

"*Pasque Dieu!* Vex not my kinswoman—if she prefer a convent to a throne, cross not the holy choice!" said the wily Louis, with a mocking irony on his pinched lips.

The prince alone spoke not, but stood proudly on the same spot, gazing on the earl, as he slowly moved to the door.

"Oh, Edward—Edward, my son!" exclaimed the unhappy Margaret, "if for thy sake—for thine—I must make the past a blank—speak thou for me!"

"I have spoken," said the prince, gently, "and thou didst chide me, noble mother; yet I spoke, methinks, as Henry V. had done, if of a mighty enemy he had had the power to make a noble friend."

A short convulsive sob was heard from the throne chair; and as suddenly as it burst, it ceased. Queen Margaret rose—not a trace of that stormy emotion upon the grand and marble beauty of her face. Her voice, unnaturally calm, arrested the steps of the departing earl.

"Lord Warwick, defend this boy—restore his rights—release his sainted father—and for years of anguish and of exile, Margaret of Anjou forgives the champion of her son!"

In an instant Prince Edward was again by the earl's side—a moment more, and the earl's proud knee bent in homage to the queen—joyful tears were in the eyes of her friends and kindred—a triumphant smile on the lips of Louis,—and Margaret's face, terrible in its stony and locked repose, was raised above, as if asking the All-Merciful, pardon—for the pardon which the human sinner had bestowed!*

* Ellis's "Original Letters from the Harleian MSS.," letter 42.

CHAPTER X

LOVE AND MARRIAGE—DOUBTS OF CONSCIENCE—DOMESTIC JEALOUSY—AND HOUSEHOLD TREASON

The events that followed this tempestuous interview were such as the position of the parties necessarily compelled. The craft of Louis—the energy and love of Prince Edward—the representations of all her kindred and friends, conquered, though not without repeated struggles, Margaret's repugnance to a nearer union between Warwick and her son. The earl did not deign to appear personally in this matter. He left it, as became him, to Louis and the prince, and finally received from them the proposals, which ratified the league, and consummated the schemes of his revenge.

Upon the Very Cross* in St. Mary's Church of Angers, Lord Warwick swore without change to hold the party of King Henry. Before the same sacred symbol, King Louis and his brother, Duke of Guienne, robed in canvas, swore to sustain to their utmost the Earl of Warwick in behalf of King Henry; and Margaret recorded her oath "to treat the earl as true and faithful, and never for deeds past to make him any reproach."

Then were signed the articles of marriage between Prince Edward and the Lady Anne—the latter to remain with Margaret, but the marriage not to be consummated "till Lord Warwick had entered England

* Miss Strickland observes upon this interview—"It does not appear that Warwick mentioned the execution of his father, the Earl of Salisbury, which is almost a confirmation of the statements of those historians who deny that he was beheaded by Margaret."

and regained the realm, or most part, for King Henry"—a condition which pleased the earl, who desired to award his beloved daughter no less a dowry than a crown.

An article far more important than all to the safety of the earl, and to the permanent success of the enterprise, was one that virtually took from the fierce and unpopular Margaret the reins of government, by constituting Prince Edward (whose qualities endeared him more and more to Warwick, and were such as promised to command the respect and love of the people) sole regent of all the realm, upon attaining his majority. For the Duke of Clarence were reserved all the lands and dignities of the duchy of York, the right to the succession of the throne to him and his posterity—failing male heirs to the Prince of Wales—with a private pledge of the vice-royalty of Ireland.

Margaret had attached to her consent one condition highly obnoxious to her high-spirited son, and to which he was only reconciled by the arguments of Warwick: she stipulated that he should not accompany the earl to England, nor appear there till his father was proclaimed king. In this, no doubt, she was guided by maternal fears and by some undeclared suspicion, either of the good faith of Warwick, or of his means to raise a sufficient army to fulfil his promise. The brave prince wished to be himself foremost in the battles fought in his right and for his cause. But the earl contended, to the surprise and joy of Margaret, that it best behoved the prince's interests to enter England without one enemy in the field, leaving others to clear his path, free himself from all the personal hate of hostile factions, and without a drop of blood upon the sword of one heralded and announced as the peace-

maker and impartial reconciler of all feuds. So then (these high conditions settled), in the presence of the Kings René and Louis, of the Earl and Countess of Warwick, and in solemn state, at Amboise, Edward of Lancaster plighted his marriage troth to his beloved and loving Anne.

It was deep night—and high revel in the Palace of Amboise crowned the ceremonies of that memorable day. The Earl of Warwick stood alone in the same chamber in which he had first discovered the secret of the young Lancastrian. From the brilliant company, assembled in the halls of state, he had stolen unperceived away, for his great heart was full to overflowing. The part he had played for many days was over, and with it the excitement and the fever. His schemes were crowned;—the Lancastrians were won to his revenge;—the king's heir was the betrothed of his favourite child;—and the hour was visible in the distance, when, by the retribution most to be desired, the father's hand should lead that child to the throne of him who would have degraded her to the dust. If victory awaited his sanguine hopes, as father to his future queen, the dignity and power of the earl became greater in the court of Lancaster than, even in his palmiest day, amidst the minions of ungrateful York; the sire of two lines—if Anne's posterity should fail, the crown would pass to the sons of Isabel,—in either case, from him (if successful in his invasion) would descend the royalty of England. Ambition, pride, revenge, might well exult in viewing the future, as mortal wisdom could discern it. The house of Nevile never seemed brightened by a more glorious star: and yet the earl was heavy and sad at heart. However he had concealed it from the eyes of others, the haughty ire of Margaret must have

galled him in his deepest soul. And even, as he had that day contemplated the holy happiness in the face of Anne, a sharp pang had shot through his breast. Were those the witnesses of fair-omened spousailles? How different from the hearty greeting of his warrior-friends, was the measured courtesy of foes, who had felt and fled before his sword? If aught chanced to him, in the hazard of the field, what thought for his child could ever speak in pity from the hard and scornful eyes of the imperious Anjouite!

The mist which till then had clouded his mind, or left visible to his gaze but one stern idea of retribution, melted into air. He beheld the fearful crisis to which his life had passed—he had reached the eminence to mourn the happy gardens left behind. Gone, for ever gone, the old endearing friendships—the sweet and manly remembrances of brave companionship and early love! Who among those who had confronted war by his side, for the house of York, would hasten to clasp his hand and hail his coming, as the captain of hated Lancaster? True, could he bow his honour to proclaim the true cause of his desertion, the heart of every father would beat in sympathy with his; but less than ever could the tale that vindicated his name be told. How stoop to invoke malignant pity to the insult offered to a future queen? Dark in his grave must rest the secret no words could syllable, save by such vague and mysterious hint and comment as pass from baseless gossip into dubious history.* True, that in his change of party he was not, like Julian of Spain, an apostate to his native land. He did not meditate the

* Hall well explains the mystery which wrapped the king's insult to a female of the House of Warwick, by the simple sentence, "the certainty was not, for both their honours, openly known!"

subversion of his country by the foreign foe, it was but the substitution of one English monarch for another—a virtuous prince for a false and a sanguinary king. True, that the change from rose to rose had been so common amongst the greatest and the bravest, that even the most rigid could scarcely censure what the age itself had sanctioned. But what other man of his stormy day had been so conspicuous in the downfall of those he was now as conspicuously to raise? What other man had Richard of York taken so dearly to his heart—to what other man had the august father said—"Protect my sons?" Before him seemed literally to rise the phantom of that honoured prince, and with clay cold lips to ask—"Art thou, of all the world, the doomsman of my first-born?" A groan escaped the breast of the self-tormentor, he fell on his knees and prayed—"O, pardon, thou All-seeing!—plead for me, Divine Mother! if in this I have darkly erred, taking my *heart* for my *conscience*, and mindful only of a selfish wrong! Oh, surely, no! Had Richard of York himself lived to know what I have suffered from his unworthy son—causeless insult, broken faith, public and unabashed dishonour:—yea, pardoning, serving, loving on through all, till, at the last, nothing less than the foulest taint that can light upon 'scutcheon and name was the cold, premeditated reward for untired devotion—surely, surely, Richard himself had said—'Thy honour, at last forbids all pardon!'"

Then, in that rapidity with which the human heart, once seizing upon self-excuse, reviews, one after one, the fair apologies, the earl passed from the injury to himself to the mal-government of his land, and muttered over the thousand instances of cruelty and misrule which rose to his remembrance—forgetting, alas,

or steeling himself to the memory, that till Edward's vices had assailed his own hearth and honour, he had been contented with lamenting them,—he had not ventured to chastise. At length, calm and self-acquitted, he rose from his self-confession, and leaning by the open casement, drank in the reviving and gentle balm of the summer air. The state apartments he had left, formed, as we have before observed, an angle to the wing in which the chamber he had now retired to was placed. They were brilliantly illumined—their windows open to admit the fresh, soft breeze of night,—and he saw, as if by daylight, distinct and gorgeous, in their gay dresses, the many revellers within. But one group caught and riveted his eye. Close by the centre window he recognised his gentle Anne, with downcast looks; he almost fancied he saw her blush, as her young bridegroom, young and beautiful as herself, whispered love's flatteries in her ear. He saw farther on, but yet near, his own sweet countess, and muttered—"After twenty years of marriage, may Anne be as dear to him as *thou* art now to me!" And still he saw, or deemed he saw, his lady's eye, after resting with tender happiness on the young pair, rove wistfully around, as if missing and searching for her partner in her mother's joy. But what form sweeps by with so haughty a majesty, then pauses by the betrothed, addresses them not, but seems to regard them with so fixed a watch? He knew by her ducal diadem, by the baudekin colours of her robe, by her unmistakable air of pride, his daughter Isabel. He did not distinguish the expression of her countenance, but an ominous thrill passed through his heart; for the *attitude* itself had an expression, and not that of a sister's sympathy and love. He turned away his face

with an unquiet recollection of the altered mood of his discontented daughter. He looked again: the duchess had passed on—lost amidst the confused splendour of the revel. And high and rich swelled the merry music that invited to the stately pavon. He gazed still: his lady had left her place, the lovers, too, had vanished, and where they had stood, stood now, in close conference, his ancient enemies, Exeter and Somerset. The sudden change, from objects of love to those associated with hate, had something which touched one of those superstitions to which, in all ages, the heart, when deeply stirred, is weakly sensitive. And again, forgetful of the revel, the earl turned to the serener landscape of the grove and the moonlit green-sward, and mused and mused, till a soft arm thrown round him woke his reverie. For this had his lady left the revel. Divining, by the instinct born of love, the gloom of her husband, she had stolen from pomp and pleasure to his side.

"Ah! wherefore wouldst thou rob me," said the countess, "of one hour of thy presence, since so few hours remain—since when the sun, that succeeds the morrow's, shines upon these walls, the night of thine absence will have closed upon me?"

"And if that thought of parting, sad to me as thee, suffice not, *belle amie*, to dim the revel," answered the earl, "weetest thou not how ill the grave and solemn thoughts of one who sees before him the emprise that would change the dynasty of a realm, can suit with the careless dance and the wanton music? But, not at that moment did I think of those mightier cares; my thoughts were nearer home. Hast thou noted, sweet wife, the silent gloom, the clouded brow of Isabel, since she learned that Anne was to be the bride of the heir of Lancaster?"

The mother suppressed a sigh. "We must pardon, or glance lightly over, the mood of one who loves her lord, and mourns for his baffled hopes! Well-a-day! I grieve that she admits not even me to her confidence. Ever with the favourite lady who lately joined her train—methinks, that new friend gives less holy counsels than a mother!"

"Ha! and yet what counsels can Isabel listen to from a comparative stranger? Even if Edward, or rather his cunning Elizabeth, had suborned this waiting-woman, our daughter never could hearken, even in an hour of anger, to the message from our dishonourer and our foe."

"Nay, but a flatterer often fosters, by praising the erring thought. Isabel hath something, dear lord, of thy high heart and courage, and ever from childhood, her vaulting spirit, her very character of stately beauty, have given her a conviction of destiny and power loftier than those reserved for our gentle Anne. Let us trust to time and forbearance, and hope that the affection of the generous sister will subdue the jealousy of the disappointed princess."

"Pray Heaven, indeed, that it so prove! Isabel's ascendancy over Clarence is great, and might be dangerous. Would that she consented to remain in France with thee and Anne! Her lord, at least, it seems I have convinced and satisfied. Pleased at the vast fortunes before him, the toys of vice-regal power, his lighter nature reconciles itself to the loss of a crown, which, I fear, it could never have upheld. For the more I have read his qualities in our household intimacy, the more it seems that I could scarcely have justified the imposing on England a king not worthy of so great a people. He is young yet, but how dif-

ferent the youth of Lancastrian Edward? In *him* what earnest and manly spirit! What heaven-born views of the duties of a king! Oh, if there be a sin in the passion that hath urged me on, let me, and me alone, atone—and may I be at least the instrument to give to England a prince whose virtues shall compensate for all!"

While yet the last word trembled upon the earl's lips, a light flashed along the floors, hitherto illumined but by the stars and the full moon. And presently Isabel, in conference with the lady whom her mother had referred to, passed into the room, on her way to her private chamber. The countenance of this female diplomatist, whose talent for intrigue Philip de Comines * has commemorated, but whose name, happily for her memory, History has concealed, was soft and winning in its expression, to the ordinary glance, though the sharpness of the features, the thin compression of the lips, and the harsh dry redness of the hair, corresponded with the attributes which modern physiognomical science truly or erringly assigns to a wily and treacherous character. She bore a light in her hand, and its rays shone full on the disturbed and agitated face of the duchess. Isabel perceived at once the forms of her parents, and stopped short in some whispered conversation, and uttered a cry almost of dismay.

"Thou leavest the revel betimes, fair daughter," said the earl, examining her countenance with an eye somewhat stern.

"My lady," said the confidant, with a lowly reverence, "was anxious for her babe."

"Thy lady, good waiting-wench," said Warwick,

* Comines, iii. 5; Hall, Lingard, Hume, &c.

"needs not thy tongue to address her father. Pass on."

The gentlewoman bit her lips, but obeyed, and quitted the room. The earl approached and took Isabel's hand—it was cold as stone.

"My child," said he, tenderly, "thou dost well to retire to rest—of late thy cheek hath lost its bloom. But just now, for many causes, I was wishing thee not to brave our perilous return to England; and now, I know not whether it would make me the more uneasy, to fear for thy health if absent or thy safety if with me!"

"My lord," replied Isabel, coldly, "my duty calls me to my husband's side, and the more, since now it seems he dares the battle, but reaps not its rewards! Let Edward and Anne rest here in safety—Clarence and Isabel go to achieve the diadem and orb for others!"

"Be not bitter with thy father, girl—be not envious of thy sister!" said the earl, in grave rebuke; then softening his tone, he added, "The women of a noble house should have no ambition of their own—their glory and their honour they should leave, un murmuring, in the hands of men! Mourn not if thy sister mounts the throne of him who would have branded the very name to which thou and she were born!"

"I have made no reproach, my lord. Forgive me, I pray you, if I now retire; I am sore weary, and would fain have strength and health not to be a burden to you when you depart."

The duchess bowed with proud submission, and moved on.

"Beware!" said the earl, in a low voice.

"Beware!—and of what?" said Isabel, startled.

"Of thine own heart, Isabel. Ay, go to thine infant's couch, ere thou seek thine own, and, before the sleep of Innocence, calm thyself back to Womanhood."

The duchess raised her head quickly, but habitual awe of her father checked the angry answer; and kissing, with formal reverence, the hand the countess extended to her, she left the room. She gained the chamber in which was the cradle of her son, gorgeously canopied with silks, inwrought with the blazoned arms of royal Clarence;—and beside the cradle sat the confidant.

The duchess drew aside the drapery, and contemplated the rosy face of the infant slumberer.

Then, turning to her confidant, she said—

"Three months since, and I hoped my firstborn would be a king! Away with those vain mockeries of royal birth! How suit they the destined vassal of the abhorred Lancastrian?"

"Sweet lady," said the confidant, "did I not warn thee from the first, that this alliance, to the injury of my lord duke and this dear boy, was already imminent? I had hoped thou mightst have prevailed with the earl!"

"He heeds me not—he cares not for me!" exclaimed Isabel; "his whole love is for Anne—Anne, who, without energy and pride, I scarcely have looked on as my equal! And now, to my younger sister, I must bow my knee—pleased if she deign to bid me hold the skirt of her queenly robe! Never—no, never!"

"Calm thyself; the courier must part this night. My Lord of Clarence is already in his chamber; he waits but thine assent to write to Edward, that he rejects not his loving messages."

The duchess walked to and fro, in great disorder.
 "But to be thus secret and false to my father?"

"Doth he merit that thou shouldst sacrifice thy child to him? Reflect!—the king has no son! The English barons acknowledge not in girls a sovereign;* and, with Edward on the throne, thy son is heir-presumptive. Little chance that a male heir shall now be born to Queen Elizabeth, while from Anne and her bridegroom, a long line may spring. Besides, no matter what parchment treaties may ordain, how can Clarence and his offspring ever be regarded by a Lancastrian king but as enemies to feed the prison or the block, when some false invention gives the seemly pretext for extirpating the lawful race."

"Cease—cease—cease!" cried Isabel, in terrible struggles with herself.

"Lady, the hour presses! And, reflect, a few lines are but words, to be confirmed or retracted as occasion suits! If Lord Warwick succeed, and King Edward lose his crown, ye can shape as ye best may your conduct to the time. But if the earl lose the day—if again he be driven into exile—a few words now release you and yours from everlasting banishment; restore your boy to his natural heritage; deliver you from the insolence of the Anjouite, who, methinks, even dared this very day to taunt your highness——"

"She did—she did! Oh that my father had been by to hear! She bade me stand aside (that Anne might pass)—'not for the younger daughter of Lord Warwick, but for the lady admitted into the royalty

* Miss Strickland (Life of Elizabeth of York) remarks, "How much Norman prejudice in favour of Salic law had corrupted the common, or constitutional law of England, regarding this succession." The remark involves a controversy.

of Lancaster!' Elizabeth Woodville, at least, never dared this insolence!"

"And this Margaret, the Duke of Clarence is to place on the throne which your child yonder might otherwise aspire to mount!"

Isabel clasped her hands in mute passion.

"Hark!" said the confidant, throwing open the door.—

And along the corridor came, in measured pomp, a stately procession, the chamberlain in front, announcing "Her Highness the Princess of Wales;" and Louis XI., leading the virgin bride (wife but in name and honour, till her dowry of a kingdom was made secure) to her gentle rest. The ceremonial pomp, the regal homage that attended the younger sister thus raised above herself, completed in Isabel's jealous heart the triumph of the Tempter. Her face settled into hard resolve, and she passed at once from the chamber into one near at hand, where the Duke of Clarence sat alone, the rich wines of the livery, not untasted, before him, and the ink yet wet upon a scroll he had just indited.

He turned his irresolute countenance to Isabel as she bent over him and read the letter. It was to Edward; and after briefly warning him of the meditated invasion, significantly added—"and if I may seem to share this emprise, which, *here and alone*, I cannot resist, thou shalt find me still, when the moment comes, thy affectionate brother and loyal subject."

"Well, Isabel," said the duke, "thou knowest I have delayed this, till the last hour, to please thee; for verily, lady mine, thy will is my sweetest law. But now, if thy heart misgives thee——"

"It does—it does!" exclaimed the duchess, bursting into tears.

"If thy heart misgives thee," continued Clarence, who with all his weakness had much of the duplicity of his brothers, "why, let it pass. Slavery to scornful Margaret—vassalage to thy sister's spouse—triumph to the House which both thou and I were taught from childhood to deem accursed,—why welcome all! so that Isabel does not weep, and our boy reproach us not in the days to come!"

For an answer, Isabel, who had seized the letter, let it drop on the table, pushed it, with averted face, towards the duke, and turned back to the cradle of her child, whom she woke with her sobs, and who wailed its shrill reply in infant petulance and terror,—snatched from its slumber to the arms of the remorseful mother.

A smile of half contemptuous joy passed over the thin lips of the she-Judas, and, without speaking, she took her way to Clarence. He had sealed and bound his letter, first adding these words—"My lady and duchess, whatever her kin, has seen this letter, and approves it, for she is more a friend to York than to the earl, now he has turned Lancastrian;" and placed it in a small iron coffer.

He gave the coffer curiously clasped and locked, to the gentlewoman, with a significant glance—"Be quick, or she repents! The courier waits!—his steed saddled! The instant you give it, he departs—he hath his permit to pass the gates."

"All is prepared; ere the clock strike, he is on his way."

The confidant vanished—the duke sank in his chair, and rubbed his hands.

"Oho! father-in-law, thou deemest me too dull for a crown. I am not dull enough for thy tool. I have

had the wit, at least, to deceive thee, and to hide resentment beneath a smiling brow! Dullard *thou*, to believe aught less than the sovereignty of England could have bribed Clarence to thy cause!" He turned to the table and complacently drained his goblet.

Suddenly, haggard and pale as a spectre, Isabel stood before him.

"I was mad—mad, George! The letter! the letter—it must not go!"

At that moment the clock struck.

"*Bel enfant*," said the duke, "it is too late."