

and Rivers, and Richard Nevile!" answered Warwick, in a stern whisper.

Edward paused, and at that moment Anthony himself emerged from his tent (which adjoined the king's) in company with the Archbishop of York, who had rode thither in Warwick's train.

"My liege," said that gallant knight, putting his knee to the ground, "I have heard from the archbishop the new perils that await your highness, and I grieve sorely that, in this strait, your councillors deem it meet to forbid me the glory of fighting or falling by your side! I know too well the unhappy odium attached to my house and name in the northern parts, to dispute the policy which ordains my absence from your armies. Till these feuds are over, I crave your royal leave to quit England, and perform my pilgrimage to the sainted shrine of Compostella."

A burning flush passed over the king's face, as he raised his brother-in-law, and clasped him to his bosom.

"Go or stay, as you will, Anthony!" said he, "but let these proud men know that neither time nor absence can tear you from your king's heart. But envy must have its hour! Lord Warwick, I attend you; but, it seems, rather as your prisoner than your liege."

Warwick made no answer: the king mounted, and waved his hand to Anthony. The torches tossed to and fro, the horns sounded, and in a silence, moody and resentful on either part, Edward and his terrible subject rode on to the towers of Warwick.

The next day the king beheld, with astonishment, the immense force that, in a time so brief, the earl had collected round his standard.

From his casement, which commanded that lovely slope on which so many a tourist now gazes with an

eye that seeks to call back the stormy and chivalric past, Edward beheld the earl on his renowned black charger, reviewing the thousands that, file on file, and rank on rank, lifted pike and lance in the cloudless sun.

"After all," muttered the king, "I can never make a new noble a great baron! And if in peace a great baron overshadows the throne, in time of war a great baron is a throne's bulwark! Gramercy, I had been mad to cast away such an army—an army fit for a king to lead! They serve Warwick now—but Warwick is less skilful in the martial art than I—and soldiers, like hounds, love best the most dexterous huntsman."

CHAPTER VII

HOW KING EDWARD ARRIVES AT THE CASTLE OF MIDDLEHAM

On the ramparts of feudal Middleham, in the same place where Anne had confessed to Isabel the romance of her childish love, again the sisters stood, awaiting the coming of their father and the king. They had only, with their mother, reached Middleham two days before, and the preceding night an advanced guard had arrived at the castle to announce the approach of the earl with his royal comrade and visitor. From the heights, already, they beheld the long array winding in glorious order towards the mighty pile.

"Look!" exclaimed Isabel, "look! already methinks I see the white steed of Clarence. Yes! it is he! it is my George—my husband! The banner borne before, shows his device."

"Ah! happy Isabel!" said Anne, sighing, "what rapture to await the coming of him one loves!"

"My sweet Anne," returned Isabel, passing her arm tenderly round her sister's slender waist, "when thou hast conquered the vain folly of thy childhood, thou wilt find a Clarence of thine own. And yet," added the young duchess, smiling, "it must be the opposite of a Clarence, to be to thy heart what a Clarence is to mine. I love George's gay humour—thou lovest a melancholy brow. I love that charming weakness which supple to my woman will—thou lovest a proud nature that may command thine own. I do not respect George less, because I know my mind stronger than his own; but thou (like my gentle mother) wouldst have thy mate, lord and chief in all things, and live from his life as the shadow from the sun. But where left you our mother?"

"In the oratory, at prayer!"

"She has been sad of late."

"The dark times darken her; and she ever fears the king's falseness or caprice will stir the earl up to some rash emprise. My father's letter, brought last night to her, contains something that made her couch sleepless."

"Ha!" exclaimed the duchess, eagerly, "my mother confides in thee more than me. Saw you the letter?"

"No."

"Edward will make himself unfit to reign," said Isabel, abruptly. "The barons will call on him to resign; and then—and *then*, Anne—sister Anne,—Warwick's daughters cannot be born to be simple subjects!"

"Isabel, God temper your ambition! Oh! curb it—crush it down! Abuse not your influence with Clarence. Let not the brother aspire to the brother's crown."

"Sister, a king's diadem covers all the sins schemed in the head that wins it!"

As the duchess spoke, her eyes flashed and her form dilated. Her beauty seemed almost terrible.

The gentle Anne gazed and shuddered; but ere she found words to rebuke, the lovely shape of the countess-mother was seen moving slowly towards them. She was dressed in her robes of state to receive her kingly guest; the vest fitting high to the throat, where it joined the ermine tippet, and thickly sown with jewels; the sleeves tight, with the second or over sleeves, that, loose and large, hung pendant and sweeping even to the ground; and the gown, velvet of cramousin, trimmed with ermine, made a costume not less graceful than magnificent, and which, where compressed, set off the exquisite symmetry of a form still youthful, and where flowing, added majesty to a beauty naturally rather soft and feminine than proud and stately. As she approached her children, she looked rather like their sister than their mother, as if Time, at least, shrunk from visiting harshly one for whom such sorrows were reserved.

The face of the countess was so sad in its aspect of calm and sweet resignation, that even the proud Isabel was touched; and kissing her mother's hand, she asked, "If any ill tidings preceded her father's coming?"

"Alas, my Isabel, the times themselves are bad tidings! Your youth scarcely remembers the days when brother fought against brother, and the son's sword rose against the father's breast. But I, recalling them, tremble to hear the faintest murmur that threatens a civil war." She paused, and forcing a smile to her lips, added, "Our woman fears must not, however, sadden our lords with an unwelcome countenance; for men, returning to their hearths, have a right to a wife's smile; and so, Isabel, thou and I, wives both,

must forget the morrow in to-day. Hark! the trumpets sound near and nearer—let us to the hall."

Before, however, they had reached the castle, a shrill blast rang at the outer gate. The portcullis was raised; the young Duke of Clarence, with a bridegroom's impatience, spurred alone through the gloomy arch, and Isabel, catching sight of his countenance, lifted towards the ramparts, uttered a cry and waved her hand. Clarence heard and saw, leapt from his steed, and had clasped Isabel to his breast, almost before Anne or the countess had recognised the new comer.

Isabel, however, always stately, recovered in an instant from the joy she felt at her lord's return, and gently escaping his embrace, she glanced with a blush towards the battlements crowded with retainers; Clarence caught and interpreted the look.

"Well, *belle mère*," he said, turning to the countess—"and if yon faithful followers *do* witness with what glee a fair bride inspires a returning bridegroom—is there cause for shame in this check of damascene?"

"Is the king still with my father?" asked Isabel hastily, and interrupting the countess's reply.

"Surely yes; and hard at hand. And pardon me that I forgot, dear lady, to say that my royal brother has announced his intention of addressing the principal officers of the army in Middleham Hall. This news gave me fair excuse for hastening to you and Isabel."

"All is prepared for his highness," said the countess, "save our own homage. We must quicken our steps—come, Anne."

The countess took the arm of the younger sister, while the duchess made a sign to Clarence,—he lingered behind, and Isabel, drawing him aside, asked—

"Is my father reconciled to Edward?"



Clarence clasped Isabel to his breast.

"No—nor Edward to him."

"Good! The king has no soldiers of his own amidst yon armed train?"

"Save a few of Anthony Woodville's recruits—none. Raoul de Fulke and St. John have retired to their towers in sullen dudgeon. But have you no softer questions for my return, *bella mia?*"

"Pardon me—many—my *king*."

"*King!*"

"What other name should the successor of Edward IV. bear?"

"Isabel," said Clarence, in great emotion, "what is it you would tempt me to? Edward IV. spares the life of Henry VI., and shall Edward IV.'s brother conspire against his own?"

"Saints forefend!" exclaimed Isabel—"can you so wrong my honest meaning? O George! can you conceive that your wife—Warwick's daughter—harbours the thought of murder? No! surely the career before you seems plain and spotless! Can Edward reign? Deserted by the barons, and wearing away even my father's long-credulous love; odious! except in luxurious and unwarlike London, to all the commons—how reign? What other choice left? none—save Henry of Lancaster or George of York."

"Were it so," said the weak duke, and yet he added, falteringly—"believe me, Warwick meditates no such changes in my favour."

"Time is a rapid ripener," answered Isabel—"but hark, they are lowering the drawbridge for our guests."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ANCIENTS RIGHTLY GAVE TO THE GODDESS OF
ELOQUENCE A CROWN

The lady of Warwick stood at the threshold of the porch, which, in the inner side of the broad quadrangle, admitted to the apartments used by the family; and, heading the mighty train that, line after line, emerged through the grim jaws of the arch, came the earl on his black destrier, and the young king.

Even where she stood, the anxious *Chatelaine* beheld the moody and gloomy air with which Edward glanced around the strong walls of the fortress, and up to the battlements that bristled with the pikes and sallets of armed men, who looked on the pomp below, in the silence of military discipline.

"Oh, Anne!" she whispered to her youngest daughter, who stood beside her—"what are women worth in the strife of men? Would that our smiles could heal the wounds which a taunt can make in a proud man's heart!"

Anne, affected and interested by her mother's words, and with a secret curiosity to gaze upon the man who ruled on the throne of the prince she loved, came nearer and more in front, and suddenly, as he turned his head, the king's regard rested upon her intent eyes and blooming face.

"Who is that fair donzell, cousin of Warwick?" he asked.

"My daughter, sire."

"Ah! your youngest!—I have not seen her since she was a child."

Edward reined in his charger, and the earl threw himself from his selle, and held the king's stirrup to dismount. But he did so with a haughty and unsmiling visage. "I would be the first, sire," said he, with a slight emphasis, and as if excusing to himself his condescension—"to welcome to Middleham the son of Duke Richard."

"And your suzerain, my lord earl," added Edward, with no less proud a meaning, and leaning his hand lightly on Warwick's shoulder, he dismounted slowly. "Rise, lady," he said, raising the countess, who knelt at the porch—"and you too, fair demoiselle. *Pardieu*,—we envy the knee that hath knelt to *you*." So saying, with royal graciousness, he took the countess's hand, and they entered the hall as the musicians, in the gallery raised above, rolled forth their stormy welcome.

The archbishop, who had followed close to Warwick and the king, whispered now to his brother—

"Why would Edward address the captains?"

"I know not."

"He hath made himself familiar with many in the march."

"Familiarity with a steel casque better becomes a king than waisall with a greasy flat-cap."

"You do not fear lest he seduce from the White Bear its retainers?"

"As well fear that he can call the stars from their courses around the sun."

While these words were interchanged, the countess conducted the king to a throne-chair, raised upon the dais, by the side of which were placed two seats of state, and, from the dais, at the same time, advanced the Duke and Duchess of Clarence. The king prevented their kneeling, and kissed Isabel slightly and

gravely on the forehead. "Thus, noble lady, I greet the entrance of the Duchess of Clarence into the royalty of England."

Without pausing for reply, he passed on and seated himself on the throne, while Isabel and her husband took possession of the state chairs on either hand. At a gesture of the king's, the countess and Anne placed themselves on seats less raised, but still upon the dais. But now as Edward sat, the hall grew gradually full of lords and knights who commanded in Warwick's train, while the earl and the archbishop stood mute in the centre, the one armed *cap-à-pie*, leaning on his sword, the other with his arms folded in his long robes.

The king's eye, clear, steady, and majestic, roved round that martial audience, worthy to be a monarch's war-council, and not one of whom marched under a monarch's banner! Their silence, their discipline, the splendour of their arms, the greater splendour of their noble names, contrasted painfully with the little mutinous camp of Olney, and the surly, untried recruits of Anthony Woodville. But Edward, whose step, whose form, whose aspect, proclaimed the man conscious of his rights to be lord of all, betrayed not to those around him the kingly pride, the lofty grief, that swelled within his heart. Still seated, he raised his left hand to command silence; with the right he replaced his plumed cap upon his brow.

"Lords and gentlemen," he said (arrogating to himself at once, as a thing of course, that gorgeous following), "we have craved leave of our host to address to you some words—words which it pleases a king to utter, and which may not be harsh to the ears of a loyal subject. Nor will we, at this great current of unsteady fortune, make excuse, noble ladies, to you, that we

speak of war to knighthood, which is ever the sworn defender of the daughter and the wife:—the daughters and the wife of our cousin, Warwick, have too much of hero-blood in their blue veins to grow pale at the sight of heroes. Comrades in arms! thus far towards our foe upon the frontiers we have marched, without a sword drawn or an arrow launched from an archer's bow. We believe that a blessing settles on the head of a true king, and that the trumpet of a good angel goes before his path, announcing the victory which awaits him. Here, in the hall of the Earl of Warwick, our captain-general, we thank you for your cheerful countenance, and your loyal service; and here, as befits a king, we promise to you those honours *a king alone* worthily can bestow." He paused, and his keen eye glanced from chief to chief as he resumed: "We are informed that certain misguided and traitor lords have joined the Rose of Lancaster. Whoever so doth is attainted, life and line, evermore! His lands and dignities are forfeit to enrich and to ennoble the men who strike for me. Heaven grant I may have foes eno' to reward all my friends! To every baron who owns Edward IV. king (ay, and not king in name—king in banquet and in bower—but leader and captain in the war), I trust to give a new barony—to every knight a new knight's fee—to every yeoman a hyde of land—to every soldier a year's pay. What more I can do, let it be free for any one to suggest—for my domains of York are broad, and my heart is larger still!"

A murmur of applause and reverence went round. Vowed, as those warriors were, to the earl, they felt that A MONARCH was amongst them.

"What say you, then? We are ripe for glory. Three days will we halt at Middleham, guest to our noble subject."

"Three days, sire!" repeated Warwick, in a voice of surprise.

"Yes; and this, fair cousin, and ye, lords and gentlemen, is my reason for the delay. I have despatched Sir William, Lord de Hastings, to the Duke of Gloucester, with command to join us here—(the archbishop started, but instantly resumed his earnest placid aspect)—to the Lord Montagu, Earl of Northumberland, to muster all the vassals of our shire of York. As three streams that dash into the ocean, shall our triple army meet and rush to the war. Not even, gentlemen, not even to the great Earl of Warwick will Edward IV. be so beholden for roialme and renown, as to march but a companion to the conquest. If ye were raised in Warwick's name, not mine—why, be it so! I envy him such friends; but I will have an army of mine own, to show mine English soldiery how a Plantagenet battles for his crown. Gentlemen, ye are dismissed to your repose. In three days we march! and if any of you know in these fair realms the man, be he of York or Lancaster, more fit to command brave subjects than he who now addresses you, I say to that man—turn rein, and leave us! Let tyrants and cowards enforce reluctant service, *my* crown was won by the hearts of my people! Girded by those hearts, let me reign—or, mourned by them, let me fall! So God and St. George favour me as I speak the truth!"

And as the king ceased, he uncovered his head, and kissed the cross of his sword. A thrill went through the audience. Many were there, disaffected to his person, and whom Warwick's influence alone could have roused to arms; but, at the close of an address, spirited and royal in itself, and borrowing thousand-fold effect by the voice and mien of the speaker, no

feeling but that of enthusiastic loyalty, of almost tearful admiration, was left in those steel-clad breasts.

As the king lifted on high the cross of his sword, every blade leapt from its scabbard, and glittered in the air: and the dusty banners in the hall waved, as to a mighty blast, when, amidst the rattle of armour, burst forth the universal cry—"Long live Edward IV.! Long live the king!"

The sweet countess, even amidst the excitement, kept her eyes anxiously fixed on Warwick, whose countenance, however, shaded by the black plumes of his casque, though the visor was raised, revealed nothing of his mind. Her daughters were more powerfully affected; for Isabel's intellect was not so blinded by her ambition, but that the kingliness of Edward forced itself upon her with a might and solemn weight, which crushed, for the moment, her aspiring hopes—Was *this* the man unfit to reign? *This* the man voluntarily to resign a crown? *This* the man whom George of Clarence, without fratricide, could succeed? No!—*there*, spoke the soul of the First and the Third Edward! There, shook the mane, and there, glowed the eye, of the indomitable lion of the august Plantagenets! And the same conviction, rousing softer and holier sorrow, sat on the heart of Anne: she saw, as for the first time, clearly before her, the awful foe with whom her ill-omened and beloved prince had to struggle for his throne. In contrast beside that form, in the prime of manly youth—a giant in its strength, a god in its beauty—rose the delicate shape of the melancholy boy who, afar in exile, coupled in his dreams the sceptre and the bride! By one of those mysteries which magnetism seeks to explain, in the strong intensity of her emotions, in the tremor of her shaken nerves, fear

seemed to grow prophetic. A stream as of blood rose up from the dizzy floors. The image of her young prince, bound and friendless, stood before the throne of that warrior-king. In the waving glitter of the countless swords raised on high, she saw the murderous blade against the boy-heir of Lancaster descend—descend! Her passion, her terror, at the spectre which fancy thus evoked, seized and overcame her; and ere the last hurrah sent its hollow echo to the raftered roof, she sank from her chair to the ground, hueless and insensible as the dead.

The king had not without design permitted the unwonted presence of the women in this warlike audience. Partly because he was not unaware of the ambitious spirit of Isabel, partly because he counted on the affection shown to his boyhood by the countess, who was said to have singular influence over her lord, but principally because in such a presence he trusted to avoid all discussion and all questioning, and to leave the effect of his eloquence, in which he excelled all his contemporaries, Gloucester alone excepted, single and unimpaired; and, therefore, as he rose, and returned with a majestic bend the acclamation of the warriors, his eye now turned towards the chairs where the ladies sat, and he was the first to perceive the swoon of the fair Anne.

With the tender grace that always characterised his service to women, he descended promptly from his throne, and raised the lifeless form in his stalwart arms; and Anne, as he bent over her, looked so strangely lovely, in her marble stillness, that even in that hour a sudden thrill shot through a heart always susceptible to beauty, as the harp-string to the breeze.

“It is but the heat, lady,” said he to the alarmed

countess, “and let me hope that interest which my fair kinswoman may take in the fortunes of Warwick and of York, *hitherto* linked together——”

“May they ever be so!” said Warwick, who, on seeing his daughter’s state, had advanced hastily to the dais; and, moved by the king’s words, his late speech, the evils that surrounded his throne, the gentleness shown to the beloved Anne, forgetting resentment and ceremony alike, he held out his mailed hand. The king, as he resigned Anne to her mother’s arms, grasped with soldierly frankness, and with the ready wit of the cold intellect which reigned beneath the warm manner, the hand thus extended, and holding still that iron gauntlet in his own ungloved and jewelled fingers, he advanced to the verge of the dais, to which, in the confusion occasioned by Anne’s swoon, the principal officers had crowded, and cried aloud—

“Behold! Warwick and Edward, thus hand in hand, as they stood when the clarions sounded the charge at Tooton! and that link, what swords, forged on a mortal’s anvil, can rend or sever?”

In an instant every knee there knelt; and Edward exultingly beheld, that what before had been allegiance to the earl was now only homage to the king!