

CHAPTER IX

WEDDED CONFIDENCE AND LOVE—THE EARL AND THE
PRELATE—THE PRELATE AND THE KING—SCHEMES—
WILES—AND THE BIRTH OF A DARK THOUGHT DES-
TINED TO ECLIPSE A SUN

While, preparatory to the banquet, Edward, as was then the daily classic custom, relaxed his fatigues, mental or bodily, in the hospitable bath, the archbishop sought the closet of the earl.

"Brother," said he, throwing himself with some petulance into the only chair the room, otherwise splendid, contained—"when you left me, to seek Edward in the camp of Anthony Woodville, what was the understanding between us?"

"I know of none," answered the earl, who, having doffed his armour, and dismissed his squires, leaned thoughtfully against the wall, dressed for the banquet, with the exception of the short surcoat, which lay glittering on the tabouret.

"You know of none? Reflect! Have you brought hither Edward as a guest or as a prisoner?"

The earl knit his brows—"A prisoner, archbishop?"

The prelate regarded him with a cold smile.

"Warwick, you, who would deceive no other man, now seek to deceive yourself." The earl drew back, and his hardy countenance grew a shade paler. The prelate resumed—"You have carried Edward from his camp, and severed him from his troops; you have placed him in the midst of your own followers—you have led him, chafing and resentful all the way, to this impregnable keep; and you now pause, amazed by the

grandeur of your captive; a man who leads to his home a tiger—a spider who has entangled a hornet in its web!—"

"Nay, reverend brother," said the earl calmly, "ye churchmen never know what passes in the hearts of those who feel and do not scheme. When I learned that the king had fled to the Woodvilles—that he was bent upon violating the pledge given in his name to the insurgent commons; I vowed that he should redeem my honour and his own, or that for ever I would quit his service. And here, within these walls which sheltered his childhood, I trusted, and trust still, to make one last appeal to his better reason."

"For all that, men now, and history hereafter, will consider Edward as your captive."

"To living men, my words and deeds can clear themselves; and as for history, let clerks and scholars fool themselves in the lies of parchment! He who has acted history, despises the gownsmen who sit in cloistered ease, and write about what they know not." The earl paused, and then continued—"I confess, however, that I have had a scheme. I have wished to convince the king how little his mushroom lords can bestead him in the storm; and that he holds his crown only from his barons and his people."

"That is, from the Lord Warwick!"

"Perhaps I am the personation of both seignorie and people; but I design this solely for his welfare. Ah, the gallant prince—how well he bore himself to-day!"

"Ay, when stealing all hearts from thee to him."

"And, *Vive Dieu*, I never loved him so well as when he did! Methinks it was for a day like this that I reared his youth and achieved his crown. Oh, priest—priest, thou mistakest me. I am rash, hot, haughty, hasty;

and I love not to bow my knees to a man because they call him king, if his life be vicious, and his word be false. But, could Edward be ever as to-day, then indeed should I hail a sovereign whom a baron may reverence and a soldier serve!"

Before the archbishop could reply, the door gently opened, and the countess appeared. Warwick seemed glad of the interruption; he turned quickly—"And how fares my child?"

"Recovered from her strange swoon, and ready to smile at thy return. Oh, Warwick, thou art reconciled to the king?"

"That glads thee, sister?" said the archbishop.

"Surely. Is it not for my lord's honour?"

"May he find it so!" said the prelate, and he left the room.

"My priest-brother is chafed," said the earl smiling. "Pity he was not born a trader, he would have made a shrewd hard bargain.—Verily, our priests burn the Jews out of envy! Ah, *m'amie*, how fair thou art to-day. Methinks even Isabel's cheek less blooming." And the warrior drew the lady towards him, and smoothed her hair, and tenderly kissed her brow. "My letter vexed thee, I know, for thou lovest Edward, and blamest me not for my love to him. It is true that he hath paltered with me, and that I had stern resolves, not against his crown, but to leave him to his fate, and in these halls to resign my charge. But while he spoke, and while he looked, methought I saw his mother's face, and heard his dear father's tones, and the past rushed over me, and all wrath was gone. Sonless myself, why would he not be my son?" The earl's voice trembled, and the tears stood in his dark eyes.

"Speak thus, dear lord, to Isabel, for I fear her overvaulting spirit——"

"Ah, had Isabel been his wife!" he paused and moved away. Then, as if impatient to escape the thoughts that tended to an ungracious recollection, he added—"and now, sweetheart, these slight fingers have oftentimes buckled on my mail, let them place on my breast this badge of St. George's chivalry; and, if angry thoughts return, it shall remind me that the day on which I wore it first, Richard of York said to his young Edward, 'Look to that star, boy, if ever, in cloud and trouble, thou wouldst learn what safety dwells in the heart which never knew deceit.'"

During the banquet, the king, at whose table sat only the Duke of Clarence and the earl's family, was gracious as day to all, but especially to the Lady Anne, attributing her sudden illness to some cause not unflattering to himself; her beauty, which somewhat resembled that of the queen, save that it had more advantage of expression and of youth, was precisely of the character he most admired. Even her timidity, and the reserve with which she answered him, had their charms; for, like many men, themselves of imperious nature and fiery will, he preferred even imbecility in a woman to whatever was energetic or determined; and hence perhaps his indifference to the more dazzling beauty of Isabel. After the feast, the numerous demoiselles, high-born and fair, who swelled the more than regal train of the countess, were assembled in the long gallery, which was placed in the third story of the castle and served for the principal state apartment. The dance began; but Isabel excused herself from the pavon, and the king led out the reluctant and melancholy Anne.

The proud Isabel, who had never forgiven Edward's slight to herself, resented deeply his evident admiration

of her sister, and conversed apart with the archbishop, whose subtle craft easily drew from her lips confessions of an ambition higher even than his own. He neither encouraged nor dissuaded; he thought there were things more impossible than the accession of Clarence to the throne, but he was one who never plotted,—save for himself and for the church.

As the revel waned, the prelate approached the earl, who, with that remarkable courtesy which charmed those below his rank, and contrasted with his haughtiness to his peers, had well played amongst his knights the part of host, and said, in a whisper, "Edward is in a happy mood—let us lose it not. Will you trust me to settle all differences, ere he sleep? Two proud men never can agree without a third of a gentler temper."

"You are right," said Warwick, smiling, "yet the danger is, that I should rather concede too much, than be too stubborn. But look you; all I demand is, satisfaction to mine own honour, and faith to the army I disbanded in the king's name."

"*All!*" muttered the archbishop, as he turned away, "but that *all* is everything to provoke quarrel for you, and nothing to bring power to *me!*"

The earl and the archbishop attended the king to his chamber, and after Edward was served with the parting refection, or livery, the earl said, with his most open smile—"Sire, there are yet affairs between us; whom will you confer with—me or the archbishop?"

"Oh! the archbishop, by all means, fair cousin," cried Edward, no less frankly; "for if you and I are left alone, the Saints help both of us!—when flint and steel meet, fire flies, and the house may burn."

The earl half smiled at the candour—half sighed at

the levity—of the royal answer, and silently left the room. The king, drawing round him his loose dressing-robe, threw himself upon the gorgeous coverlid of the bed, and lying at lazy length, motioned to the prelate to seat himself at the foot. The archbishop obeyed. Edward raised himself on his elbow, and, by the light of seven gigantic tapers, set in sconces of massive silver, the priest and the king gravely gazed on each other, without speaking.

At last Edward, bursting into his hale, clear, silvery laugh, said, "Confess, dear sir and cousin—confess that we are like two skilful masters of Italian fence, each fearing to lay himself open by commencing the attack."

"Certes," quoth the archbishop, "your grace overestimates my vanity, in opining that I deemed myself equal to so grand a duello. If there were dispute between us, I should only win by baring my bosom."

The king's bow-like lip curved with a slight sneer, quickly replaced by a serious and earnest expression—"Let us leave word-making, and to the point, George. Warwick is displeased because I will not abandon my wife's kindred; you, with more reason, because I have taken from your hands the chancellor's great seal—"

"For myself, I humbly answer that your grace errs. I never coveted other honours than those of the church."

"Ay," said Edward, keenly examining the young prelate's smooth face, "is it so? Yes, now I begin to comprehend thee. What offence have I given to the church? Have I suffered the law too much to sleep against the Lollards? If so, blame Warwick."

"On the contrary, sire, unlike other priests, I have

ever deemed that persecution heals no schism. Blow not dying embers. Rather do I think of late that too much severity hath helped to aid, by Lollard bows and pikes, the late rising. My lady, the queen's mother, unjustly accused of witchcraft, hath sought to clear herself, and perhaps too zealously, in exciting your grace against that invisible giant—ycleped heresy."

"Pass on," said Edward. "It is not then indifference to the ecclesia that you complain of. Is it neglect of the ecclesiastic? Ha! ha! you and I, though young, know the colours that make up the patchwork world. Archbishop, I love an easy life; if your brother and his friends will but give me *that*, let them take all else. Again, I say, to the point,—I cannot banish my lady's kindred, but I will bind your house still more to mine. I have a daughter, failing male issue, the heiress to my crown. I will betroth her to your nephew, my beloved Montagu's son. They are children yet, but their ages not unsuited. And when I return to London, young Nevile shall be Duke of Bedford, a title hitherto reserved to the royal race.* Let that be a pledge of peace between the queen's mother, bearing the same honours and the house of Nevile, to which they pass."

The cheek of the archbishop flushed with proud pleasure; he bowed his head, and Edward, ere he could answer, went on,—“Warwick is already so high that, *pardie*, I have no other step to give him, save my throne itself, and, God's truth, I would rather be Lord Warwick than King of England! But for you—listen—our only English cardinal is old and sickly—

* And indeed there was but one Yorkist duke then in England out of the royal family—viz., the young boy, Buckingham, who afterwards vainly sought to bend the Ulysses bow of Warwick against Richard III.

whenever he pass to Abraham's bosom, who but you should have the suffrage of the holy college? Thou knowest that I am somewhat in the good favour of the sovereign pontiff. Command me to the utmost. Now, George, are we friends?"

The archbishop kissed the gracious hand extended to him, and, surprised to find, as by magic, all his schemes frustrated by sudden acquiescence in the objects of them all, his voice faltered with real emotion as he gave vent to his gratitude. But abruptly he checked himself, his brow lowered, and with a bitter remembrance of his brother's plain, blunt sense of honour, he said, "Yet, alas, my liege, in all this there is nought to satisfy our stubborn host."

"By dear Saint George and my father's head!" exclaimed Edward, reddening, and starting to his feet, "what would the man have?"

"You know," answered the archbishop, "that Warwick's pride is only roused when he deems his honour harmed. Unhappily, as he thinks, by your grace's full consent, he pledged himself to the insurgents of Olney to the honourable dismissal of the lords of the Woodville race. And unless this be conceded, I fear me that all else he will reject, and the love between ye can be but hollow!"

Edward took but three strides across the chamber, and then halted opposite the archbishop, and laid both hands on his shoulders, as, looking him full in the face, he said, "Answer me frankly, am I a prisoner in these towers, or not?"

"Not, sire."

"You palter with me, priest. I have been led hither against my will. I am almost without an armed retinue. I am at the earl's mercy. This chamber

might be my grave, and this couch my bed of death."

"Holy Mother! Can you think so of Warwick? Sire, you freeze my blood."

"Well, then, if I refuse to satisfy Warwick's pride, and disdain to give up loyal servants to rebel insolence, what will Warwick do? Speak out, archbishop."

"I fear me, sire, that he will resign all office, whether of peace or war. I fear me that the goodly army now at sleep within and around these walls will vanish into air, and that your highness will stand alone amidst new men, and against the disaffection of the whole land!"

Edward's firm hand trembled. The prelate continued, with a dry, caustic smile—

"Sire, Sir Anthony Woodville, now Lord Rivers, has relieved you of all embarrassment; no doubt, my Lord Dorset and his kinsmen will be chevaliers enough to do the same. The Duchess of Bedford will but suit the decorous usage to retire awhile into privacy, to mourn her widowhood. And when a year is told, if these noble persons reappear at court, your word and the earl's will at least have been kept."

"I understand thee," said the king, half laughing; "but I have my pride as well as Warwick. To concede this point is to humble the conceder."

"I have thought how to soothe all things, and without humbling either party. Your grace's mother is dearly beloved by Warwick, and revered by all. Since your marriage she hath lived secluded from all state affairs. As so nearly akin to Warwick—so deeply interested in your grace—she is a fitting mediator in all disputes. Be they left to her to arbitrate."

"Ah! cunning prelate, thou knowest how my proud mother hates the Woodvilles—thou knowest how her judgment will decide."

"Perhaps so; but at least your grace will be spared all pain and all abasement."

"Will Warwick consent to this?"

"I trust so."

"Learn, and report to me. Enough for to-night's conference."

Edward was left alone, and his mind ran rapidly over the field of action open to him.

"I have half won the earl's army," he thought; "but it would be to lose all hold in their hearts again, if they knew that these unhappy Woodvilles were the cause of a second breach between us. Certes, the Lancastrians are making strong head! Certes, the times must be played with and appeased! And yet these poor gentlemen love me after my own fashion, and not with the bear's hug of that intolerable earl. How came the grim man by so fair a daughter? Sweet Anne! I caught her eye often fixed on me, and with a soft fear which my heart beat loud to read aright. Verily, this is the fourth week I have passed without hearing a woman's sigh! What marvel that so fair a face enamours me! Would that Warwick made her his ambassador; and yet it were all over with the Woodvilles if he did! These men know not how to manage me, and well-a-day, that task is easy eno' to women!"

He laughed gaily to himself as he thus concluded his soliloquy, and extinguished the tapers. But rest did not come to his pillow; and after tossing to and fro for some time in vain search for sleep, he rose and opened his casement to cool the air which the tapers

had overheated. In a single casement, in a broad turret, projecting from an angle in the building,—below the tower in which his chamber was placed, the king saw a solitary light burning steadily. A sight so unusual at such an hour surprised him. “Peradventure, the wily prelate,” thought he. “Cunning never sleeps.” But a second look showed him the very form that chased his slumbers. Beside the casement, which was partially open, he saw the soft profile of the Lady Anne; it was bent downwards; and what with the clear moonlight, and the lamp within her chamber, he could see distinctly that she was weeping. “Ah! Anne,” muttered the amorous king, “would that I were by to kiss away those tears!” While yet the unholy wish murmured on his lips, the lady rose. The fair hand, that seemed almost transparent in the moonlight, closed the casement; and though the light lingered for some minutes ere it left the dark walls of the castle without other sign of life than the step of the sentry, Anne was visible no more.

“Madness—madness—madness!” again murmured the king. “These Neviles are fatal to me in all ways—in hatred or in love!”

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,* 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

* Croyl. 552.