with lance and brand, and the recreation of knightly song. There were Jasper of Pembroke, and Sir Henry Rous, and the Earl of Devon, and the Knight of Lytton, whose House had followed, from sire to son, the fortunes of the Lancastrian Rose; [Sir Robert de Lytton (whose grandfather had been Comptroller to the Household of Henry IV., and Agister of the Forests allotted to Queen Joan), was one of the most powerful knights of the time; and afterwards, according to Perkin Warbeck, one of the ministers most trusted by Henry VII. He was lord of Lytton, in Derbyshire (where his ancestors had been settled since the Conquest), of Knebworth in Herts (the ancient seat and manor of

Plantagenet de Brotherton, Earl of Norfolk and Earl Marshal), of Myndelesden and Langley, of Standyarn, Dene, and Brekesborne, in Northamptonshire, and became in the reign of Henry VII. Privy Councillor, Uuder-Treasurer, and Keeper of the great Wardrobe.] and, contrasting the sober garments of the exiles, shone the jewels and cloth-of-gold that decked the persons of the more prosperous foreigners, Ferri, Count of Vaudemonte, Margaret's brother, the Duke of Calabria, and the powerful form of Sir Pierre de Breze, who had accompanied Margaret in her last disastrous campaigns, with all the devotion of a chevalier for the lofty lady adored in secret. [See, for the chivalrous devotion of this knight (Seneschal of Normandy) to Margaret, Miss Strickland's Life of that queen.]

When the door opened, and gave to the eyes of those proud exiles the form of their puissant enemy, they with difficulty suppressed the murmur of their resentment, and their looks turned with sympathy and grief to the hueless face of their queen.

The earl himself was troubled; his step was less firm, his crest less haughty, his eye less serenely steadfast.

But beside him, in a dress more homely than that of the poorest exile there, and in garb and in aspect, as he lives forever in the portraiture of Victor Hugo and our own yet greater Scott, moved Louis, popularly called "The Fell."

"Madame and cousin," said the king, "we present to you the man for whose haute courage and dread fame we have such love and respect, that we value him as much as any king, and would do as much for him as for man living [Ellis: Original Letters, vol. i., letter 42, second series]; and with my lord of Warwick, see also this noble earl of Oxford, who, though he may have sided awhile with the enemies of your Highness, comes now to pray your pardon, and to lay at your feet his sword."

Lord Oxford (who had ever unwillingly acquiesced in the Yorkist dynasty), more prompt than Warwick, here threw himself on his knees before Margaret, and his tears fell on her hand, as he murmured "Pardon."

"Rise, Sir John de Vere," said the queen, glancing with a flashing eye from Oxford to Lord Warwick. "Your pardon is right easy to purchase, for well I know that you yielded but to the time,--you did not turn the time against us; you and yours have suffered much for King Henry's cause. Rise, Sir Earl."

"And," said a voice, so deep and so solemn, that it hushed the very breath of those who heard it,--"and has Margaret a pardon also for the man who did more than all others to dethrone King Henry, and can do more than all to restore his crown?"

"Ha!" cried Margaret, rising in her passion, and casting from her the hand her son had placed upon her shoulder, "ha! Ownest thou thy wrongs, proud lord? Comest thou at last to kneel at Queen Margaret's feet? Look round and behold her court,--some half-score brave and unhappy gentlemen, driven from their hearths and homes, their heritage the prey of knaves and varlets, their sovereign in a prison, their sovereign's wife, their sovereign's son, persecuted and hunted from the soil! And comest thou now to the forlorn majesty of sorrow to

boast, 'Such deeds were mine?'"

"Mother and lady," began the prince

"Madden me not, my son. Forgiveness is for the prosperous, not for adversity and woe."

"Hear me," said the earl,--who, having once bowed his pride to the interview, had steeled himself against the passion which, in his heart, he somewhat despised as a mere woman's burst of inconsiderate fury,--"for I have this right to be heard,--that not one of these knights, your lealest and noblest friends, can say of me that I ever stooped to gloss mine acts, or palliate bold deeds with wily words. Dear to me as comrade in arms, sacred to me as a father's head, was Richard of York, mine uncle by marriage with Lord Salisbury's sister. I speak not now of his claims by descent (for those even King Henry could not deny), but I maintain them, even in your Grace's presence, to be such as vindicate, from disloyalty and treason, me and the many true and gallant men who upheld them through danger, by field and scaffold. Error, it might be,--but the error of men who believed themselves the defenders of a just cause. Nor did I, Queen Margaret, lend myself wholly to my kinsman's quarrel, nor share one scheme that went to the dethronement of King Henry, until--pardon, if I speak bluntly; it is my wont, and would be more so now, but for thy fair face and woman's form, which awe me more than if confronting the frown of Coeur de Lion, or the First Great Edward--pardon me, I say, if I speak bluntly, and aver that I was not King Henry's foe until false counsellors had planned my destruction, in body and goods, land and life. In the midst of peace, at Coventry, my father and myself scarcely escaped the knife of the murderer. [See Hall (236), who says that Margaret had laid a snare for Salisbury and Warwick at Warwick, and "if they had not suddenly departed, their life's thread had been broken."] In the streets of London the very menials and hangmen employed in the service of your Highness beset me unarmed [Hall, Fabyan]; a little time after and my name was attainted by an illegal Parliament. [Parl. Rolls, 370; W. Wyr. 478.] And not till after these things did Richard Duke of York ride to the hall of Westminster, and lay his hand upon the throne; nor till after these things did I and my father Salisbury say to each other, 'The time has come when neither peace nor honour can be found for us under King Henry's reign.' Blame me if you will, Queen Margaret; reject me if you need not my sword; but that which I did in the gone days was such as no nobleman so outraged and despaired [Warwick's phrase. See Sir H. Ellis's "Original Letters," vol. i., second series.] would have forborne to do,--remembering that England is not the heritage of the king alone, but that safety and honour, and freedom and justice, are the rights of his Norman gentlemen and his Saxon people. And rights are a mockery and a laughter if they do not justify resistance, whensoever, and by whomsoever, they are invaded and assailed."

It had been with a violent effort that Margaret had refrained from interrupting this address, which had, however, produced no inconsiderable effect upon the knightly listeners around the dais. And now, as the earl ceased, her indignation was arrested by dismay on seeing the young prince suddenly leave his post and advance to the side of Warwick.

"Right well hast thou spoken, noble earl and cousin,--right well, though right plainly. And I," added the prince, "saving the presence

of my queen and mother,--I, the representative of my sovereign father, in his name will pledge thee a king's oblivion and pardon for the past, if thou on thy side acquit my princely mother of all privity to the snares against thy life and honour of which thou hast spoken, and give thy knightly word to be henceforth leal to Lancaster. Perish all memories of the past that can make walls between the souls of brave men."

Till this moment, his arms folded in his gown, his thin, fox-like face bent to the ground, Louis had listened, silent and undisturbed. He now deemed it the moment to second the appeal of the prince. Passing his hand hypocritically over his tearless eyes, the king turned to Margaret and said,--

"Joyful hour! happy union! May Madame La Vierge and Monseigneur Saint Martin sanctify and hallow the bond by which alone my beloved kinswoman can regain her rights and roiaulme. Amen."

Unheeding this pious ejaculation, her bosom heaving, her eyes wandering from the earl to Edward, Margaret at last gave vent to her passion.

"And is it come to this, Prince Edward of Wales, that thy mother's wrongs are not thine? Standest thou side by side with my mortal foe, who, instead of repenting treason, dares but to complain of injury? Am I fallen so low that my voice to pardon or disdain is counted but as a sough of idle air! God of my fathers, hear me! Willingly from my heart I tear the last thought and care for the pomps of earth. Hateful to me a crown for which the wearer must cringe to enemy and rebel! Away, Earl Warwick! Monstrous and unnatural seems it to the wife of captive Henry to see thee by the side of Henry's son!"

Every eye turned in fear to the aspect of the earl, every ear listened for the answer which might be expected from his well-known heat and pride,--an answer to destroy forever the last hope of the Lancastrian line. But whether it was the very consciousness of his power to raise or to crush that fiery speaker, or those feelings natural to brave men, half of chivalry, half contempt, which kept down the natural anger by thoughts of the sex and sorrows of the Anjouite, or that the wonted irascibility of his temper had melted into one steady and profound passion of revenge against Edward of York, which absorbed all lesser and more trivial causes of resentment,--the earl's face, though pale as the dead, was unmoved and calm, and, with a grave and melancholy smile, he answered,--

"More do I respect thee, O queen, for the hot words which show a truth rarely heard from royal lips than hadst thou deigned to dissimulate the forgiveness and kindly charity which sharp remembrance permits thee not to feel! No, princely Margaret, not yet can there be frank amity between thee and me! Nor do I boast the affection yon gallant gentlemen have displayed. Frankly, as thou hast spoken, do I say, that the wrongs I have suffered from another alone move me to allegiance to thyself! Let others serve thee for love of Henry; reject not my service, given but for revenge on Edward,--as much, henceforth, am I his foe as formerly his friend and maker! [Sir H. Ellis: Original Letters, vol. i., second series.] And if, hereafter, on the throne, thou shouldst remember and resent the former wars, at least thou hast owed me no gratitude, and thou canst not grieve my heart and seethe my brain, as the man whom I once loved better than a

son! Thus, from thy presence I depart, chafing not at thy scornful wrath; mindful, young prince, but of thy just and gentle heart, and sure, in the calm of my own soul (on which this much, at least, of our destiny is reflected as on a glass), that when, high lady, thy colder sense returns to thee, thou wilt see that the league between us must be made!--that thine ire as woman must fade before thy duties as a another, thy affection as a wife, and thy paramount and solemn obligations to the people thou hast ruled as queen! In the dead of night thou shalt hear the voice of Henry in his prison asking Margaret to set him free; the vision of thy son shall rise before thee in his bloom and promise, to demand why his mother deprives him of a crown; and crowds of pale peasants, grinded beneath tyrannous exaction, and despairing fathers mourning for dishonoured children, shall ask the Christian queen if God will sanction the unreasoning wrath which rejects the only instrument that can redress her people."

This said, the earl bowed his head and turned; but, at the first sign of his departure, there was a general movement among the noble bystanders. Impressed by the dignity of his bearing, by the greatness of his power, and by the unquestionable truth that in rejecting him Margaret cast away the heritage of her son, the exiles, with a common impulse, threw themselves at the queen's feet, and exclaimed, almost in the same words,--

"Grace! noble queen!--Grace for the great Lord Warwick!"

"My sister," whispered John of Calabria, "thou art thy son's ruin if the earl depart!"

"Pasque Dieu! Vex not my kinswoman,--if she prefer a convent to a throne, cross not the holy choice!" said the wily Louis, with a mocking irony on his pinched lips.

The prince alone spoke not, but stood proudly on the same spot, gazing on the earl, as he slowly moved to the door.

"Oh, Edward! Edward, my son!" exclaimed the unhappy Margaret, "if for thy sake--for thine--I must make the past a blank, speak thou for me!"

"I have spoken," said the prince, gently, "and thou didst chide me, noble mother; yet I spoke, methinks, as Henry V. had done, if of a mighty enemy he had had the power to make a noble friend."

A short, convulsive sob was heard from the throne chair; and as suddenly as it burst, it ceased. Queen Margaret rose, not a trace of that stormy emotion upon the grand and marble beauty of her face. Her voice, unnaturally calm, arrested the steps of the departing earl.

"Lord Warwick, defend this boy, restore his rights, release his sainted father, and for years of anguish and of exile, Margaret of Anjou forgives the champion of her son!"

In an instant Prince Edward was again by the earl's side; a moment more, and the earl's proud knee bent in homage to the queen, joyful tears were in the eyes of her friends and kindred, a triumphant smile on the lips of Louis, and Margaret's face, terrible in its stony and locked repose, was raised above, as if asking the All-Merciful pardon --for the pardon which the human sinner had bestowed! [Ellis: Original Letters from the Harleian Manuscripts, letter 42.]

CHAPTER X.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE--DOUBTS OF CONSCIENCE--DOMESTIC JEALOUSY--AND HOUSEHOLD TREASON.

The events that followed this tempestuous interview were such as the position of the parties necessarily compelled. The craft of Louis, the energy and love of Prince Edward, the representations of all her kindred and friends, conquered, though not without repeated struggles, Margaret's repugnance to a nearer union between Warwick and her son. The earl did not deign to appear personally in this matter. He left it, as became him, to Louis and the prince, and finally received from them the proposals, which ratified the league, and consummated the schemes of his revenge.

Upon the Very Cross [Miss Strickland observes upon this interview: "It does not appear that Warwick mentioned the execution of his father, the Earl of Salisbury, which is almost a confirmation of the statements of those historians who deny that he was beheaded by Margaret."] in St. Mary's Church of Angers, Lord Warwick swore without change to hold the party of King Henry. Before the same sacred symbol, King Louis and his brother, Duke of Guienne, robed in canvas, swore to sustain to their utmost the Earl of Warwick in behalf of King Henry; and Margaret recorded her oath "to treat the earl as true and faithful, and never for deeds past to make him any reproach."

Then were signed the articles of marriage between Prince Edward and the Lady Anne,--the latter to remain with Margaret, but the marriage not to be consummated "till Lord Warwick had entered England and regained the realm, or most part, for King Henry,"--a condition which pleased the earl, who desired to award his beloved daughter no less a dowry than a crown.

An article far more important than all to the safety of the earl and to the permanent success of the enterprise, was one that virtually took from the fierce and unpopular Margaret the reins of government, by constituting Prince Edward (whose qualities endeared him more and more to Warwick, and were such as promised to command the respect and love of the people) sole regent of all the realm, upon attaining his majority. For the Duke of Clarence were reserved all the lands and dignities of the duchy of York, the right to the succession of the throne to him and his posterity,--failing male heirs to the Prince of Wales,--with a private pledge of the vicerealty of Ireland.

Margaret had attached to her consent one condition highly obnoxious to her high-spirited son, and to which he was only reconciled by the arguments of Warwick: she stipulated that he should not accompany the earl to England, nor appear there till his father was proclaimed king. In this, no doubt, she was guided by maternal fears, and by some undeclared suspicion, either of the good faith of Warwick, or of his means to raise a sufficient army to fulfil his promise. The brave prince wished to be himself foremost in the battles fought in his right and for his cause. But the earl contended, to the surprise and joy of Margaret, that it best behoved the prince's interests to enter England without one enemy in the field, leaving others to clear his

path, free himself from all the personal hate of hostile factions, and without a drop of blood upon the sword of one heralded and announced as the peace-maker and impartial reconciler of all feuds. So then (these high conditions settled), in the presence of the Kings Rene and Louis, of the Earl and Countess of Warwick, and in solemn state, at Amboise, Edward of Lancaster plighted his marriage-troth to his beloved and loving Anne.

It was deep night, and high revel in the Palace of Amboise crowned the ceremonies of that memorable day. The Earl of Warwick stood alone in the same chamber in which he had first discovered the secret of the young Lancastrian. From the brilliant company, assembled in the halls of state, he had stolen unperceived away, for his great heart was full to overflowing. The part he had played for many days was over, and with it the excitement and the fever. His schemes were crowned,--the Lancastrians were won to his revenge; the king's heir was the betrothed of his favourite child; and the hour was visible in the distance, when, by the retribution most to be desired, the father's hand should lead that child to the throne of him who would have degraded her to the dust. If victory awaited his sanguine hopes, as father to his future queen, the dignity and power of the earl became greater in the court of Lancaster than, even in his palmiest day, amidst the minions of ungrateful York; the sire of two lines,--if Anne's posterity should fail, the crown would pass to the sons of Isabel,--in either case from him (if successful in his invasion) would descend the royalty of England. Ambition, pride, revenge, might well exult in viewing the future, as mortal wisdom could discern it. The House of Nevile never seemed brightened by a more glorious star: and yet the earl was heavy and sad at heart. However he had concealed it from the eyes of others, the haughty ire of Margaret must have galled him in his deepest soul. And even as he had that day contemplated the holy happiness in the face of Anne, a sharp pang had shot through his breast. Were those the witnesses of fair-omened spousailles? How different from the hearty greeting of his warrior-friends was the measured courtesy of foes who had felt and fled before his sword! If aught chanced to him in the hazard of the field, what thought for his child ever could speak in pity from the hard and scornful eyes of the imperious Anjouite?

The mist which till then had clouded his mind, or left visible to his gaze but one stern idea of retribution, melted into air. He beheld the fearful crisis to which his life had passed,--he had reached the eminence to mourn the happy gardens left behind. Gone, forever gone, the old endearing friendships, the sweet and manly remembrances of brave companionship and early love! Who among those who had confronted war by his side for the House of York would hasten to clasp his hand and hail his coming as the captain of hated Lancaster? True, could he bow his honour to proclaim the true cause of his desertion, the heart of every father would beat in sympathy with his; but less than ever could the tale that vindicated his name be told. How stoop to invoke malignant pity to the insult offered to a future queen? Dark in his grave must rest the secret no words could syllable, save by such vague and mysterious hint and comment as pass from baseless gossip into dubious history. [Hall well explains the mystery which wrapped the king's insult to a female of the House of Warwick by the simple sentence, "The certainty was not, for both their honours, openly known!"] True, that in his change of party he was not, like Julian of Spain, an apostate to his native land. He did not meditate the subversion of his country by the foreign foe; it was but the

substitution of one English monarch for another,--a virtuous prince for a false and a sanguinary king. True, that the change from rose to rose had been so common amongst the greatest and the bravest, that even the most rigid could scarcely censure what the age itself had sanctioned. But what other man of his stormy day had been so conspicuous in the downfall of those he was now as conspicuously to raise? What other man had Richard of York taken so dearly to his heart, to what other man had the august father said, "Protect my sons"? Before him seemed literally to rise the phantom of that honoured prince, and with clay-cold lips to ask, "Art thou, of all the world, the doomsman of my first-born?" A groan escaped the breast of the self-tormentor; he fell on his knees and prayed: "Oh, pardon, thou All-seeing!--plead for me, Divine Mother! if in this I have darkly erred, taking my heart for my conscience, and mindful only of a selfish wrong! Oh, surely, no! Had Richard of York himself lived to know what I have suffered from his unworthy son,--causeless insult, broken faith, public and unabashed dishonour; yea, pardoning, serving, loving on through all, till, at the last, nothing less than the foulest taint that can light upon 'scutcheon and name was the cold, premeditated reward for untired devotion,--surely, surely, Richard himself had said, 'Thy honour at last forbids all pardon!'"

Then, in that rapidity with which the human heart, once seizing upon self-excuse, reviews, one after one, the fair apologies, the earl passed from the injury to himself to the mal-government of his land, and muttered over the thousand instances of cruelty and misrule which rose to his remembrance,--forgetting, alas, or steeling himself to the memory, that till Edward's vices had assailed his own hearth and honour, he had been contented with lamenting them, he had not ventured to chastise. At length, calm and self-acquitted, he rose from his self-confession, and leaning by the open casement, drank in the reviving and gentle balm of the summer air. The state apartments he had left, formed as we have before observed, an angle to the wing in which the chamber he had now retired to was placed. They were brilliantly illumined, their windows opened to admit the fresh, soft breeze of night; and he saw, as if by daylight, distinct and gorgeous, in their gay dresses, the many revellers within. But one group caught and riveted his eye. Close by the centre window he recognized his gentle Anne, with downcast looks; he almost fancied he saw her blush, as her young bridegroom, young and beautiful as herself, whispered love's flatteries in her ear. He saw farther on, but yet near, his own sweet countess, and muttered, "After twenty years of marriage, may Anne be as dear to him as thou art now to me!" And still he saw, or deemed he saw, his lady's eye, after resting with tender happiness on the young pair, rove wistfully around, as if missing and searching for her partner in her mother's joy. But what form sweeps by with so haughty a majesty, then pauses by the betrothed, addresses them not, but seems to regard them with so fixed a watch? He knew by her ducal diadem, by the baudekin colours of her robe, by her unmistakable air of pride, his daughter Isabel. He did not distinguish the expression of her countenance, but an ominous thrill passed through his heart; for the attitude itself had an expression, and not that of a sister's sympathy and love. He turned away his face with an unquiet recollection of the altered mood of his discontented daughter. He looked again: the duchess had passed on, lost amidst the confused splendour of the revel. And high and rich swelled the merry music that invited to the stately pavon. He gazed still; his lady had left her place, the lovers too had vanished, and where they stood, stood now in close conference his ancient enemies, Exeter and Somerset. The

sudden change from objects of love to those associated with hate had something which touched one of those superstitions to which, in all ages, the heart, when deeply stirred, is weakly sensitive. And again, forgetful of the revel, the earl turned to the serener landscape of the grove and the moonlit green sward, and mused and mused, till a soft arm thrown round him woke his reverie. For this had his lady left the revel. Divining, by the instinct born of love, the gloom of her husband, she had stolen from pomp and pleasure to his side.

"Ah, wherefore wouldst thou rob me," said the countess, "of one hour of thy presence, since so few hours remain; since, when the sun that succeeds the morrow's shines upon these walls, the night of thine absence will have closed upon me?"

"And if that thought of parting, sad to me as thee, suffice not, belle amie, to dim the revel," answered the earl, "weetest thou not how ill the grave and solemn thoughts of one who sees before him the emprise that would change the dynasty of a realm can suit with the careless dance and the wanton music? But not at that moment did I think of those mightier cares; my thoughts were nearer home. Hast thou noted, sweet wife, the silent gloom, the clouded brow of Isabel, since she learned that Anne was to be the bride of the heir of Lancaster?"

The mother suppressed a sigh. "We must pardon, or glance lightly over, the mood of one who loves her lord, and mourns for his baffled hopes! Well-a-day! I grieve that she admits not even me to her confidence. Ever with the favourite lady who lately joined her train,--methinks that new friend gives less holy counsel than a mother!"

"Ha! and yet what counsels can Isabel listen to from a comparative stranger? Even if Edward, or rather his cunning Elizabeth, had suborned this waiting-woman, our daughter never could hearken, even in an hour of anger, to the message from our dishonourer and our foe."

"Nay, but a flatterer often fosters by praising the erring thought. Isabel hath something, dear lord, of thy high heart and courage; and ever from childhood, her vaulting spirit, her very character of stately beauty, hath given her a conviction of destiny and power loftier than those reserved for our gentle Anne. Let us trust to time and forbearance, and hope that the affection of the generous sister will subdue the jealousy of the disappointed princess."

"Pray Heaven, indeed, that it so prove! Isabel's ascendancy over Clarence is great, and might be dangerous. Would that she consented to remain in France with thee and Anne! Her lord, at least, it seems I have convinced and satisfied. Pleased at the vast fortunes before him, the toys of viceregal power, his lighter nature reconciles itself to the loss of a crown, which, I fear, it could never have upheld. For the more I have read his qualities in our household intimacy, the more it seems that I could scarcely have justified the imposing on England a king not worthy of so great a people. He is young yet, but how different the youth of Lancastrian Edward! In him what earnest and manly spirit! What heaven-born views of the duties of a king! Oh, if there be a sin in the passion that hath urged me on, let me, and me alone, atone! and may I be at least the instrument to give to England a prince whose virtues shall compensate for all!"

While yet the last word trembled upon the earl's lips, a light flashed

along the floors, hitherto illumined but by the stars and the full moon. And presently Isabel, in conference with the lady whom her mother had referred to, passed into the room, on her way to her private chamber. The countenance of this female diplomatist, whose talent for intrigue Philip de Comines [Comines, iii. 5; Hall, Lingard, Hume, etc.] has commemorated, but whose name, happily for her memory, history has concealed, was soft and winning in its expression to the ordinary glance, though the sharpness of the features, the thin compression of the lips, and the harsh dry redness of the hair corresponded with the attributes which modern physiognomical science truly or erringly assigns to a wily and treacherous character. She bore a light in her hand, and its rays shone full on the disturbed and agitated face of the duchess. Isabel perceived at once the forms of her parents, and stopped short in some whispered conversation, and uttered a cry almost of dismay.

"Thou leavest the revel betimes, fair daughter," said the earl, examining her countenance with an eye somewhat stern.

"My lady," said the confidant, with a lowly reverence, "was anxious for her babe."

"Thy lady, good waiting-wench," said Warwick, "needs not thy tongue to address her father. Pass on."

The gentlewoman bit her lips, but obeyed, and quitted the room. The earl approached, and took Isabel's hand,--it was cold as stone.

"My child," said he, tenderly, "thou dost well to retire to rest; of late thy cheek hath lost its bloom. But just now, for many causes, I was wishing thee not to brave our perilous return to England; and now, I know not whether it would make me the more uneasy, to fear for thy health if absent or thy safety if with me!"

"My lord," replied Isabel, coldly, "my duty calls me to my husband's side, and the more, since now it seems he dares the battle but reaps not its rewards! Let Edward and Anne rest in safety, Clarence and Isabel go to achieve the diadem and orb for others!"

"Be not bitter with thy father, girl; be not envious of thy sister!" said the earl, in grave rebuke; then, softening his tone, he added, "The women of a noble House should have no ambition of their own,--their glory and their honour they should leave, unmurmuring, in the hands of men! Mourn not if thy sister mounts the throne of him who would have branded the very name to which thou and she were born!"

"I have made no reproach, my lord. Forgive me, I pray you, if I now retire; I am so weary, and would fain have strength and health not to be a burden to you when you depart."

The duchess bowed with proud submission, and moved on. "Beware!" said the earl, in a low voice.

"Beware!--and of what?" said Isabel, startled.

"Of thine own heart, Isabel. Ay, go to thine infant's couch ere thou seek thine own, and, before the sleep of innocence, calm thyself back to womanhood."

The duchess raised her head quickly, but habitual awe of her father checked the angry answer; and kissing, with formal reverence, the hand the countess extended to her, she left the room. She gained the chamber in which was the cradle of her son, gorgeously canopied with silks, inwrought with the blazoned arms of royal Clarence;--and beside the cradle sat the confidant.

The duchess drew aside the drapery, and contemplated the rosy face of the infant slumberer.

Then, turning to her confidant, she said,--

"Three months since, and I hoped my first-born would be a king! Away with those vain mockeries of royal birth! How suit they the destined vassal of the abhorred Lancastrian?"

"Sweet lady," said the confidant, "did I not warn thee from the first that this alliance, to the injury of my lord duke and this dear boy, was already imminent? I had hoped thou mightst have prevailed with the earl!"

"He heeds me not, he cares not for me!" exclaimed Isabel; "his whole love is for Anne,--Anne, who, without energy and pride, I scarcely have looked on as my equal! And now to my younger sister I must bow my knee, pleased if she deign to bid me hold the skirt of her queenly robe! Never,--no, never!"

"Calm thyself; the courier must part this night. My Lord of Clarence is already in his chamber; he waits but thine assent to write to Edward, that he rejects not his loving messages."

The duchess walked to and fro, in great disorder. "But to be thus secret and false to my father?"

"Doth be merit that thou shouldst sacrifice thy child to him? Reflect! the king has no son! The English barons acknowledge not in girls a sovereign; [Miss Strickland ("Life of Elizabeth of York") remarks, "How much Norman prejudice in favour of Salic law had corrupted the common or constitutional law of England regarding the succession!" The remark involves a controversy.] and, with Edward on the throne, thy son is heir-presumptive. Little chance that a male heir shall now be born to Queen Elizabeth, while from Anne and her bridegroom a long line may spring. Besides, no matter what parchment treaties may ordain, how can Clarence and his offspring ever be regarded by a Lancastrian king but as enemies to feed the prison or the block, when some false invention gives the seemingly pretext for extirpating the lawful race?"

"Cease, cease, cease!" cried Isabel, in terrible struggles with herself.

"Lady, the hour presses! And, reflect, a few lines are but words, to be confirmed or retracted as occasion suits! If Lord Warwick succeed, and King Edward lose his crown, ye can shape as ye best may your conduct to the time. But if the earl lose the day, if again he be driven into exile, a few words now release you and yours from everlasting banishment; restore your boy to his natural heritage; deliver you from the insolence of the Anjouite, who, methinks, even dared this very day to taunt your highness--"

"She did--she did! Oh that my father had been by to hear! She bade me stand aside that Anne might pass,--'not for the younger daughter of Lord Warwick, but for the lady admitted into the royalty of Lancaster!' Elizabeth Woodville, at least, never dared this insolence!"

"And this Margaret the Duke of Clarence is to place on the throne which your child yonder might otherwise aspire to mount!"

Isabel clasped her hands in mute passion.

"Hark!" said the confidant, throwing open the door--

And along the corridor came, in measured pomp, a stately procession, the chamberlain in front, announcing "Her Highness the Princess of Wales;" and Louis XI., leading the virgin bride (wife but in name and honour, till her dowry of a kingdom was made secure) to her gentle rest. The ceremonial pomp, the regal homage that attended the younger sister thus raised above herself, completed in Isabel's jealous heart the triumph of the Tempter. Her face settled into hard resolve, and she passed at once from the chamber into one near at hand, where the Duke of Clarence sat alone, the rich wines of the livery, not untasted, before him, and the ink yet wet upon a scroll he had just indited.

He turned his irresolute countenance to Isabel as she bent over him and read the letter. It was to Edward; and after briefly warning him of the meditated invasion, significantly added, "and if I may seem to share this emprise, which, here and alone, I cannot resist, thou shalt find me still, when the moment comes, thy affectionate brother and loyal subject."

"Well, Isabel," said the duke, "thou knowest I have delayed this till the last hour to please thee; for verily, lady mine, thy will is my sweetest law. But now, if thy heart misgives thee--"

"It does, it does!" exclaimed the duchess, bursting into tears.

"If thy heart misgives thee," continued Clarence, who with all his weakness had much of the duplicity of his brothers, "why, let it pass. Slavery to scornful Margaret, vassalage to thy sister's spouse, triumph to the House which both thou and I were taught from childhood to deem accursed,--why, welcome all! so that Isabel does not weep, and our boy reproach us not in the days to come!"

For all answer, Isabel, who had seized the letter, let it drop on the table, pushed it, with averted face, towards the duke, and turned back to the cradle of her child, whom she woke with her sobs, and who wailed its shrill reply in infant petulance and terror, snatched from its slumber to the arms of the remorseful mother.

A smile of half contemptuous joy passed over the thin lips of the she-Judas, and, without speaking, she took her way to Clarence. He had sealed and bound his letter, first adding these words, "My lady and duchess, whatever her kin, has seen this letter, and approves it, for she is more a friend to York than to the earl, now he has turned Lancastrian;" and placed it in a small iron coffer.

He gave the coffer, curiously clasped and locked, to the gentlewoman, with a significant glance--"Be quick, or she repents! The courier waits, his steed saddled! The instant you give it, he departs,--he hath his permit to pass the gates."

"All is prepared; ere the clock strike, he is on his way." The confidant vanished; the duke sank in his chair, and rubbed his hands.

"Oho, father-in-law, thou deemest me too dull for a crown! I am not dull enough for thy tool. I have had the wit, at least, to deceive thee, and to hide resentment beneath a smiling brow! Dullard, thou to believe aught less than the sovereignty of England could have bribed Clarence to thy cause!" He turned to the table and complacently drained his goblet.

Suddenly, haggard and pale as a spectre, Isabel stood before him.

"I was mad--mad, George! The letter! the letter--it must not go!"

At that moment the clock struck.

"Bel enfant," said the duke, "it is too late!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LAST OF THE BARONS, V9 ***

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