

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 flexile 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—nay, even last night; for I, too, dreamt of another, dreamt 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 refection, the embroidery frame, the closheys, 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,* accusing Richard III. of

* Grafton, 806.

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,* she consented to send her daughters to his custody, though subjected to the stain of illegitimacy, and herself only recognised 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 mount-

* 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.

ed 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 (*viz.*, 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 whom can he have seen on the borders worthy to be a prince's bride?"

"It is no sudden passion, sir, 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 bases 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 Lancas-

trians 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."

"Oh, Henry," exclaimed the king, casting his eyes towards the turret that held his captive, "well mightest thou 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 sum-

moned 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 their 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 coheiress, 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 Neviles 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 ante-room 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 recognise 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, ho! 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 hath just left me. Art thou jealous?"

"Happily, your highness sees no beauty in locks 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 gate-