

fall!—O mercy, mercy! do not let him perish of his wounds or by the rifler's knife, even though a rebel!"

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

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

The cry reached the tymbesteres, and Graul rose from a body from which she had extracted a few coins smeared with blood, and darted to the spot; and so, as Adam raised his face from contemplating the dead, whose last moments he had sought to soothe, the Alecto of the battle-field stood before him, her knife bare in her gory hand. Red Grisell, who had just left (with a spurn of wrath—for the pouch was empty) the corpse of a soldier, round whose neck she had twined her hot clasp the day before, sprang towards Sibyll; the rest of the sisterhood flocked to the place, and laughed in glee as they beheld their unexpected prey.

The danger was horrible and imminent; no pity was seen in those savage eyes. The wanderers prepared for death—when, suddenly, torches flashed over the ground. A cry was heard—"See, the riflers of the dead!" Armed men bounded forward, and the startled wretches uttered a shrill unearthly scream, and fled from the spot, leaping over the carcasses, and doubling and winding, till they had vanished into the darkness of the wood.

"Provost!" said a commanding voice, "hang me up those sentinels at daybreak!"

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

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

CHAPTER VI

THE SUBTLE CRAFT OF RICHARD OF GLOUCESTER

It was some weeks after the defeat of Sir Geoffrey Gates, and Edward was at Shene, with his gay court. Reclined at length within a pavilion placed before a cool fountain, in the royal gardens, and surrounded by his favourites, the king listened indolently to the music of his minstrels, and sleeked the plumage of his favourite falcon, perched upon his wrist. And scarcely would it have been possible to recognise in that lazy voluptuary the dauntless soldier, before whose lance, as deer before the hound, had so lately fled, at bloody Erpingham, the chivalry of the Lancastrian Rose; but remote from the pavilion, and in one of the deserted

bowling alleys, Prince Richard and Lord Montagu walked apart, in earnest conversation. The last of these noble personages had remained inactive during the disturbances, and Edward had not seemed to entertain any suspicion of his participation in the anger and revenge of Warwick. The king took from him, it is true, the lands and earldom of Northumberland, and restored them to the Percy, but he had accompanied this act with gracious excuses, alleging the necessity of conciliating the head of an illustrious house, which had formally entered into allegiance to the dynasty of York, and bestowed upon his early favourite, in compensation, the dignity of marquis.* The politic king, in thus depriving Montagu of the wealth and the retainers of the Percy, reduced him, as a younger brother, to a comparative poverty and insignificance, which left him dependent on Edward's favour, and deprived him, as he thought, of the power of active mischief; at the same time, more than ever, he insisted on Montagu's society, and summoning his attendance at the court, kept his movements in watchful surveillance.

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

* Montagu said, bitterly, of this new dignity, "He takes from me the Earldom and domains of Northumberland, and makes me a Marquis, with a pie's nest to maintain it withal."—Stowe, Edw. IV.—Warkworth Chronicle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I mean," renewed Montagu, "that in my brother's flight, his retainers were taken by surprise. In vain the king would confiscate his lands—he cannot confiscate men's hearts. If Warwick to-morrow set his armed heel upon the soil, trowest thou, sagacious and clear-judging prince, that the strife which would follow would be but another field of Losecote?*" Thou

* The battle of Erpingham, so popularly called, in contempt of the rebellious runaways.

hast heard of the honours with which King Louis has received the earl. Will that king grudge him ships and moneys? And meanwhile, thinkest thou that his favourers sleep?"

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

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

"*Almost!*" repeated Richard, smiling.

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

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

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

Richard's countenance for a moment evinced disappointment; but he said drily, "Then Warwick would propose that Clarence should be king?—and the great barons, and the honest burghers, and the sturdy yeomen, would, you think, not stand aghast at the manifesto which declares not that the dynasty of York is corrupt and faulty, but that the younger son should depose the elder—that younger son, mark me! not only unknown in war, and green in council, but gay, giddy, vacillating—not subtle of wit, and resolute of deed, as he who *so* aspires should be!—Montagu—a vain dream!"—Richard paused, and then resumed, in a low tone, as to himself—"Oh! not so—not so are kings cozened from their thrones—a pretext must blind men—say they are illegitimate—say they are too young—too feeble—too anything—glide into their place—and then, not war—not war. You *slay* them not—they *disappear!*" The duke's face, as he muttered, took a sinister and a dark expression—his eyes seemed to gaze on space. Suddenly recovering himself as from a reverie, he turned, with his wonted sleek

* Hall.

and gracious aspect, to the startled Montagu, and said, "I was but quoting from Italian history, good my lord—wise lore, but terrible, and murderous. Return we to the point. Thou seest Clarence could not reign, and as well," added the prince, with a slight sigh—"as well or better (for, without vanity, I have more of a king's metal in me), might I—even I—aspire to my brother's crown!" Here he paused, and glanced rapidly and keenly at the marquis; but whether or not in these words he had sought to sound Montagu, and that glance sufficed to show him it were bootless or dangerous to speak more plainly, he resumed with an altered voice—"Enough of this: Warwick will discover the idleness of such design; and if he land, his trumpets must ring to a more kindling measure. John Montagu, thinkest thou that Margaret of Anjou and the Lancastrians will not rather win thy brother to their side? *There* is the true danger to Edward—none elsewhere."

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

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

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

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

"Forgive me, my cousin," said Richard, meekly; "my love to Anne transported me too far. Lord Oxford's words, as you report them, had conjured up a rival, and—but enough of this.—And now," added the prince, gravely, and with a steadiness of voice and manner that gave a certain majesty to his small stature—"now, as thou hast spoken openly, openly also will I reply. I feel the wrong to the Lady Anne as to myself; deeply, burningly, and lastingly, will it live in my mind; it may be, sooner or later, to rise to gloomy deeds, even against Edward and Edward's blood. But no, I have the king's solemn protestations of repentance; his guilty passion has burned into ashes, and he now sighs—gay Edward—for a lighter fere. I cannot join with Clarence, less can I join with the Lancastrians. My birth makes me the prop of the throne of

York—to guard it as a heritage (who knows) that may descend to mine—nay, to me! And, mark me well! if Warwick attempt a war of fratricide, he is lost; if, on the other hand, he can submit himself to the hands of Margaret, stained with his father's gore, the success of an hour will close in the humiliation of a life. There is a third way left, and that way thou hast piously and wisely shown. Let him, like me, resign revenge, and, not exacting a confession and a cry of *peccavi*, which no king, much less King Edward the Plantagenet, can whimper forth—let him accept such overtures as his liege can make. His titles and castles shall be restored, equal possessions to those thou hast lost assigned to thee, and all my guerdon (if I can so negotiate) as all my ambition,—his daughter's hand. Muse on this, and for the peace and weal of the realm so limit all thy schemes, my lord and cousin!”

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

“Shame on my ripe manhood and lore of life,” muttered Montagu, enraged against himself and deeply mortified. “How sentence by sentence, and step by step yon crafty pigmy led me on, till all our projects—all our fears and hopes are revealed to him, who but views them as a foe. Anne betrothed to one, who even in fiery youth can thus beguile and dupe! Warwick decoyed hither upon fair words, at the will of one whom Italy (boy, there thou didst forget thy fence of cunning!) has taught how the great are slain not, but *disappear!* No, even this defeat instructs me now. But right—right! the reign of Clarence is impossible, and that of Lancaster is ill-omened and portentous; and after all, my son stands nearer to the throne than

any subject, in his alliance with the Lady Elizabeth. Would to heaven the king could yet—But out on me! this is no hour for musing on mine own aggrandisement; rather let me fly at once and warn Oxford—imperilled by my imprudence—against that dark eye which hath set watch upon his life.”

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

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

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

And regarding “the brother-marquis” with a stately eye that silenced and awed retort, the long-descended Montagu passed the courtiers, and rode slowly on till out of sight of the palace; he then pushed into a hand

gallop, and halted not till he had reached London, and gained the house in which, then, dwelt the Earl of Oxford, the most powerful of all the Lancastrian nobles not in exile, and who had hitherto temporised with the reigning house.

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

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

"Now Heaven be praised!" cried the king, extending to Richard the letter which communicated the flight of the disaffected lords. "We have two enemies the less in our roialme, and many a barony the more to confiscate to our kingly wants. Ha—ha! these Lancastrians only serve to enrich us. Frowning still, Richard; smile, boy!"

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

"Gave it me! an error, Richard! that crown was at once the heritage of my own birth, and the achievement of my own sword. But were it as you say, it is not in a king's nature to bear the presence of a power more formidable than his own—to submit to a voice

that commands rather than counsels; and the happiest chance that ever befel me is the exile of this earl. How, after what hath chanced, can I ever see his face again without humiliation, or he mine without resentment?"

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

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

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

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

"Thou hast no right to taunt or to suspect me, my

liege," returned Richard, with a quiver in his lip. "Thou hast included me in thy meditated wrong to Warwick; and had that wrong been done——"

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

"Bluntly, yes!" exclaimed Richard, almost fiercely, and playing with his dagger. "But" (he added, with a sudden change of voice), "I understand and know thee better than the earl did or could. I know what in thee is but thoughtless impulse, haste of passion, the habit kings form of forgetting all things save the love or hate, the desire or anger, of a moment. Thou hast told me thyself, and with tears, of thy offence; thou hast pardoned my boy's burst of anger; I have pardoned thy evil thought; thou hast told me thyself, that another face has succeeded to the brief empire of Anne's blue eye, and hast further pledged me thy kingly word, that if I can yet compass the hand of a cousin, dear to me from childhood, thou wilt confirm the union."

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

Richard bowed low in order to conceal the expression of his face, and went on without further notice of the explanation.

"And all this considered, Edward, I swear, by St. Paul, the holiest saint to thoughtful men, and by St. George, the noblest patron to high-born warriors, that thy crown and thine honour are as dear to me as if they were mine own. Whatever sins Richard of Gloucester may live to harbour and repent, no man shall ever say of him that he was a recreant to the honour of his coun-

try,* or slow to defend the rights of his ancestors from the treason of a vassal or the sword of a foreign foe. Therefore, I say again, if thou reject my honest counsels—if thou suffer Warwick to unite with Lancaster and France—if the ships of Louis bear to your shores, an enemy, the might of whom your reckless daring undervalues, foremost in the field in battle, nearest to your side in exile, shall Richard Plantagenet be found!"

These words, being uttered with sincerity, and conveying a promise never forfeited, were more impressive than the subtlest eloquence the wily and accomplished Gloucester ever employed as the cloak to guile, and they so affected Edward, that he threw his arms around his brother; and after one of those bursts of emotion which were frequent in one whose feelings were never deep and lasting, but easily aroused and warmly spoken, he declared himself ready to listen to and adopt all means which Richard's art could suggest for the better maintenance of their common weal and interests.

And then, with that wondrous, if somewhat too restless and over-refining energy which belonged to him, Richard rapidly detailed the scheme of his profound and dissimulating policy. His keen and intuitive insight into human nature had shown him the stern necessity which, against their very will, must unite Warwick with Margaret of Anjou. His conversation with Montagu had left no doubt of that peril on his penetrating mind. He foresaw that this union might be made durable and sacred by the marriage of Anne

* So Lord Bacon observes of Richard, with that discrimination, even in the strongest censure, of which profound judges of mankind are alone capable, that he was "a king jealous of the honour of the English nation."

and Prince Edward; and to defeat this alliance was his first object, partly through Clarence, partly through Margaret herself. A gentlewoman in the Duchess of Clarence's train had been arrested on the point of embarking to join her mistress. Richard had already seen and conferred with this lady, whose ambition, duplicity, and talent for intrigue, were known to him. Having secured her by promises of the most lavish dignities and rewards, he proposed that she should be permitted to join the duchess with secret messages to Isabel and the duke, warning them both that Warwick and Margaret would forget their past feud in present sympathy, and that the rebellion against King Edward, instead of placing them on the throne, would humble them to be subordinates and aliens to the real profitters—the Lancastrians.* He foresaw what effect these warnings would have upon the vain duke and the ambitious Isabel, whose character was known to him from childhood. He startled the king by insisting upon sending, at the same time, a trusty diplomatist to Margaret of Anjou, proffering to give the Princess Elizabeth (betrothed to Lord Montagu's son) to the young Prince Edward.† Thus, if the king, who had, as yet, no son, were to die, Margaret's son, in right of his wife, as well as in that of his own descent, would peaceably ascend the throne. "Need I say that I mean not this in sad and serious earnest," observed Richard, interrupting the astonished king—"I mean it but to amuse the Anjouite, and to deafen her ears to any overtures from Warwick. If she listen, we gain time—that time will inevitably renew irreconcilable quarrel between herself and the earl. His hot temper and desire

* Comines, 3, c. 5; Hall; Hollinshed.

† "Original Letters from Harleian MSS."—Edited by Sir H. Ellis (Second Series).

of revenge will not brook delay. He will land, unsupported by Margaret and her partisans, and without any fixed principle of action which can strengthen force by opinion."

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

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

CHAPTER VII

WARWICK AND HIS FAMILY IN EXILE

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

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