

THE LAST OF THE BARONS - VOLUME 8.

EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON*

BOOK VIII.

IN WHICH THE LAST LINK BETWEEN KING-MAKER AND KING
SNAPS ASUNDER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY ANNE VISITS THE COURT.

It was some weeks after the date of the events last recorded. The storm that hung over the destinies of King Edward was dispersed for the hour, though the scattered clouds still darkened the horizon: the Earl of Warwick had defeated the Lancastrians on the frontier, [Croyl. 552] and their leader had perished on the scaffold; but Edward's mighty sword had not shone in the battle. Chained by an attraction yet more powerful than slaughter, he had lingered at Middleham, while Warwick led his army to York; and when the earl arrived at the capital of Edward's ancestral duchy, he found that the able and active Hastings—having heard, even before he reached the Duke of Gloucester's camp, of Edward's apparent seizure by the earl and the march to Middleham—had deemed it best to halt at York, and to summon in all haste a council of such of the knights and barons as either love to the king or envy to Warwick could collect. The report was general that Edward was retained against his will at Middleham; and this rumour Hastings gravely demanded Warwick, on the arrival of the latter at York, to disprove. The earl, to clear himself from a suspicion that impeded all his military movements, despatched Lord Montagu to Middleham, who returned not only with the king, but the countess and her daughters, whom Edward, under pretence of proving the complete amity that existed between Warwick and himself, carried in his train. The king's appearance at York reconciled all differences; but he suffered Warwick to march alone against the enemy, and not till after the decisive victory, which left his reign for a while without an open foe, did he return to London.

*PDF created by pdfbooks.co.za

Thither the earl, by the advice of his friends, also repaired, and in a council of peers, summoned for the purpose, deigned to refute the rumours still commonly circulated by his foes, and not disbelieved by the vulgar, whether of his connivance at the popular rising or his forcible detention of the king at Middleham. To this, agreeably to the counsel of the archbishop, succeeded a solemn interview of the heads of the Houses of York and Warwick, in which the once fair Rose of Raby (the king's mother) acted as mediator and arbiter. The earl's word to the commons at Olney was ratified. Edward consented to the temporary retirement of the Woodvilles, though the gallant Anthony yet delayed his pilgrimage to Compostella. The vanity of Clarence was contented by the government of Ireland, but, under various pretences, Edward deferred his brother's departure to that important post. A general amnesty was proclaimed, a parliament summoned for the redress of popular grievances, and the betrothal of the king's daughter to Montagu's heir was proclaimed: the latter received the title of Duke of Bedford; and the whole land rejoiced in the recovered peace of the realm, the retirement of the Woodvilles, and the reconciliation of the young king with his all-beloved subject. Never had the power of the Neviles seemed so secure; never did the throne of Edward appear so stable.

It was at this time that the king prevailed upon the earl and his countess to permit the Lady Anne to accompany the Duchess of Clarence in a visit to the palace of the Tower. The queen had submitted so graciously to the humiliation of her family, that even the haughty Warwick was touched and softened; and the visit of his daughter at such a time became a homage to Elizabeth which it suited his chivalry to render.

The public saw in this visit, which was made with great state and ceremony, the probability of a new and popular alliance. The archbishop had suffered the rumour of Gloucester's attachment to the Lady Anne to get abroad, and the young prince's return from the North was anxiously expected by the gossips of the day.

It was on this occasion that Warwick showed his gratitude for Marmaduke Nevile's devotion. "My dear and gallant kinsman," he said, "I forget not that when thou didst leave the king and the court for the discredited minister and his gloomy hall,—I forget not that thou didst tell me of love to some fair maiden, which had not prospered according to thy merits. At least it shall not be from lack of lands, or of the gold spur, which allows the wearer to ride by the side of king or kaisar, that thou canst not choose thy bride as the heart bids thee. I pray thee, sweet cousin, to attend my child Anne to the court, where the king will show thee no ungracious countenance; but it is just to recompense thee for the loss of thy post in his highness's chamber. I hold the king's commission to make knights of such as can pay the fee, and thy lands shall suffice for the dignity. Kneel down and rise up, Sir Marmaduke Nevile, lord of the Manor of Borrodaile,

with its woodlands and its farms, and may God and our Lady render thee puissant in battle and prosperous in love!”

Accordingly, in his new rank, and entitled to ruffle it with the bravest, Sir Marmaduke Nevile accompanied the earl and the Lady Anne to the palace of the Tower.

As Warwick, leaving his daughter amidst the brilliant circle that surrounded Elizabeth, turned to address the king, he said, with simple and unaffected nobleness,—

”Ah, my liege, if you needed a hostage of my faith, think that my heart is here, for verily its best blood were less dear to me than that slight girl,—the likeness of her mother, when her lips first felt the touch of mine!”

Edward’s bold brow fell, and he blushed as he answered, ”My Elizabeth will hold her as a sister. But, cousin, part you not now for the North?”

”By your leave I go first to Warwick.”

”Ah, you do not wish to approve of my seeming preparations against France?”

”Nay, your Highness is not in earnest. I promised the commons that you would need no supplies for so thriftless a war.”

”Thou knowest I mean to fulfil all thy pledges. But the country so swarms with disbanded soldiers, that it is politic to hold out to them a hope of service, and so let the clouds gradually pass away.”

”Alack, my liege,” said Warwick, gravely, ”I suppose that a crown teaches the brow to scheme; but hearty peace or open war seems ever the best to me.”

Edward smiled, and turned aside. Warwick glanced at his daughter, whom Elizabeth flatteringly caressed, stifled a sigh, and the air seemed lighter to the insects of the court as his proud crest bowed beneath the doorway, and, with the pomp of his long retinue, he vanished from the scene.

”And choose, fair Anne,” said the queen, ”choose from my ladies whom you will have for your special train. We would not that your attendance should be less than royal.”

The gentle Anne in vain sought to excuse herself from an honour at once arrogant and invidious, though too innocent to perceive the cunning so characteristic of the queen; for, under the guise of a special compliment, Anne had received the royal request to have her

female attendants chosen from the court, and Elizabeth now desired to force upon her a selection which could not fail to mortify those not preferred. But glancing timidly round the circle, the noble damsel's eye rested on one fair face, and in that face there was so much that awoke her own interest, and stirred up a fond and sad remembrance, that she passed involuntarily to the stranger's side, and artlessly took her hand. The high-born maidens, grouped around, glanced at each other with a sneer, and slunk back. Even the queen looked surprised; but recovering herself, inclined her head graciously, and said, "Do we read your meaning aright, Lady Anne, and would you this gentlewoman, Mistress Sibyll Warner, as one of your chamber?"

"Sibyll, ah, I knew that my memory failed me not," murmured Anne; and, after bowing assent to the queen, she said, "Do you not also recall, fair demoiselle, our meeting, when children long years ago?"

"Well, noble dame," [The title of dame was at that time applied indiscriminately to ladies whether married or single, if of high birth.] answered Sibyll. And as Anne turned, with her air of modest gentleness, yet of lofty birth and breeding, to explain to the queen that she had met Sibyll in earlier years, the king approached to monopolize his guest's voice and ear. It seemed natural to all present that Edward should devote peculiar attention to the daughter of Warwick and the sister of the Duchess of Clarence; and even Elizabeth suspected no guiltier gallantry in the subdued voice, the caressing manner, which her handsome lord adopted throughout that day, even to the close of the nightly revel, towards a demoiselle too high (it might well appear) for licentious homage.

But Anne herself, though too guileless to suspect the nature of Edward's courtesy, yet shrank from it in vague terror. All his beauty, all his fascination, could not root from her mind the remembrance of the exiled prince; nay, the brilliancy of his qualities made her the more averse to him. It darkened the prospects of Edward of Lancaster that Edward of York should wear so gracious and so popular a form. She hailed with delight the hour when she was conducted to her chamber, and dismissing gently the pompous retinue allotted to her, found herself alone with the young maiden whom she had elected to her special service.

"And you remember me, too, fair Sibyll?" said Anne, with her dulcet and endearing voice.

"Truly, who would not? for as you, then, noble lady, glided apart from the other children, hand in hand with the young prince, in whom all dreamed to see their future king, I heard the universal murmur of—a false prophecy!"

"Ah! and of what?" asked Anne.

"That in the hand the prince clasped with his small rosy fingers—the hand of great Warwick's daughter—lay the best defence of his father's throne."

Anne's breast heaved, and her small foot began to mark strange characters on the floor.

"So," she said musingly, "so even here, amidst a new court, you forget not Prince Edward of Lancaster. Oh, we shall find hours to talk of the past days. But how, if your childhood was spent in Margaret's court, does your youth find a welcome in Elizabeth's?"

"Avarice and power had need of my father's science. He is a scholar of good birth, but fallen fortunes, even now, and ever while night lasts, he is at work. I belonged to the train of her grace of Bedford; but when the duchess quitted the court, and the king retained my father in his own royal service, her highness the queen was pleased to receive me among her maidens. Happy that my father's home is mine!—who else could tend him?"

"Thou art his only child?—he must—love thee dearly?"

"Yet not as I love him; he lives in a life apart from all else that live. But after all, peradventure it is sweeter to love than to be loved."

Anne, whose nature was singularly tender and woman-like, was greatly affected by this answer. She drew nearer to Sibyll; she twined her arm round her slight form, and kissed her forehead.

"Shall I love thee, Sibyll?" she said, with a girl's candid simplicity, "and wilt thou love me?"

"Ah, lady! there are so many to love thee,—father, mother, sister,—all the world; the very sun shines more kindly upon the great!"

"Nay!" said Anne, with that jealousy of a claim to suffering to which the gentler natures are prone, "I may have sorrows from which thou art free. I confess to thee, Sibyll, that something I know not how to explain draws me strangely towards thy sweet face. Marriage has lost me my only sister, for since Isabel is wed she is changed to me—would that her place were supplied by thee! Shall I steal thee from the queen when I depart? Ah, my mother—at least thou wilt love her! for verily, to love my mother you have but to breathe the same air. Kiss me, Sibyll."

Kindness, of late, had been strange to Sibyll, especially from her own sex, one of her own age; it came like morning upon the folded blossom. She threw her arms round the new friend that seemed sent to her from heaven; she kissed Anne's face and hands with grateful tears.

"Ah!" she said at last, when she could command a voice still broken with emotion—"if I could ever serve—ever repay thee—though those gracious words were the last thy lips should ever deign to address to me!"

Anne was delighted; she had never yet found one to protect; she had never yet found one in whom thoroughly to confide. Gentle as her mother was, the distinction between child and parent was, even in the fond family she belonged to, so great in that day, that she could never have betrayed to the countess the wild weakness of her young heart.

The wish to communicate, to reveal, is so natural to extreme youth, and in Anne that disposition was so increased by a nature at once open and inclined to lean on others, that she had, as we have seen, sought a confidante in Isabel; but with her, even at the first, she found but the half-contemptuous pity of a strong and hard mind; and lately, since Edward's visit to Middleham, the Duchess of Clarence had been so rapt in her own imperious egotism and discontented ambition, that the timid Anne had not even dared to touch, with her, upon those secrets which it flushed her own bashful cheek to recall. And this visit to the court, this new, unfamiliar scene, this estrangement from all the old accustomed affections, had produced in her that sense of loneliness which is so irksome, till grave experience of real life accustoms us to the common lot. So with the exaggerated and somewhat morbid sensibility that belonged to her, she turned at once, and by impulse, to this sudden, yet graceful friendship. Here was one of her own age, one who had known sorrow, one whose voice and eyes charmed her, one who would not chide even folly, one, above all, who had seen her beloved prince, one associated with her fondest memories, one who might have a thousand tales to tell of the day when the outlaw boy was a monarch's heir. In the childishness of her soft years, she almost wept at another channel for so much natural tenderness. It was half the woman gaining a woman-friend, half the child clinging to a new playmate.

"Ah, Sibyll," she whispered, "do not leave me to-night; this strange place daunts me, and the figures on the arras seem so tall and spectre-like, and they say the old tower is haunted. Stay, dear Sibyll!"

And Sibyll stayed.

CHAPTER II.

THE SLEEPING INNOCENCE—THE WAKEFUL CRIME.

While these charming girls thus innocently conferred; while, Anne's sweet voice running on in her artless fancies, they helped each other to undress; while hand in hand they knelt in prayer by the crucifix in the dim recess; while timidly they extinguished the light, and stole to rest; while, conversing in whispers, growing gradually more faint and low, they sank into guileless sleep,—the unholy king paced his solitary chamber, parched with the fever of the sudden and frantic passion that swept away from a heart in which every impulse was a giant all the memories of honour, gratitude, and law.

The mechanism of this strong man's nature was that almost unknown to the modern time; it belonged to those earlier days which furnish to Greece the terrible legends Ovid has clothed in gloomy fire, which a similar civilization produced no less in the Middle Ages, whether of Italy or the North,—that period when crime took a grandeur from its excess; when power was so great and absolute that its girth burst the ligaments of conscience; when a despot was but the incarnation of WILL; when honour was indeed a religion, but its faith was valour, and it wrote its decalogue with the point of a fearless sword.

The youth of Edward IV. was as the youth of an ancient Titan, of an Italian Borgia; through its veins the hasty blood rolled as a devouring flame. This impetuous and fiery temperament was rendered yet more fearful by the indulgence of every intemperance; it fed on wine and lust; its very virtues strengthened its vices,—its courage stifled every whisper of prudence; its intellect, uninured to all discipline, taught it to disdain every obstacle to its desires. Edward could, indeed, as we have seen, be false and crafty, a temporizer, a dissimulator; but it was only as the tiger creeps,—the better to spring, undetected, on its prey. If detected, the cunning ceased, the daring rose, and the mighty savage had fronted ten thousand foes, secure in its fangs and talons, its bold heart and its deadly spring. Hence, with all Edward's abilities, the astonishing levities and indiscretions of his younger years. It almost seemed, as we have seen him play fast and loose with the might of Warwick, and with that power, whether of barons or of people, which any other prince of half his talents would have trembled to arouse against an unrooted throne,—it almost seemed as if he loved to provoke a danger for the pleasure it gave the brain to baffle or the hand to crush it. His whole nature coveting excitement, nothing was left to the beautiful, the luxurious Edward, already wearied with pomp and pleasure, but what was unholy and forbidden. In his court were a hundred ladies, perhaps not less fair than Anne, at least of a beauty more commanding the common homage, but these he had only to smile on

with ease to win. No awful danger, no inexpiable guilt, attended those vulgar frailties, and therefore they ceased to tempt. But here the virgin guest, the daughter of his mightiest subject, the beloved treasure of the man whose hand had built a throne, whose word had dispersed an army—here, the more the reason warned, the conscience started, the more the hell-born passion was aroused.

Like men of his peculiar constitution, Edward was wholly incapable of pure and steady love. His affection for his queen the most resembled that diviner affection; but when analyzed, it was composed of feelings widely distinct. From a sudden passion, not otherwise to be gratified, he had made the rashest sacrifices for an unequal marriage. His vanity, and something of original magnanimity, despite his vices, urged him to protect what he himself had raised,—to secure the honour of the subject who was honoured by the king. In common with most rude and powerful natures, he was strongly alive to the affections of a father, and the faces of his children helped to maintain the influence of the mother. But in all this, we need scarcely say that that true love, which is at once a passion and a devotion, existed not. Love with him cared not for the person loved, but solely for its own gratification; it was desire for possession,—nothing more. But that desire was the will of a king who never knew fear or scruple; and, pampered by eternal indulgence, it was to the feeble lusts of common men what the storm is to the west wind. Yet still, as in the solitude of night he paced his chamber, the shadow of the great crime advancing upon his soul appalled even that dauntless conscience. He gasped for breath; his cheeks flushed crimson, and the next moment grew deadly pale. He heard the loud beating of his heart. He stopped still. He flung himself on a seat, and hid his face with his hands; then starting up, he exclaimed, "No, no! I cannot shut out that sweet face, those blue eyes from my gaze. They haunt me to my destruction and her own. Yet why say destruction? If she love me, who shall know the deed? If she love me not, will she dare to reveal her shame? Shame!—nay, a king's embrace never dishonours. A king's bastard is a House's pride. All is still,—the very moon vanishes from heaven. The noiseless rushes in the gallery give no echo to the footstep. Fie on me! Can a Plantagenet know fear?" He allowed himself no further time to pause; he opened the door gently and stole along the gallery. He knew well the chamber, for it was appointed by his command, and, besides the usual door from the corridor, a small closet conducted to a secret panel behind the arras. It was the apartment occupied, in her visits to the court, by the queen's rival, the Lady Elizabeth Lucy. He passed into the closet; he lifted the arras; he stood in that chamber, which gratitude and chivalry and hospitable faith should have made sacred as a shrine. And suddenly, as he entered, the moon, before hid beneath a melancholy cloud, broke forth in awful splendour, and her light rushed through the casement opposite his eye, and bathed the room with the beams of a ghostlier day.

The abruptness of the solemn and mournful glory scared him as the

rebuking face of a living thing; a presence as if not of earth seemed to interpose between the victim and the guilt. It was, however, but for a moment that his step halted. He advanced: he drew aside the folds of the curtain heavy with tissue of gold, and the sleeping face of Anne lay hushed before him. It looked pale in the moonlight, but ineffably serene, and the smile on its lips seemed still sweeter than that which it wore awake. So fixed was his gaze, so ardently did his whole heart and being feed through his eyes upon that exquisite picture of innocence and youth, that he did not see for some moments that the sleeper was not alone. Suddenly an exclamation rose to his lips. He clenched his hand in jealous agony; he approached; he bent over; he heard the regular breathing which the dreams of guilt never know; and then, when he saw that pure and interlaced embrace,—the serene yet somewhat melancholy face of Sibyll, which seemed hueless as marble in the moonlight, bending partially over that of Anne, as if even in sleep watchful; both charming forms so linked and woven that the two seemed as one life, the very breath in each rising and ebbing with the other; the dark ringlets of Sibyll mingling with the auburn gold of Anne's luxuriant hair, and the darkness and the gold, tress within tress, falling impartially over either neck, that gleamed like ivory beneath that common veil,—when he saw this twofold loveliness, the sentiment, the conviction of that mysterious defence which exists in purity, thrilled like ice through his burning veins. In all his might of monarch and of man, he felt the awe of that unlooked-for protection,—maidenhood sheltering maidenhood, innocence guarding innocence. The double virtue appalled and baffled him; and that slight arm which encircled the neck he would have perilled his realm to clasp, shielded his victim more effectually than the bucklers of all the warriors that ever gathered round the banner of the lofty Warwick. Night and the occasion befriended him; but in vain. While Sibyll was there, Anne was saved. He ground his teeth, and muttered to himself. At that moment Anne turned restlessly. This movement disturbed the light sleep of her companion. She spoke half inaudibly, but the sound was as the hoot of shame in the ear of the guilty king. He let fall the curtain, and was gone. And if one who lived afterwards to hear and to credit the murderous doom which, unless history lies, closed the male line of Edward, had beheld the king stealing, felon-like, from the chamber,—his step reeling to and fro the gallery floors, his face distorted by stormy passion, his lips white and murmuring, his beauty and his glory dimmed and humbled,—the spectator might have half believed that while Edward gazed upon those harmless sleepers, A VISION OF THE TRAGEDY TO COME had stricken down his thought of guilt, and filled up its place with horror,—a vision of a sleep as pure, of two forms wrapped in an embrace as fond, of intruders meditating a crime scarce fouler than his own; and the sins of the father starting into grim corporeal shapes, to become the deathsmen of the sons!

CHAPTER III.

NEW DANGERS TO THE HOUSE OF YORK—AND THE KING'S HEART
ALLIES ITSELF
WITH REBELLION AGAINST THE KING'S THRONE.

Oh, beautiful is the love of youth to youth, and touching the tenderness of womanhood to woman; and fair in the eyes of the happy sun is the waking of holy sleep, and the virgin kiss upon virgin lips smiling and murmuring the sweet "Good-morrow!"

Anne was the first to wake; and as the bright winter morn, robust with frosty sunbeams shone cheerily upon Sibyll's face, she was struck with a beauty she had not sufficiently observed the day before; for in the sleep of the young the traces of thought and care vanish, the aching heart is lulled in the body's rest, the hard lines relax into flexible ease, a softer, warmer bloom steals over the cheek, and, relieved from the stiff restraints of dress, the rounded limbs repose in a more alluring grace! Youth seems younger in its slumber, and beauty more beautiful, and purity more pure. Long and dark, the fringe of the eyelash rested upon the white lids, and the freshness of the parting pouted lips invited the sister kiss that wakened up the sleeper.

"Ah, lady," said Sibyll, parting her tresses from her dark blue eyes, "you are here, you are safe!—blessed be the saints and our Lady! for I had a dream in the night that startled and appalled me."

"And my dreams were all blithe and golden," said Anne. "What was thine?"

"Methought you were asleep and in this chamber, and I not by your side, but watching you at a little distance; and lo! a horrible serpent glided from yon recess, and, crawling to your pillow, I heard its hiss, and strove to come to your aid, but in vain; a spell seemed to chain my limbs. At last I found voice, I cried aloud, I woke; and mock me not, but I surely heard a parting footstep, and the low grating of some sliding door."

"It was the dream's influence, enduring beyond the dream. I have often felt it so,—nay, even last night; for I, too, dreamed of another, dreamed that I stood by the altar with one far away, and when I woke—for I woke also—it was long before I could believe it was thy hand I held, and thine arm that embraced me."

The young friends rose, and their toilet was scarcely ended, when again appeared in the chamber all the stateliness of retinue allotted to the Lady Anne. Sibyll turned to depart. "And whither go you?" asked Anne.

"To visit my father; it is my first task on rising," returned Sibyll, in a whisper.

"You must let me visit him, too, at a later hour. Find me here an hour before noon, Sibyll."

The early morning was passed by Anne in the queen's company. The refectory, the embroidery frame, the closets, filled up the hours. The Duchess of Clarence had left the palace with her lord to visit the king's mother at Baynard's Castle; and Anne's timid spirits were saddened by the strangeness of the faces round her, and Elizabeth's habitual silence. There was something in the weak and ill-fated queen that ever failed to conciliate friends. Though perpetually striving to form and create a party, she never succeeded in gaining confidence or respect. And no one raised so high was ever left so friendless as Elizabeth, when, in her awful widowhood, her dowry home became the sanctuary. All her power was but the shadow of her husband's royal sun, and vanished when the orb prematurely set; yet she had all gifts of person in her favour, and a sleek smoothness of manner that seemed to the superficial formed to win; but the voice was artificial, and the eye cold and stealthy. About her formal precision there was an eternal consciousness of self, a breathing egotism. Her laugh was displeasing, -cynical, not mirthful; she had none of that forgetfulness of self, that warmth when gay, that earnestness when sad, which create sympathy. Her beauty was without loveliness, her character without charm; every proportion in her form might allure the sensualist; but there stopped the fascination. The mind was trivial, though cunning and dissimulating; and the very evenness of her temper seemed but the clockwork of a heart insensible to its own movements. Vain in prosperity, what wonder that she was so abject in misfortune? What wonder that even while, in later and gloomier years, [Grafton, 806] accusing Richard III. of the murder of her royal sons, and knowing him, at least, the executioner of her brother and her child by the bridegroom of her youth, [Anthony Lord Rivers, and Lord Richard Gray. Not the least instance of the frivolity of Elizabeth's mind is to be found in her willingness, after all the woes of her second widowhood, and when she was not very far short of sixty years old, to take a third husband, James III., of Scotland, -a marriage prevented only by the death of the Scotch king.] she consented to send her daughters to his custody, though subjected to the stain of illegitimacy, and herself only recognized as the harlot?

The king, meanwhile, had ridden out betimes alone, and no other of the male sex presumed in his absence to invade the female circle. It was with all a girl's fresh delight that Anne escaped at last to her own chamber, where she found Sibyll; and, with her guidance, she threaded the gloomy mazes of the Tower. "Let me see," she whispered, "before we visit your father, let me see the turret in which the unhappy Henry is confined."

And Sibyll led her through the arch of that tower, now called "The Bloody," and showed her the narrow casement deep sunk in the mighty wall, without which hung the starling in the cage, basking its plumes in the wintry sun. Anne gazed with that deep interest and tender reverence which the parent of the man she loves naturally excites in a woman; and while thus standing sorrowful and silent, the casement was unbarred, and she saw the mild face of the human captive; he seemed to talk to the bird, which, in shrill tones and with clapping wings, answered his address. At that time a horn sounded at a little distance off; a clangour of arms, as the sentries saluted, was heard; the demoiselles retreated through the arch, and mounted the stair conducting to the very room, then unoccupied, in which tradition records the murder of the Third Richard's nephews; and scarcely had they gained this retreat, ere towards the Bloody Gate, and before the prison tower, rode the king who had mounted the captive's throne. His steed, gaudy with its housing, his splendid dress, the knights and squires who started forward from every corner to hold his gilded stirrup, his vigorous youth, so blooming and so radiant,—all contrasted, with oppressive force, the careworn face that watched him meekly through the little casement of the Wakefield tower. Edward's large, quick blue eye caught sudden sight of the once familiar features. He looked up steadily, and his gaze encountered the fallen king's. He changed countenance: but with the external chivalry that made the surface of his hollow though brilliant character, he bowed low to his saddle-bow as he saw his captive, and removed the plumed cap from his high brow.

Henry smiled sadly, and shook his reverend head, as if gently to rebuke the mockery; then he closed the casement; and Edward rode into the yard.

"How can the king hold here a court and here a prison? Oh, hard heart!" murmured Anne, as, when Edward had disappeared, the damsels bent their way to Adam's chamber.

"Would the Earl Warwick approve thy pity, sweet Lady Anne?" asked Sibyll.

"My father's heart is too generous to condemn it," returned Anne, wiping the tears from her eyes; "how often in the knight's galliard shall I see that face!"

The turret in which Warner's room was placed flanked the wing inhabited by the royal family and their more distinguished guests (namely, the palace, properly speaking, as distinct from the fortress), and communicated with the regal lodge by a long corridor, raised above cloisters and open to a courtyard. At one end of this corridor a door opened upon the passage, in which was situated the chamber of the Lady Anne; the other extremity communicated with a

rugged stair of stone, conducting to the rooms tenanted by Warner. Leaving Sibyll to present her learned father to the gentle Anne, we follow the king into the garden, which he entered on dismounting. He found here the Archbishop of York, who had come to the palace in his barge, and with but a slight retinue, and who was now conversing with Hastings in earnest whispers.

The king, who seemed thoughtful and fatigued, approached the two, and said, with a forced smile, "What learned sententiary engages you two scholars?"

"Your Grace," said the archbishop, "Minerva was not precisely the goddess most potent over our thoughts at that moment. I received a letter last evening from the Duke of Gloucester, and as I know the love borne by the prince to the Lord Hastings, I inquired of your chamberlain how far he would have foreguessed the news it announced."

"And what may the tidings be?" asked Edward, absently.

The prelate hesitated.

"Sire," he said gravely, "the familiar confidence with which both your Highness and the Duke of Gloucester distinguish the chamberlain, permits me to communicate the purport of the letter in his presence. The young duke informs me that he hath long conceived an affection which he would improve into marriage, but before he address either the demoiselle or her father, he prays me to confer with your Grace, whose pleasure in this, as in all things, will be his sovereign law."

"Ah, Richard loves me with a truer love than George of Clarence! But who can he have seen on the Borders worthy to be a prince's bride?"

"It is no sudden passion, sire, as I before hinted; nay, it has been for some time sufficiently notorious to his friends and many of the court; it is an affection for a maiden known to him in childhood, connected to him by blood,—my niece, Anne Nevile."

As if stung by a scorpion, Edward threw off the prelate's arm, on which he had been leaning with his usual caressing courtesy.

"This is too much!" said he, quickly, and his face, before somewhat pale, grew highly flushed. "Is the whole royalty of England to be one Nevile? Have I not sufficiently narrowed the basis of my throne? Instead of mating my daughter to a foreign power,—to Spain or to Bretagne,—she is betrothed to young Montagu! Clarence weds Isabel, and now Gloucester—no, prelate, I will not consent!"

The archbishop was so little prepared for this burst, that he remained speechless. Hastings pressed the king's arm, as if to caution him against so imprudent a display of resentment; but the king walked on,

not heeding him, and in great disturbance. Hastings interchanged looks with the archbishop, and followed his royal master.

"My king," he said, in an earnest whisper, "whatever you decide, do not again provoke unhappy feuds laid at rest. Already this morning I sought your chamber, but you were abroad, to say that I have received intelligence of a fresh rising of the Lancastrians in Lincolnshire, under Sir Robert Welles, and the warlike knight of Scrivelsby, Sir Thomas Dymoke. This is not yet an hour to anger the pride of the Neviles!"

"O Hastings! Hastings!" said the king, in a tone of passionate emotion, "there are moments when the human heart cannot dissemble! Howbeit your advice is wise and honest! No, we must not anger the Neviles!"

He turned abruptly; rejoined the archbishop, who stood on the spot on which the king had left him, his arms folded on his breast, his face calm, but haughty.

"My most worshipful cousin," said Edward, "forgive the well-known heat of my hasty moods! I had hoped that Richard would, by a foreign alliance, have repaired the occasion of confirming my dynasty abroad, which Clarence lost. But no matter! Of these things we will speak anon. Say naught to Richard till time ripens maturer resolutions: he is a youth yet. What strange tidings are these from Lincolnshire?"

"The house of your purveyor, Sir Robert de Burgh, is burned, his lands wasted. The rebels are headed by lords and knights. Robin of Redesdale, who, methinks, bears a charmed life, has even ventured to rouse the disaffected in my brother's very shire of Warwick."

"O Henry," exclaimed the king, casting his eyes towards the turret that held his captive, "well mightest then call a crown 'a wreath of thorns!'"

"I have already," said the archbishop, "despatched couriers to my brother, to recall him from Warwick, whither he went on quitting your Highness. I have done more; prompted by a zeal that draws me from the care of the Church to that of the State, I have summoned the Lords St. John, De Fulke, and others, to my house of the More,—praying your Highness to deign to meet them, and well sure that a smile from your princely lips will regain their hearts and confirm heir allegiance, at a moment when new perils require all strong arms."

"You have done most wisely. I will come to your palace,—appoint your own day."

"It will take some days for the barons to arrive from their castles. I fear not ere the tenth day from this."

"Ah," said the king, with a vivacity that surprised his listeners, aware of his usual impetuous energy, "the delay will but befriend us; as for Warwick, permit me to alter your arrangements; let him employ the interval, not in London, where he is useless, but in raising men in the neighbourhood of his castle, and in defeating the treason of this Redesdale knave. We will give commission to him and to Clarence to levy troops; Hastings, see to this forthwith. Ye say Sir Robert Welles leads the Lincolnshire varlets; I know the nature of his father, the Lord Welles,—a fearful and timorous one; I will send for him, and the father's head shall answer for the son's faith. Pardon me, dear cousin, that I leave you to attend these matters. Prithee visit our queen, meanwhile, she holds you our guest."

"Nay, your Highness must vouchsafe my excuse; I also have your royal interests too much at heart to while an hour in my pleasurement. I will but see the friends of our House now in London, and then back to the More, and collect the force of my tenants and retainers."

"Ever right, fair speed to you, cardinal that shall be! Your arm, Hastings."

The king and his favourite took their way into the state chambers.

"Abet not Gloucester in this alliance,—abet him not!" said the king, solemnly.

"Pause, sire! This alliance gives to Warwick a wise counsellor, instead of the restless Duke of Clarence. Reflect what danger may ensue if an ambitious lord, discontented with your reign, obtains the hand of the great earl's coheirress, and the half of a hundred baronies that command an army larger than the crown's."

Though these reasonings at a calmer time might well have had their effect on Edward, at that moment they were little heeded by his passions. He stamped his foot violently on the floor. "Hastings!" he exclaimed, "be silent! or—" He stopped short, mastered his emotion. "Go, assemble our privy council. We have graver matters than a boy's marriage now to think of."

It was in vain that Edward sought to absorb the fire of his nature in state affairs, in all needful provisions against the impending perils, in schemes of war and vengeance. The fatal frenzy that had seized him haunted him everywhere, by day and by night. For some days after the unsuspected visit which he had so criminally stolen to his guest's chamber, something of knightly honour, of religious scruple, of common reason,—awakened in him the more by the dangers which had sprung up and which the Nevilles were now actively employed in defeating,—struggled against his guilty desire, and roused his conscience to a less feeble resistance than it usually displayed when opposed to

passion; but the society of Anne, into which he was necessarily thrown so many hours in the day, and those hours chiefly after the indulgences of the banquet, was more powerful than all the dictates of a virtue so seldom exercised as to have none of the strength of habit. And as the time drew near when he must visit the archbishop, head his army against the rebels (whose force daily increased, despite the captivity of Lord Welles and Sir Thomas Dymoke, who, on the summons of the king, had first taken sanctuary, and then yielded their persons on the promise of pardon and safety), and restore Anne to her mother,—as this time drew near, his perturbation of mind became visible to the whole court; but, with the instinct of his native craft, he contrived to conceal its cause. For the first time in his life he had no confidant—he did not dare trust his secret to Hastings. His heart gnawed itself. Neither, though constantly stealing to Anne’s side, could he venture upon language that might startle and enlighten her. He felt that even those attentions, which on the first evening of her arrival had been noticed by the courtiers, could not be safely renewed. He was grave and constrained, even when by her side, and the etiquette of the court allowed him no opportunity for unwitnessed conference. In this suppressed and unequal struggle with himself the time passed, till it was now but the day before that fixed for his visit to the More. And, as he rose at morning from his restless couch, the struggle was over, and the soul resolved to dare the crime. His first thought was to separate Anne from Sibyll. He affected to rebuke the queen for giving to his high-born guest an associate below her dignity, and on whose character, poor girl, rested the imputation of witchcraft; and when the queen replied that Lady Anne herself had so chosen, he hit upon the expedient of visiting Warner himself, under pretence of inspecting his progress,—affected to be struck by the sickly appearance of the sage, and sending for Sibyll, told her, with an air of gracious consideration, that her first duty was to attend her parent; that the queen released her for some days from all court duties; and that he had given orders to prepare the room adjoining Master Warner’s, and held by Friar Bungey, till that worthy had retired with his patroness from the court, to which she would for the present remove.

Sibyll, wondering at this novel mark of consideration in the careless king, yet imputing it to the high value set on her father’s labours, thanked Edward with simple earnestness, and withdrew. In the anteroom she encountered Hastings, on his way to the king. He started in surprise, and with a jealous pang: “What! thou, Sibyll! and from the king’s closet! What led thee thither?”

“His grace’s command.” And too noble for the pleasure of exciting the distrust that delights frivolous minds as the proof of power, Sibyll added, “The king has been kindly speaking to me of my father’s health.” The courtier’s brow cleared; he mused a moment, and said, in a whisper, “I beseech thee to meet me an hour hence at the eastern rampart.”

Since the return of Lord Hastings to the palace there had been an estrangement and distance in his manner, ill suiting one who enjoyed the rights of an accepted suitor, and wounding alike to Sibyll's affection and her pride; but her confidence in his love and truth was entire. Her admiration for him partook of worship, and she steadily sought to reason away any causes for alarm by recalling the state cares which pressed heavily upon him, and whispering to herself that word of "wife," which, coming in passionate music from those beloved lips, had thrown a mist over the present, a glory over the future! and in the king's retention of Adam Warner, despite the Duchess of Bedford's strenuous desire to carry him off with Friar Bungey, and restore him to his tasks of alchemist and multiplier, as well as in her own promotion to the queen's service, Sibyll could not but recognize the influence of her powerful lover. His tones now were tender, though grave and earnest. Surely, in the meeting he asked, all not comprehended would be explained. And so, with a light heart, she passed on.

Hastings sighed as his eye followed her from the room, and thus said he to himself, "Were I the obscure gentleman I once was, how sweet a lot would that girl's love choose to me from the urn of fate! But, oh! when we taste of power and greatness, and master the world's dark wisdom, what doth love shrink to?—an hour's bliss and a life's folly." His delicate lip curled, and breaking from his soliloquy, he entered the king's closet. Edward was resting his face upon the palms of his hands, and his bright eyes dwelt upon vacant space, till they kindled into animation as they lighted on his favourite.

"Dear Will," said the king, "knowest thou that men say thou art bewitched?"

"Beau sire, often have men, when a sweet face hath captured thy great heart, said the same of thee!"

"It may be so with truth, for verily love is the arch-devil's birth."

The king rose, and strode his chamber with a quick step; at last pausing,—

"Hastings," he said, "so thou lovest the multiplier's pretty daughter? She has just left me. Art thou jealous?"

"Happily your Highness sees no beauty in looks that have the gloss of the raven, and eyes that have the hue of the violet."

"No, I am a constant man, constant to one idea of beauty in a thousand forms,—eyes like the summer's light-blue sky, and locks like its golden sunbeams! But to set thy mind at rest, Will, know that I have but compassionated the sickly state of the scholar, whom thou prizest

so highly; and I have placed thy fair Sibyll's chamber near her father's. Young Lovell says thou art bent on wedding the wizard's daughter."

"And if I were, beau sire?"

Edward looked grave.

"If thou wert, my poor Will, thou wouldst lose all the fame for shrewd wisdom which justifies thy sudden fortunes. No, no; thou art the flower and prince of my new seignorie,—thou must mate thyself with a name and a barony that shall be worthy thy fame and thy prospects. Love beauty, but marry power, Will. In vain would thy king draw thee up, if a despised wife draw thee down!"

Hastings listened with profound attention to these words. The king did not wait for his answer, but added laughingly,—

"It is thine own fault, crafty gallant, if thou dost not end all her spells."

"What ends the spells of youth and beauty, beau sire?"

"Possession!" replied the king, in a hollow and muttered voice.

Hastings was about to answer, when the door opened, and the officer in waiting announced the Duke of Clarence. "Ha!" said Edward, "George comes to importune me for leave to depart to the government of Ireland, and I have to make him weet that I think my Lord Worcester a safer viceroy of the two."

"Your Highness will pardon me; but, though I deemed you too generous in the appointment, it were dangerous now to annul it."

"More dangerous to confirm it. Elizabeth has caused me to see the folly of a grant made over the malmsey,—a wine, by the way, in which poor George swears he would be content to drown himself. Viceroy of Ireland! My father had that government, and once tasting the sweets of royalty, ceased to be a subject! No, no, Clarence—"

"Can never meditate treason against a brother's crown. Has he the wit or the energy or the genius for so desperate an ambition?"

"No; but he hath the vanity. And I will wager thee a thousand marks to a silver penny that my jester shall talk giddie Georgie into advancing a claim to be soldan of Egypt or Pope of Rome!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOSTER-BROTHERS.

Sir Marmaduke Nevile was sunning his bravery in the Tower Green, amidst the other idlers of the court, proud of the gold chain and the gold spurs which attested his new rank, and not grieved to have exchanged the solemn walls of Middleham for the gay delights of the voluptuous palace, when to his pleasure and surprise, he perceived his foster-brother enter the gateway; and no sooner had Nicholas entered, than a bevy of the younger courtiers hastened eagerly towards him.

"Gramercy!" quoth Sir Marmaduke, to one of the bystanders, "what hath chanced to make Nick Alwyn a man of such note, that so many wings of satin and pile should flutter round him like sparrows round an owl?—which, by the Holy Rood, his wise face somewhat resembleth."

"Know you not that Master Alwyn, since he hath commenced trade for himself, hath acquired already the repute of the couthliest goldsmith in London? No dague-hilts, no buckles are to be worn, save those that he fashions; and—an he live, and the House of York prosper—verily, Master Alwyn the goldsmith will ere long be the richest and best man from Mile-end to the Sanctuary."

"Right glad am I to hear it," said honest Marmaduke, heartily; and approaching Alwyn, he startled the precise trader by a friendly slap on the shoulder.

"What, man, art thou too proud to remember Marmaduke Nevile? Come to my lodgment yonder, and talk of old days over the king's canary."

"I crave your pardon, dear Master Nevile."

"Master—avaunt! Sir Marmaduke,—knighted by the hand of Lord Warwick,—Sir Marmaduke Nevile, lord of a manor he hath never yet seen, sober Alwyn."

Then drawing his foster-brother's arm in his, Marmaduke led him to the chamber in which he lodged.

The young men spent some minutes in congratulating each other on their respective advances in life: the gentleman who had attained competence and station simply by devotion to a powerful patron, the trader who had already won repute and the prospect of wealth by ingenuity, application, and toil; and yet, to do justice, as much virtue went to Marmaduke's loyalty to Warwick as to Alwyn's capacities for making a fortune. Mutual compliments over, Alwyn said hesitatingly,—

"And dost thou find Mistress Sibyll more gently disposed to thee than when thou didst complain to me of her cruelty?"

"Marry, good Nicholas, I will be frank with thee. When I left the court to follow Lord Warwick, there were rumours of the gallantries of Lord Hastings to the girl, which grieved me to the heart. I spoke to her thereof bluntly and honourably, and got but high looks and scornful words in return. Good fellow, I thank thee for that squeeze of the hand and that doleful sigh. In my absence at Middleham, I strove hard to forget one who cared so little for me. My dear Alwyn, those Yorkshire lasses are parlously comely, and mighty douce and debonaire. So I stormed cruel Sibyll out of my heart perforce of numbers."

"And thou lovest her no more?"

"Not I, by this goblet! On coming back, it is true, I felt pleased to clank my gold spurs in her presence, and curious to see if my new fortunes would bring out a smile of approval; and verily, to speak sooth, the donzell was kind and friendly, and spoke to me so cheerly of the pleasure she felt in my advancement, that I adventured again a few words of the old folly. But my lassie drew up like a princess, and I am a cured man."

"By your troth?"

"By my troth!"

Alwyn's head sank on his bosom in silent thought. Sir Marmaduke emptied his goblet; and really the young knight looked so fair and so gallant, in his new surcoat of velvet, that it was no marvel if he should find enough food for consolation in a court where men spent six hours a day in making love,—nor in vain.

"And what say they still of the Lord Hastings?" asked Alwyn, breaking silence. "Nothing, I trow and trust, that arraigns the poor lady's honour, though much that may scoff at her simple faith in a nature so vain and fickle. 'The tongue's not steel, yet it cuts,' as the proverb saith of the slanderer."

"No! scandal spares her virtue as woman, to run down her cunning as witch! They say that Hastings hath not prevailed, nor sought to prevail,—that he is spell-bound. By Saint Thomas, from a maid of such character Marmaduke Nevile is happily rescued!"

"Sir Marmaduke," then said Alwyn, in a grave and earnest voice, "it behoves me, as true friend, though humble, and as honest man, to give thee my secret, in return for thine own. I love this girl. Ay, ay! thou thinkest that love is a strange word on a craftsman's lips, but 'cold flint hides hot fire.' I would not have been thy rival, Heaven

forefend! hadst thou still cherished a hope, or if thou now wilt forbid my aspiring; but if thou wilt not say me nay, I will try my chance in delivering a pure soul from a crafty wooer."

Marmaduke stared in great surprise at his foster-brother; and though, no doubt, he spoke truth when he said he was cured of his love for Sibyll, he yet felt a sort of jealousy at Alwyn's unexpected confession, and his vanity was hurt at the notion that the plain-visaged trader should attempt where the handsome gentleman had failed.—However, his blunt, generous, manly nature after a brief struggle got the better of these sore feelings; and holding out his hand to Alwyn, he said, "My dear foster-brother, try the hazard and cast thy dice, if thou wilt. Heaven prosper thee, if success be for thine own good! But if she be given to witchcraft (plague on thee, man, sneer not at the word), small comfort to bed and hearth can such practices bring!"

"Alas!" said Alwyn, "the witchcraft is on the side of Hastings,—the witchcraft of fame and rank, and a glozing tongue and experienced art. But she shall not fall, if a true arm can save her; and 'though Hope be a small child; she can carry a great anchor."

These words were said so earnestly, that they opened new light into Marmaduke's mind; and his native generosity standing in lieu of intellect, he comprehended sympathetically the noble motives which actuated the son of commerce.

"My poor Alwyn," he said, "if thou canst save this young maid,—whom by my troth I loved well, and who tells me yet that she loveth me as a sister loves,—right glad shall I be. But thou stakest thy peace of mind against hers! Fair luck to thee, say I again,—and if thou wilt risk thy chance at once (for suspense is love's purgatory), seize the moment. I saw Sibyll, just ere we met, pass to the ramparts, alone; at this sharp season the place is deserted; go."

"I will, this moment!" said Alwyn, rising and turning very pale; but as he gained the door, he halted—"I had forgot, Master Nevile, that I bring the king his signet-ring, new set, of the falcon and fetter-lock."

"They will keep thee three hours in the anteroom. The Duke of Clarence is now with the king. Trust the ring to me, I shall see his highness ere he dines."

Even in his love, Alwyn had the Saxon's considerations of business; he hesitated—"May I not endanger thereby the king's favour and loss of custom?" said the trader.

"Tush, man! little thou knowest King Edward; he cares naught for the ceremonies: moreover, the Neviles are now all-puissant in favour. I

am here in attendance on sweet Lady Anne, whom the king loves as a daughter, though too young for sire to so well-grown a donzell; and a word from her lip, if need be, will set all as smooth as this gorget of lawn!"

Thus assured, Alwyn gave the ring to his friend, and took his way at once to the ramparts. Marmaduke remained behind to finish the canary and marvel how so sober a man should form so ardent a passion. Nor was he much less surprised to remark that his friend, though still speaking with a strong provincial accent, and still sowing his discourse with rustic saws and proverbs, had risen in language and in manner with the rise of his fortunes. "An he go on so, and become lord mayor," muttered Marmaduke, "verily he will half look like a gentleman!"

To these meditations the young knight was not long left in peace. A messenger from Warwick House sought and found him, with the news that the earl was on his road to London, and wished to see Sir Marmaduke the moment of his arrival, which was hourly expected. The young knight's hardy brain somewhat flustered by the canary, Alwyn's secret, and this sudden tidings, he hastened to obey his chief's summons, and forgot, till he gained the earl's mansion, the signet ring intrusted to him by Alwyn. "What matters it?" said he then, philosophically,—"the king hath rings eno' on his fingers not to miss one for an hour or so, and I dare not send any one else with it. Marry, I must plunge my head in cold water, to get rid of the fumes of the wine."

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVER AND THE GALLANT—WOMAN'S CHOICE.

Alwyn bent his way to the ramparts, a part of which then resembled the boulevards of a French town, having rows of trees, green sward, a winding walk, and seats placed at frequent intervals for the repose of the loungers. During the summer evenings, the place was a favourite resort of the court idlers; but now, in winter, it was usually deserted, save by the sentries, placed at distant intervals. The trader had not gone far in his quest when he perceived, a few paces before him, the very man he had most cause to dread; and Lord Hastings, hearing the sound of a footfall amongst the crisp, faded leaves that strewed the path, turned abruptly as Alwyn approached his side.

At the sight of his formidable rival, Alwyn had formed one of those resolutions which occur only to men of his decided, plain-spoken, energetic character. His distinguishing shrewdness and penetration

had given him considerable insight into the nobler as well as the weaker qualities of Hastings; and his hope in the former influenced the determination to which he came. The reflections of Hastings at that moment were of a nature to augur favourably to the views of the humbler lover; for, during the stirring scenes in which his late absence from Sibyll had been passed, Hastings had somewhat recovered from her influence; and feeling the difficulties of reconciling his honour and his worldly prospects to further prosecution of the love, rashly expressed but not deeply felt, he had determined frankly to cut the Gordian knot he could not solve, and inform Sibyll that marriage between them was impossible. With that view he had appointed this meeting, and his conference with the king but confirmed his intention. It was in this state of mind that he was thus accosted by Alwyn:—

”My lord, may I make bold to ask for a few moments your charitable indulgence to words you may deem presumptuous?”

”Be brief, then, Master Alwyn,—I am waited for.”

”Alas, my lord! I can guess by whom,—by the one whom I seek myself,—by Sibyll Warner.”

”How, Sir Goldsmith!” said Hastings, haughtily, ”what knowest thou of my movements, and what care I for thine?”

”Hearken, my Lord Hastings,—hearken!” said Alwyn, repressing his resentment, and in a voice so earnest that it riveted the entire attention of the listener—”hearken, and judge not as noble judges craftsmen, but as man should judge man. As the saw saith, ’We all lie alike in our graves.’ From the first moment I saw this Sibyll Warner I loved her. Yes; smile disdainfully, but listen still. She was obscure and in distress. I loved her not for her fair looks alone; I loved her for her good gifts, for her patient industry, for her filial duty, for her struggles to give bread to her father’s board. I did not say to myself, ’This girl will make a comely fere, a delicate paramour!’ I said, ’This good daughter will make a wife whom an honest man may take to his heart and cherish!’” Poor Alwyn stopped, with tears in his voice, struggled with his emotions, and pursued: ”My fortunes were more promising than hers; there was no cause why I might not hope. True, I had a rival then; young as myself, better born, comelier; but she loved him not. I foresaw that his love for her—if love it were—would cease. Methought that her mind would understand mine; as mine—verily I say it—yearned for hers! I could not look on the maidens of mine own rank, and who had lived around me, but what—oh, no, my lord, again I say, not the beauty, but the gifts, the mind, the heart of Sibyll, threw them all into the shade. You may think it strange that I—a plain, steadfast, trading, working, careful man—should have all these feelings; but I will tell you wherefore such as I sometimes have them, nurse them, brood on them, more than you lords and gentlemen, with all your graceful arts in pleasing. We know no

light loves! no brief distractions to the one arch passion! We sober sons of the stall and the ware are no general gallants,—we love plainly, we love but once, and we love heartily. But who knows not the proverb, 'What's a gentleman but his pleasure?'—and what's pleasure but change? When Sibyll came to the palace, I soon heard her name linked with yours; I saw her cheek blush when you spoke. Well, well, well! after all, as the old wives tell us, 'Blushing is virtue's livery.' I said, 'She is a chaste and high-hearted girl.' This will pass, and the time will come when she can compare your love and mine. Now, my lord, the time has come. I know that you seek her. Yea, at this moment, I know that her heart beats for your footstep. Say but one word,—say that you love Sibyll Warner with the thought of wedding her,—say that, on your honour, noble Hastings, as gentleman and peer, and I will kneel at your feet, and beg your pardon for my vain follies, and go back to my ware, and work, and not repine. Say it! You are silent? Then I implore you, still as peer and gentleman, to let the honest love save the maiden from the wooing that will blight her peace and blast her name! And now, Lord Hastings, I wait your gracious answer."

The sensations experienced by Hastings, as Alwyn thus concluded, were manifold and complicated; but, at the first, admiration and pity were the strongest.

"My poor friend," said he, kindly, "if you thus love a demoiselle deserving all my reverence, your words and your thoughts bespeak you no unworthy pretender; but take my counsel, good Alwyn. Come not—thou from the Chepe—come not to the court for a wife. Forget this fantasy."

"My lord, it is impossible! Forget I cannot, regret I may.

"Thou canst not succeed, man," resumed the nobleman, more coldly, "nor couldst if William Hastings had never lived. The eyes of women accustomed to gaze on the gorgeous externals of the world are blinded to plain worth like thine. It might have been different had the donzell never abided in a palace; but as it is, brave fellow, learn how these wounds of the heart scar over, and the spot becomes hard and callous evermore. What art thou, Master Nicholas Alwyn," continued Hastings, gloomily, and with a withering smile—"what art thou, to ask for a bliss denied to me—to all of us,—the bliss of carrying poetry into life, youth into manhood, by winning—the FIRST LOVED? But think not, sir lover, that I say this in jealousy or disparagement. Look yonder, by the leafless elm, the white robe of Sibyll Warner. Go and plead thy suit."

"Do I understand you, my lord?" said Alwyn, somewhat confused and perplexed by the tone and the manner Hastings adopted. "Does report err, and you do not love this maiden?"

"Fair master," returned Hastings, scornfully, "thou hast no right that I trow of to pry into my thoughts and secrets; I cannot acknowledge my judge in thee, good jeweller and goldsmith,—enough, surely, in all courtesy, that I yield thee the precedence. Tell thy tale, as movingly, if thou wilt, as thou hast told it to me; say of me all that thou fanciest thou hast reason to suspect; and if, Master Alwyn, thou woo and win the lady, fail not to ask me to thy wedding!"

There was in this speech and the bearing of the speaker that superb levity, that inexpressible and conscious superiority, that cold, ironical tranquillity, which awe and humble men more than grave disdain or imperious passion. Alwyn ground his teeth as he listened, and gazed in silent despair and rage upon the calm lord. Neither of these men could strictly be called handsome. Of the two, Alwyn had the advantage of more youthful prime, of a taller stature, of a more powerful, though less supple and graceful, frame. In their very dress, there was little of that marked distinction between classes which then usually prevailed, for the dark cloth tunic and surcoat of Hastings made a costume even simpler than the bright-coloured garb of the trader, with its broad trimmings of fur, and its aiglettes of elaborate lace. Between man and man, then, where was the visible, the mighty, the insurmountable difference in all that can charm the fancy and captivate the eye, which, as he gazed, Alwyn confessed to himself there existed between the two? Alas! how the distinctions least to be analyzed are ever the sternest! What lofty ease in that high-bred air; what histories of triumph seemed to speak in that quiet eye, sleeping in its own imperious lustre; what magic of command in that pale brow; what spells of persuasion in that artful lip! Alwyn muttered to himself, bowed his head involuntarily, and passed on at once from Hastings to Sibyll, who now, at the distance of some yards, had arrested her steps, in surprise to see the conference between the nobleman and the burgher.

But as he approached Sibyll, poor Alwyn felt all the firmness and courage he had exhibited with Hastings melt away. And the trepidation which a fearful but deep affection ever occasions in men of his character, made his movements more than usually constrained and awkward, as he cowered beneath the looks of the maid he so truly loved.

"Seekest thou me, Master Alwyn?" asked Sibyll, gently, seeing that, though he paused by her side, he spoke not.

"I do," returned Alwyn, abruptly, and again he was silent. At length, lifting his eyes and looking round him, he saw Hastings at the distance, leaning against the rampart, with folded arms; and the contrast of his rival's cold and arrogant indifference, and his own burning veins and bleeding heart, roused up his manly spirit, and gave to his tongue the eloquence which emotion gains when it once breaks the fetters it forges for itself.

"Look, look, Sibyll!" he said, pointing to Hastings "look! that man you believe loves you. If so—if he loved thee,—would he stand yonder—mark him—aloof, contemptuous, careless—while he knew that I was by your side?"

Sibyll turned upon the goldsmith eyes full of innocent surprise,—eyes that asked, plainly as eyes could speak, "And wherefore not, Master Alwyn?"

Alwyn so interpreted the look, and replied, as if she had spoken: "Because he must know how poor and tame is that feeble fantasy which alone can come from a soul worn bare with pleasure, to that which I feel and now own for thee,—the love of youth, born of the heart's first vigour; because he ought to fear that that love should prevail with thee; because that love ought to prevail. Sibyll, between us there are not imparity and obstacle. Oh, listen to me,—listen still! Frown not, turn not away." And, stung and animated by the sight of his rival, fired by the excitement of a contest on which the bliss of his own life and the weal of Sibyll's might depend, his voice was as the cry of a mortal agony, and affected the girl to the inmost recesses of her soul. "Oh, Alwyn, I frown not!" she said sweetly; "oh, Alwyn, I turn not away! Woe is me to give pain to so kind and brave a heart; but—"

"No, speak not yet. I have studied thee, I have read thee as a scholar would read a book. I know thee proud; I know thee aspiring; I know thou art vain of thy gentle blood, and distasteful of my yeoman's birth. There, I am not blind to thy faults, but I love thee despite them; and to please those faults I have toiled, schemed, dreamed, risen. I offer to thee the future with the certainty of a man who can command it. Wouldst thou wealth?—be patient (as ambition ever is): in a few years thou shalt have more gold than the wife of Lord Hastings can command; thou shalt lodge more stately, fare more sumptuously; [This was no vain promise of Master Alwyn. At that time a successful trader made a fortune with signal rapidity, and enjoyed greater luxuries than most of the barons. All the gold in the country flowed into the coffers of the London merchants.] thou shalt walk on cloth-of-gold if thou wilt! Wouldst thou titles?—I will win them. Richard de la Pole, who founded the greatest duchy in the realm, was poorer than I, when he first served in a merchant's ware. Gold buys all things now. Oh, would to Heaven it could but buy me thee!"

"Master Alwyn, it is not gold that buys love. Be soothed. What can I say to thee to soften the harsh word 'Nay'?"

"You reject me, then, and at once? I ask not your hand now. I will wait, tarry, hope,—I care not if for years; wait till I can fulfil all I promise thee!"

Sibyll, affected to tears, shook her head mournfully; and there was a long and painful silence. Never was wooing more strangely circumstanced than this,—the one lover pleading while the other was in view; the one, ardent, impassioned, the other, calm and passive; and the silence of the last, alas! having all the success which the words of the other lacked. It might be said that the choice before Sibyll was a type of the choice ever given, but in vain, to the child of genius. Here a secure and peaceful life, an honoured home, a tranquil lot, free from ideal visions, it is true, but free also from the doubt and the terror, the storms of passion; there, the fatal influence of an affection, born of imagination, sinister, equivocal, ominous, but irresistible. And the child of genius fulfilled her destiny!

”Master Alwyn,” said Sibyll, rousing herself to the necessary exertion, ”I shall never cease gratefully to recall thy generous friendship, never cease to pray fervently for thy weal below. But forever and forever let this content thee,—I can no more.”

Impressed by the grave and solemn tone of Sibyll, Alwyn hushed the groan that struggled to his lips, and gloomily replied: ”I obey you, fair mistress, and I return to my workday life; but ere I go, I pray you mistake me not if I say this much: not alone for the bliss of hoping for a day in which I might call thee mine have I thus importuned, but, not less—I swear not less—from the soul’s desire to save thee from what I fear will but lead to woe and wayment, to peril and pain, to weary days and sleepless nights. ’Better a little fire that warms than a great that burns.’ Dost thou think that Lord Hastings, the vain, the dissolute—”

”Cease, sir!” said Sibyll, proudly; ”me reprove if thou wilt, but lower not my esteem for thee by slander against another!”

”What!” said Alwyn, bitterly; ”doth even one word of counsel chafe thee? I tell thee that if thou drestest that Lord Hastings loves Sibyll Warner as man loves the maiden he would wed, thou deceivest thyself to thine own misery. If thou wouldst prove it, go to him now,—go and say, ’Wilt thou give me that home of peace and honour, that shelter for my father’s old age under a son’s roof which the trader I despise proffers me in vain?’”

”If it were already proffered me—by him?” said Sibyll, in a low voice, and blushing deeply.

Alwyn started. ”Then I wronged him; and—and—” he added generously, though with a faint sickness at his heart, ”I can yet be happy in thinking thou art so. Farewell, maiden, the saints guard thee from one memory of regret at what hath passed between us!”

He pulled his bonnet hastily over his brows, and departed with unequal

and rapid strides. As he passed the spot where Hastings stood leaning his arm upon the wall, and his face upon his hand, the nobleman looked up, and said,—

”Well, Sir Goldsmith, own at least that thy trial hath been a fair one!” Then struck with the anguish written upon Alwyn’s face, he walked up to him, and, with a frank, compassionate impulse, laid his hand on his shoulder. ”Alwyn,” he said, ”I have felt what you feel now; I have survived it, and the world hath not prospered with me less! Take with you a compassion that respects, and does not degrade you.”

”Do not deceive her, my lord,—she trusts and loves you! You never deceived man,—the wide world says it,—do not deceive woman! Deeds kill men, words women!” Speaking thus simply, Alwyn strode on, and vanished.

Hastings slowly and silently advanced to Sibyll. Her rejection of Alwyn had by no means tended to reconcile him to the marriage he himself had proffered. He might well suppose that the girl, even if unguided by affection, would not hesitate between a mighty nobleman and an obscure goldsmith. His pride was sorely wounded that the latter should have even thought himself the equal of one whom he had proposed, though but in a passionate impulse, to raise to his own state. And yet as he neared Sibyll, and, with a light footstep, she sprang forward to meet him, her eyes full of sweet joy and confidence, he shrank from an avowal which must wither up a heart opening thus all its bloom of youth and love to greet him.

”Ah, fair lord,” said the maiden, ”was it kindly in thee to permit poor Alwyn to inflict on me so sharp a pain, and thou to stand calmly distant? Sure, alas! that had thy humble rival proffered a crown, it had been the same to Sibyll! Oh, how the grief it was mine to cause grieved me; and yet, through all, I had one selfish, guilty gleam of pleasure,—to think that I had not been loved so well, if I were all unworthy the sole love I desire or covet!”

”And yet, Sibyll, this young man can in all, save wealth and a sounding name, give thee more than I can,—a heart undarkened by moody memories, a temper unsoured by the world’s dread and bitter lore of man’s frailty and earth’s sorrow. Ye are not far separated by ungenial years, and might glide to a common grave hand in hand; but I, older in heart than in age, am yet so far thine elder in the last, that these hairs will be gray, and this form bent, while thy beauty is in its prime, and—but thou weepst!”

”I weep that thou shouldst bring one thought of time to sadden my thoughts, which are of eternity. Love knows no age, it foresees no grave! its happiness and its trust behold on the earth but one glory, melting into the hues of heaven, where they who love lastingly pass

calmly on to live forever! See, I weep not now!"

"And did not this honest burgher," pursued Hastings, softened and embarrassed, but striving to retain his cruel purpose, "tell thee to distrust me; tell thee that my vows were false?"

"Methinks, if an angel told me so, I should disbelieve!"

"Why, look thee, Sibyll, suppose his warning true; suppose that at this hour I sought thee with intent to say that that destiny which ambition weaves for itself forbade me to fulfil a word hotly spoken; that I could not wed thee,—should I not seem to thee a false wooer, a poor trifler with thy earnest heart; and so, couldst thou not recall the love of him whose truer and worthier homage yet lingers in thine ear, and with him be happy?"

Sibyll lifted her dark eyes, yet humid, upon the unrevealing face of the speaker, and gazed on him with wistful and inquiring sadness; then, shrinking from his side, she crossed her arms meekly on her bosom, and thus said,—

"If ever, since we parted, one such thought hath glanced across thee— one thought of repentance at the sacrifice of pride, or the lessening of power—which (she faltered, broke off the sentence, and resumed)— in one word, if thou wouldst retract, say it now, and I will not accuse thy falsehood, but bless thy truth."

"Thou couldst be consoled, then, by thy pride of woman, for the loss of an unworthy lover?"

"My lord, are these questions fair?"

Hastings was silent. The gentler part of his nature struggled severely with the harder. The pride of Sibyll moved him no less than her trust; and her love in both was so evident, so deep, so exquisitely contrasting the cold and frivolous natures amidst which his lot had fallen, that he recoiled from casting away forever a heart never to be replaced. Standing on that bridge of life, with age before and youth behind, he felt that never again could he be so loved, or, if so loved by one so worthy of whatever of pure affection, of young romance, was yet left to his melancholy and lonely soul.

He took her hand, and, as she felt its touch, her firmness forsook her, her head drooped upon her bosom, and she burst into an agony of tears.

"Oh, Sibyll, forgive me! Smile on me again, Sibyll!" exclaimed Hastings, subdued and melted. But, alas! the heart once bruised and galled recovers itself but slowly, and it was many minutes before the softest words the eloquent lover could shape to sound sufficed to dry

those burning tears, and bring back the enchanting smile,—nay, even then the smile was forced and joyless. They walked on for some moments, both in thought, till Hastings said: "Thou lovest me, Sibyll, and art worthy of all the love that man can feel for maid; and yet, canst thou solve me this question, nor chide me that I ask it, Dost thou not love the world and the world's judgments more than me? What is that which women call honour? What makes them shrink from all love that takes not the form and circumstance of the world's hollow rites? Does love cease to be love, unless over its wealth of trust and emotion the priest mouths his empty blessing? Thou in thy graceful pride art angered if I, in wedding thee, should remember the sacrifice which men like me—I own it fairly—deem as great as man can make; and yet thou wouldst fly my love if it wooed thee to a sacrifice of thine own."

Artfully was the question put, and Hastings smiled to himself in imagining the reply it must bring; and then Sibyll answered, with the blush which the very subject called forth,

"Alas, my lord, I am but a poor casuist, but I feel that if I asked thee to forfeit whatever men respect,—honour and repute for valour, to be traitor and dastard,—thou couldst love me no more; and marvel you if, when man woos woman to forfeit all that her sex holds highest,—to be in woman what dastard and traitor is in man,—she hears her conscience and her God speak in a louder voice than can come from a human lip? The goods and pomps of the world we are free to sacrifice, and true love heeds and counts them not; but true love cannot sacrifice that which makes up love,—it cannot sacrifice the right to be loved below; the hope to love on in the realm above; the power to pray with a pure soul for the happiness it yearns to make; the blessing to seem ever good and honoured in the eyes of the one by whom alone it would be judged. And therefore, sweet lord, true love never contemplates this sacrifice; and if once it believes itself truly loved, it trusts with a fearless faith in the love on which it leans."

"Sibyll, would to Heaven I had seen thee in my youth! Would to Heaven I were more worthy of thee!" And in that interview Hastings had no heart to utter what he had resolved, "Sibyll, I sought thee but to say Farewell."

CHAPTER VI.

WARWICK RETURNS—APPEASES A DISCONTENTED PRINCE—AND CONFERS WITH A REVENGEFUL CONSPIRATOR.

It was not till late in the evening that Warwick arrived at his vast residence in London, where he found not only Marmaduke Nevile ready to receive him, but a more august expectant, in George Duke of Clarence. Scarcely had the earl crossed the threshold, when the duke seized his arm, and leading him into the room that adjoined the hall, said,—

”Verily, Edward is besotted no less than ever by his wife’s leech-like family. Thou knowest my appointment to the government of Ireland; Isabel, like myself, cannot endure the subordinate vassalage we must brook at the court, with the queen’s cold looks and sour words. Thou knowest, also, with what vain pretexts Edward has put me of; and now, this very day, he tells me that he hath changed his humour,—that I am not stern enough for the Irish kernes; that he loves me too well to banish me, forsooth; and that Worcester, the people’s butcher but the queen’s favourite, must have the post so sacredly pledged to me. I see in this Elizabeth’s crafty malice. Is this struggle between king’s blood and queen’s kith to go on forever?”

”Calm thyself, George; I will confer with the king tomorrow, and hope to compass thy not too arrogant desire. Certes, a king’s brother is the fittest vice-king for the turbulent kernes of Ireland, who are ever flattered into obeisance by ceremony and show. The government was pledged to thee—Edward can scarcely be serious. Moreover, Worcester, though forsooth a learned man—Mort-Dieu! methinks that same learning fills the head to drain the heart!—is so abhorred for his cruelties that his very landing in Ireland will bring a new rebellion to add to our already festering broils and sores. Calm thyself, I say. Where didst thou leave Isabel?”

”With my mother.”

”And Anne?—the queen chills not her young heart with cold grace?”

”Nay, the queen dare not unleash her malice against Edward’s will; and, to do him justice, he hath shown all honour to Lord Warwick’s daughter.”

”He is a gallant prince, with all his faults,” said the father, heartily, ”and we must bear with him, George; for verily he hath bound men by a charm to love him. Stay thou and share my hasty repast, and over the wine we will talk of thy views. Spare me now for a moment; I have to prepare work eno’ for a sleepless night. This Lincolnshire rebellion promises much trouble. Lord Willoughby has joined it; more than twenty thousand men are in arms. I have already sent to convene the knights and barons on whom the king can best depend, and must urge their instant departure for their halls, to raise men and meet the foe. While Edward feasts, his minister must toil. Tarry a while till I return.” The earl re-entered the hall, and beckoned to Marmaduke, who stood amongst a group of squires.

"Follow me; I may have work for thee." Warwick took a taper from one of the servitors, and led the way to his own more private apartment. On the landing of the staircase, by a small door, stood his body-squire—"Is the prisoner within?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Good!"—The earl opened the door by which the squire had mounted guard, and bade Marmaduke wait without.

The inmate of the chamber, whose dress bore the stains of fresh travel and hard riding, lifted his face hastily as the earl entered.

"Robin Hilyard," said Warwick, "I have mused much how to reconcile my service to the king with the gratitude I owe to a man who saved me from great danger. In the midst of thy unhappy and rebellious designs thou wert captured and brought to me; the papers found on thee attest a Lancastrian revolt, so ripening towards a mighty gathering, and so formidable from the adherents whom the gold and intrigues of King Louis have persuaded to risk land and life for the Red Rose, that all the king's friends can do to save his throne is now needed. In this revolt thou hast been the scheming brain, the master hand, the match to the bombard, the fire brand to the flax. Thou smilest, man! Alas! seest thou not that it is my stern duty to send thee bound hand and foot before the king's council, for the brake to wring from thee thy guilty secrets, and the gibbet to close thy days?"

"I am prepared," said Hilyard; "when the bombard explodes, the match has become useless; when the flame smites the welkin, the firebrand is consumed!"

"Bold man! what seest thou in this rebellion that can profit thee?"

"I see, looming through the chasms and rents made in the feudal order by civil war, the giant image of a free people."

"And thou wouldst be a martyr for the multitude, who deserted thee at Olney?"

"As thou for the king who dishonoured thee at Shene!"

Warwick frowned, and there was a moment's pause; at last, said the earl: "Look you, Robin, I would fain not have on my hands the blood of a man who saved my life. I believe thee, though a fanatic and half madman,—I believe thee true in word as rash of deed. Swear to me on the cross of this dagger that thou wilt lay aside all scheme and plot for this rebellion, all aid and share in civil broil and dissension, and thy life and liberty are restored to thee. In that intent, I have summoned my own kinsman, Marmaduke Nevile. He waits without the door;

he shall conduct thee safely to the seashore; thou shalt gain in peace my government of Calais, and my seneschal there shall find thee all thou canst need,—meat for thy hunger and moneys for thy pastime. Accept my mercy, take the oath, and begone.”

”My lord,” answered Hilyard, much touched and affected, ”blame not thyself if this carcass feed the crows—my blood be on mine own head! I cannot take this oath; I cannot live in peace; strife and broil are grown to me food and drink. Oh, my lord! thou knowest not what dark and baleful memories made me an agent in God’s hand against this ruthless Edward!” and then passionately, with whitening lips and convulsive features, Hilyard recounted to the startled Warwick the same tale which had roused the sympathy of Adam Warner.

The earl, whose affections were so essentially homely and domestic, was even more shocked than the scholar by the fearful narrative.

”Unhappy man!” he said with moistened eyes, ”from the core of my heart I pity thee. But thou, the scathed sufferer from civil war, wilt thou be now its dread reviver?”

”If Edward had wronged thee, great earl, as me, poor franklin, what would be thine answer? In vain moralize to him whom the spectre of a murdered child and the shriek of a maniac wife haunt and hound on to vengeance! So send me to rack and halter. Be there one curse more on the soul of Edward!”

”Thou shalt not die through my witness,” said the earl, abruptly; and he quitted the chamber.

Securing the door by a heavy bolt on the outside, he gave orders to his squire to attend to the comforts of the prisoner; and then turning into his closet with Marmaduke, said: ”I sent for thee, young cousin, with design to commit to thy charge one whose absence from England I deemed needful—that design I must abandon. Go back to the palace, and see, if thou canst, the king before he sleeps; say that this rising in Lincolnshire is more than a riot,—it is the first burst of a revolution! that I hold council here to-night, and every shire, ere the morrow, shall have its appointed captain. I will see the king at morning. Yet stay—gain sight of my child Anne; she will leave the court to-morrow. I will come for her; bid her train be prepared; she and the countess must away to Calais,—England again hath ceased to be a home for women! What to do with this poor rebel?” muttered the earl, when alone; ”release him I cannot; slay him I will not. Hum, there is space enough in these walls to inclose a captive.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE FEAR AND THE FLIGHT.

King Edward feasted high, and Sibyll sat in her father's chamber,—she silent with thought of love, Adam silent in the toils of science. The Eureka was well-nigh finished, rising from its ruins more perfect, more elaborate, than before. Maiden and scholar, each seeming near to the cherished goal,—one to love's genial altar, the other to fame's lonely shrine.

Evening advanced, night began, night deepened. King Edward's feast was over, but still in his perfumed chamber the wine sparkled in the golden cup. It was announced to him that Sir Marmaduke Nevile, just arrived from the earl's house, craved an audience. The king, pre-occupied in deep reverie, impatiently postponed it till the morrow.

"To-morrow," said the gentleman in attendance, "Sir Marmaduke bids me say, fearful that the late hour would forbid his audience, that Lord Warwick himself will visit your Grace. I fear, sire, that the disturbances are great indeed, for the squires and gentlemen in Lady Anne's train have orders to accompany her to Calais to-morrow."

"To-morrow, to-morrow!" repeated the king—"well, sir, you are dismissed."

The Lady Anne (to whom Sibyll had previously communicated the king's kindly consideration for Master Warner) had just seen Marmaduke, and learned the new dangers that awaited the throne and the realm. The Lancastrians were then openly in arms for the prince of her love, and against her mighty father!

The Lady Anne sat a while, sorrowful and musing, and then, before yon crucifix, the Lady Anne knelt in prayer. Sir Marmaduke Nevile descends to the court below, and some three or four busy, curious gentlemen, not yet a-bed, seize him by the arm, and pray him to say what storm is in the wind.

The night deepened still. The wine is drained in King Edward's goblet; King Edward has left his chamber; and Sibyll, entreating her father, but in vain, to suspend his toil, has kissed the damps from his brow, and is about to retire to her neighbouring room. She has turned to the threshold, when, hark! a faint—a distant cry, a woman's shriek, the noise of a clapping door! The voice—it is the voice of Anne! Sibyll passed the threshold, she is in the corridor; the winter moon shines through the open arches, the air is white and cold with frost. Suddenly the door at the farther end is thrown wide open, a form rushes into the corridor, it passes Sibyll, halts, turns round.

"Oh, Sibyll!" cried the Lady Anne, in a voice wild with horror, "save me—aid—help! Merciful Heaven, the king!"

Instinctively, wonderingly, tremblingly, Sibyll drew Anne into the chamber she had just quitted, and as they gained its shelter, as Anne sank upon the floor, the gleam of cloth-of-gold flashed through the dim atmosphere, and Edward, yet in the royal robe in which he had dazzled all the eyes at his kingly feast, stood within the chamber. His countenance was agitated with passion, and its clear hues flushed red with wine. At his entrance Anne sprang from the floor, and rushed to Warner, who, in dumb bewilderment, had suspended his task, and stood before the Eureka, from which steamed and rushed the dark, rapid smoke, while round and round, labouring and groaning, rolled its fairy wheels. [The gentle reader will doubtless bear in mind that Master Warner's complicated model had but little resemblance to the models of the steam-engine in our own day, and that it was usually connected with other contrivances, for the better display of the principle it was intended to illustrate.]

"Sir," cried Anne, clinging to him convulsively, "you are a father; by your child's soul, protect Lord Warwick's daughter!"

Roused from his abstraction by this appeal, the poor scholar wound his arm round the form thus clinging to him, and raising his head with dignity, replied, "Thy name, youth, and sex protect thee!"

"Unhand that lady, vile sorcerer," exclaimed the king, "I am her protector. Come, Anne, sweet Anne, fair lady, thou mistakest,—come!" he whispered. "Give not to these low natures matter for guesses that do but shame thee. Let thy king and cousin lead thee back to thy sweet rest."

He sought, though gently, to loosen the arms that wound themselves round the old man; but Anne, not heeding, not listening, distracted by a terror that seemed to shake her whole frame and to threaten her very reason, continued to cry out loudly upon her father's name,—her great father, wakeful, then, for the baffled ravisher's tottering throne!

Edward had still sufficient possession of his reason to be alarmed lest some loiterer or sentry in the outer court might hear the cries which his attempts to soothe but the more provoked. Grinding his teeth, and losing patience, he said to Adam, "Thou knowest me, friend,—I am thy king. Since the Lady Anne, in her bewilderment, prefers thine aid to mine, help to bear her back to her apartment; and thou, young mistress, lend thine arm. This wizard's den is no fit chamber for our high-born guest."

"No, no; drive me not hence, Master Warner—that man—that king—give me not up to his—his—"

"Beware!" exclaimed the king.

It was not till now that Adam's simple mind comprehended the true cause of Anne's alarm, which Sibyll still conjectured not, but stood trembling by her friend's side, and close to her father.

"Do not fear, maiden;" said Adam Warner, laying his hand upon the loosened locks that swept over his bosom, "for though I am old and feeble, God and his angels are in every spot where virtue trembles and resists. My lord king, thy sceptre extends not over a human soul!"

"Dotard, prate not to me!" said Edward, laying his hand on his dagger. Sibyll saw the movement, and instinctively placed herself between her father and the king. That slight form, those pure, steadfast eyes, those features, noble at once and delicate, recalled to Edward the awe which had seized him in his first dark design; and again that awe came over him. He retreated.

"I mean harm to none," said he, almost submissively; "and if I am so unhappy as to scare with my presence the Lady Anne, I will retire, praying you, donzell, to see to her state, and lead her back to her chamber when it so pleases herself. Saying this much, I command you, old man, and you, maiden, to stand back while I but address one sentence to the Lady Anne."

With these words he gently advanced to Anne, and took her hand; but, snatching it from him, the poor lady broke from Adam, rushed to the casement, opened it, and seeing some figures indistinct and distant in the court below, she called out in a voice of such sharp agony that it struck remorse and even terror into Edward's soul.

"Alas!" he muttered, "she will not listen to me! her mind is distraught! What frenzy has been mine! Pardon—pardon, Anne,—oh, pardon!"

Adam Warner laid his hand on the king's arm, and he drew the imperious spot away as easily as a nurse leads a docile child.

"King!" said the brave old man, "may God pardon thee; for if the last evil hath been wrought upon this noble lady, David sinned not more heavily than thou."

"She is pure, inviolate,—I swear it!" said the king, humbly. "Anne, only say that I am forgiven."

But Anne spoke not: her eyes were fixed, her lips had fallen; she was insensible as a corpse,—dumb and frozen with her ineffable dread. Suddenly steps were heard upon the stairs; the door opened, and Marmaduke Nevile entered abruptly.

"Surely I heard my lady's voice,—surely! What marvel this?—the king! Pardon, my liege!" and he bent his knee.

The sight of Marmaduke dissolved the spell of awe and repentant humiliation which had chained a king's dauntless heart. His wonted guile returned to him with his self-possession.

"Our wise craftsman's strange and weird invention"—and Edward pointed to the Eureka—"has scared our fair cousin's senses, as, by sweet Saint George, it well might! Go back, Sir Marmaduke, we will leave Lady Anne for the moment to the care of Mistress Sibyll. Donzell, remember my command. Come, sir"—(and he drew the wondering Marmaduke from the chamber); but as soon as he had seen the knight descend the stairs and regain the court, he returned to the room, and in a low, stern voice, said, "Look you, Master Warner, and you, damsel, if ever either of ye breathe one word of what has been your dangerous fate to hear and witness, kings have but one way to punish slanderers, and silence but one safeguard!—trifle not with death!"

He then closed the door, and resought his own chamber. The Eastern spices, which were burned in the sleeping-rooms of the great, still made the air heavy with their feverish fragrance. The king seated himself, and strove to recollect his thoughts, and examine the peril he had provoked. The resistance and the terror of Anne had effectually banished from his heart the guilty passion it had before harboured; for emotions like his, and in such a nature, are quick of change. His prevailing feeling was one of sharp repentance and reproachful shame. But as he roused himself from a state of mind which light characters ever seek to escape, the image of the dark-browed earl rose before him, and fear succeeded to mortification; but even this, however well-founded, could not endure long in a disposition so essentially scornful of all danger. Before morning the senses of Anne must return to her. So gentle a bosom could be surely reasoned out of resentment, or daunted, at least, from betraying to her stern father a secret that, if told, would smear the sward of England with the gore of thousands. What woman will provoke war and bloodshed? And for an evil not wrought, for a purpose not fulfilled? The king was grateful that his victim had escaped him. He would see Anne before the earl could, and appease her anger, obtain her silence! For Warner and for Sibyll, they would not dare to reveal; and, if they did, the lips that accuse a king soon belie themselves, while a rack can torture truth, and the doomsman be the only judge between the subject and the head that wears a crown.

Thus reasoning with himself, his soul faced the solitude. Meanwhile Marmaduke regained the courtyard, where, as we have said, he had been detained in conferring with some of the gentlemen in the king's service, who, hearing that he brought important tidings from the earl, had abstained from rest till they could learn if the progress of the new rebellion would bring their swords into immediate service.

Marmaduke, pleased to be of importance, had willingly satisfied their curiosity, as far as he was able, and was just about to retire to his own chamber, when the cry of Anne had made him enter the postern-door which led up the stairs to Adam's apartment, and which was fortunately not locked; and now, on returning, he had again a new curiosity to allay. Having briefly said that Master Warner had taken that untoward hour to frighten the women with a machine that vomited smoke and howled piteously, Marmaduke dismissed the group to their beds, and was about to seek his own, when, looking once more towards the casement, he saw a white hand gleaming in the frosty moonlight, and beckoning to him.

The knight crossed himself, and reluctantly ascended the stairs, and re-entered the wizard's den.

The Lady Anne had so far recovered herself, that a kind of unnatural calm had taken possession of her mind, and changed her ordinary sweet and tractable nature into one stern, obstinate resolution,—to escape, if possible, that unholy palace. And as soon as Marmaduke re-entered, Anne met him at the threshold, and laying her hand convulsively on his arm, said, "By the name you bear, by your love to my father, aid me to quit these walls."

In great astonishment, Marmaduke stared, without reply. "Do you deny me, sir?" said Anne, almost sternly.

"Lady and mistress mine," answered Marmaduke, "I am your servant in all things. Quit these walls, the palace!—How?—the gates are closed. Nay, and what would my lord say, if at night—"

"If at night!" repeated Anne, in a hollow voice; and then pausing, burst into a terrible laugh. Recovering herself abruptly, she moved to the door, "I will go forth alone, and trust in God and Our Lady."

Sibyll sprang forward to arrest her steps, and Marmaduke hastened to Adam, and whispered, "Poor lady, is her mind unsettled? Hast thou, in truth, distracted her with thy spells and glamour?"

"Hush!" answered the old man; and he whispered in Nevile's ear.

Scarcely had the knight caught the words, than his cheek paled, his eyes flashed fire. "The great earl's daughter!" he exclaimed. "Infamy—horror—she is right!" He broke from the student, approached Anne, who still struggled with Sibyll, and kneeling before her, said, in a voice choked with passions at once fierce and tender,—

"Lady, you are right. Unseemly it may be for one of your quality and sex to quit this place with me, and alone; but at least I have a man's heart, a knight's honour. Trust to me your safety, noble maiden, and I will cut your way, even through yon foul king's heart, to your great

father's side!"

Anne did not seem quite to understand his words; but she smiled on him as he knelt, and gave him her hand. The responsibility he had assumed quickened all the intellect of the young knight. As he took and kissed the hand extended to him, he felt the ring upon his finger,—the ring intrusted to him by Alwyn, the king's signet-ring, before which would fly open every gate. He uttered a joyous exclamation, loosened his long night-cloak, and praying Anne to envelop her form in its folds, drew the hood over her head; he was about to lead her forth when he halted suddenly.

"Alack," said he, turning to Sibyll, "even though we may escape the Tower, no boatman now can be found on the river. The way through the streets is dark and perilous, and beset with midnight ruffians."

"Verily," said Warner, "the danger is past now. Let the noble demoiselle rest here till morning. The king dare not again—"

"Dare not!" interrupted Marmaduke. "Alas! you little know King Edward."

At that name Anne shuddered, opened the door, and hurried down the stairs; Sibyll and Marmaduke followed her.

"Listen, Sir Marmaduke," said Sibyll. "Close without the Tower is the house of a noble lady, the dame of Longueville, where Anne may rest in safety, while you seek Lord Warwick. I will go with you, if you can obtain egress for us both."

"Brave damsel!" said Marmaduke, with emotion; "but your own safety—the king's anger—no—besides a third, your dress not concealed, would create the warder's suspicion. Describe the house."

"The third to the left, by the river's side, with an arched porch, and the fleur-de-lis embossed on the walls."

"It is not so dark but we shall find it. Fare you well, gentle mistress."

While they yet spoke, they had both reached the side of Anne. Sibyll still persisted in the wish to accompany her friend; but Marmaduke's representation of the peril to life itself that might befall her father, if Edward learned she had abetted Anne's escape, finally prevailed. The knight and his charge gained the outer gate.

"Haste, haste, Master Warder!" he cried, beating at the door with his dagger till it opened jealously,—messages of importance to the Lord Warwick. We have the king's signet. Open!"

The sleepy warder glanced at the ring; the gates were opened; they were without the fortress, they hurried on. "Cheer up, noble lady; you are safe, you shall be avenged!" said Marmaduke, as he felt the steps of his companion falter. But the reaction had come. The effort Anne had hitherto made was for escape, for liberty; the strength ceased, the object gained; her head drooped, she muttered a few incoherent words, and then sense and life left her. Marmaduke paused in great perplexity and alarm. But lo, a light in a house before him! That house the third to the river,—the only one with the arched porch described by Sibyll. He lifted the light and holy burden in his strong arms, he gained the door; to his astonishment it was open; a light burned on the stairs; he heard, in the upper room, the sound of whispered voices, and quick, soft footsteps hurrying to and fro. Still bearing the insensible form of his companion, he ascended the staircase, and entered at once upon a chamber, in which, by a dim lamp, he saw some two or three persons assembled round a bed in the recess. A grave man advanced to him, as he paused at the threshold.

"Whom seek you?"

"The Lady Longueville."

"Hush?"

"Who needs me?" said a faint voice, from the curtained recess.

"My name is Nevile," answered Marmaduke, with straightforward brevity. "Mistress Sibyll Warner told me of this house, where I come for an hour's shelter to my companion, the Lady Anne, daughter of the Earl of Warwick."

Marmaduke resigned his charge to an old woman, who was the nurse in that sick-chamber, and who lifted the hood and chafed the pale, cold hands of the young maiden; the knight then strode to the recess. The Lady of Longueville was on the bed of death—an illness of two days had brought her to the brink of the grave; but there was in her eye and countenance a restless and preternatural animation, and her voice was clear and shrill, as she said,—

"Why does the daughter of Warwick, the Yorkist, seek refuge in the house of the fallen and childless Lancastrian?"

"Swear by thy hopes in Christ that thou will tend and guard her while I seek the earl, and I reply."

"Stranger, my name is Longueville, my birth noble,—those pledges of hospitality and trust are stronger than hollow oaths. Say on!"

"Because, then," whispered the knight, after waving the bystanders from the spot, "because the earl's daughter flies dishonour in a

king's palace, and her insulter is the king!"

Before the dying woman could reply, Anne, recovered by the cares of the experienced nurse, suddenly sprang to the recess, and kneeling by the bedside, exclaimed wildly,—"Save me! bide me! save me!"

"Go and seek the earl, whose right hand destroyed my house and his lawful sovereign's throne,—go! I will live till he arrives!" said the childless widow, and a wild gleam of triumph shot over her haggard features.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GROUP ROUND THE DEATH-BED OF THE LANCASTRIAN WIDOW.

The dawning sun gleamed through gray clouds upon a small troop of men, armed in haste, who were grouped round a covered litter by the outer door of the Lady Longueville's house; while in the death-chamber, the Earl of Warwick, with a face as pale as the dying woman's, stood beside the bed, Anne calmly leaning on his breast, her eyes closed, and tears yet moist on her long fringes.

"Ay, ay, ay!" said the Lancastrian noblewoman, "ye men of wrath and turbulence should reap what ye have sown! This is the king for whom ye dethroned the sainted Henry! this the man for whom ye poured forth the blood of England's best! Ha! ha! Look down from heaven, my husband, my martyr-sons! The daughter of your mightiest foe flies to this lonely hearth,—flies to the death-bed of the powerless woman for refuge from the foul usurper whom that foe placed upon the throne!"

"Spare me," muttered Warwick, in a low voice, and between his grinded teeth. The room had been cleared, and Dr. Godard (the grave man who had first accosted Marmaduke, and who was the priest summoned to the dying) alone—save the scarce conscious Anne herself—witnessed the ghastly and awful conference.

"Hush, daughter," said the man of peace, lifting the solemn crucifix,—"calm thyself to holier thoughts."

The lady impatiently turned from the priest, and grasping the strong right arm of Warwick with her shrivelled and trembling fingers, resumed in a voice that struggled to repress the gasps which broke its breath,—

"But thou—oh, thou wilt bear this indignity! thou, the chief of England's barons, wilt see no dishonour in the rank love of the vilest

of England's kings! Oh, yes, ye Yorkists have the hearts of varlets, not of men and fathers!"

"By the symbol from which thou turnest, woman!" exclaimed the earl, giving vent to the fury which the presence of death had before suppressed, "by Him to whom, morning and night, I have knelt in grateful blessing for the virtuous life of this beloved child, I will have such revenge on the recreant whom I kinged, as shall live in the rolls of England till the trump of the Judgment Angel!"

"Father," said Anne, startled by her father's vehemence from her half-swoon, half-sleep—"Father, think no more of the past,—take me to my mother! I want the clasp of my mother's arms!"

"Leave us,—leave the dying, Sir Earl and son," said Godard. "I too am Lancastrian; I too would lay down my life for the holy Henry; but I shudder, in the hour of death, to hear yon pale lips, that should pray for pardon, preach to thee of revenge."

"Revenge!" shrieked out the dame of Longueville, as, sinking fast and fast, she caught the word—"revenge! Thou hast sworn revenge on Edward of York, Lord Warwick,—sworn it in the chamber of death, in the ear of one who will carry that word to the hero-dead of a hundred battlefields! Ha! the sun has risen! Priest—Godard—thine arms—support—raise—bear me to the casement! Quick—quick! I would see my king once more! Quick—quick! and then—then—I will hear thee pray!"

The priest, half chiding, yet half in pity, bore the dying woman to the casement. She motioned to him to open it; he obeyed. The sun, just above the welkin, shone over the lordly Thames, gilded the gloomy fortress of the Tower, and glittered upon the window of Henry's prison.

"There—there! It is he,—it is my king! Hither,—lord, rebel earl, —hither. Behold your sovereign. Repent, revenge!"

With her livid and outstretched hand, the Lancastrian pointed to the huge Wakefield tower. The earl's dark eye beheld in the dim distance a pale and reverend countenance, recognized even from afar. The dying woman fixed her glazing eyes upon the wronged and mighty baron, and suddenly her arm fell to her side, the face became set as into stone, the last breath of life gurgled within, and fled; and still those glazing eyes were fixed on the earl's hueless face, and still in his ear, and echoed by a thousand passions in his heart, thrilled the word which had superseded prayer, and in which the sinner's soul had flown,—REVENGE!