

BOOK X

THE RETURN OF THE KING-MAKER

CHAPTER I

THE MAID'S HOPE, THE COURTIER'S LOVE, AND THE SAGE'S COMFORT

Fair are thy fields, O England; fair the rural farm and the orchards in which the blossoms have ripened into laughing fruits; and fairer than all, O England, the faces of thy soft-eyed daughters.

From the field where Sibyll and her father had wandered amidst the dead, the dismal witnesses of war had vanished; and over the green pastures roved the gentle flocks. And the farm to which Hastings had led the wanderers looked upon that peaceful field through its leafy screen; and there father and daughter had found a home.

It was a lovely summer evening, and Sibyll put aside the broidery-frame, at which, for the last hour, she had *not* worked; and gliding to the lattice, looked wistfully along the winding lane. The room was in the upper story, and was decorated with a care which the exterior of the house little promised, and which almost approached to elegance. The fresh green rushes that strewed the floor were intermingled with dried wild thyme and other fragrant herbs. The bare walls were hung with serge of a bright and cheerful blue; a rich

carpet de cuir covered the oak table, on which lay musical instruments, curiously inlaid, with a few MSS., chiefly of English and Provençal poetry. The tabour-ets were covered with cushions of Norwich worsted, in gay colours. All was simple, it is true, yet all betokened a comfort—nay, a refinement, an evidence of wealth, very rare in the houses even of the second order of nobility.

As Sibyll gazed, her face suddenly brightened; she uttered a joyous cry—hurried from the room—descended the stairs, and passed her father, who was seated without the porch, and seemingly plunged in one of his most abstracted reveries. She kissed his brow—(he heeded her not)—bounded with light step over the sward of the orchard, and pausing by a wicket gate, listened with throbbing heart, to the advancing sound of a horse's hoofs; nearer came the sound, and nearer. A cavalier appeared in sight, sprang from his saddle, and, leaving his palfrey to find his way to the well-known stable, sprang lightly over the little gate.

“And thou hast watched for me, Sibyll?”

The girl blushing withdrew from the eager embrace, and said, touchingly—“My heart watcheth for thee alway. Oh, shall I thank or chide thee for so much care! Thou wilt see how thy craftsmen have changed the rugged homestead into the daintiest bower!”

“Alas! my Sibyll! would that it were worthier of thy beauty, and our mutual troth! Blessings on thy trust and sweet patience; may the day soon come when I may lead thee to a nobler home; and hear knight and baron envy the bride of Hastings.”

“My own lord!” said Sibyll, with grateful tears in confiding eyes; but, after a pause, she added, timidly—“Does the king still bear so stern a memory against so humble a subject?”

"The king is more wroth than before, since tidings of Lord Warwick's restless machinations in France have soured his temper. He cannot hear thy name without threats against thy father as a secret adherent of Lancaster, and accuseth thee of witching his chamberlain,—as, in truth, thou hast. The Duchess of Bedford is more than ever under the influence of Friar Bungey, to whose spells and charms, and not to our good swords, she ascribes the marvellous flight of Warwick and the dispersion of our foes; and the friar, methinks, has fostered, and yet feeds Edward's suspicions of thy harmless father. The king chides himself for having suffered poor Warner to depart unscathed, and even recalls the disastrous adventure of the mechanical, and swears that, from the first, thy father was in treasonable conspiracy with Margaret. Nay, sure I am, that if I dared to wed thee while his anger lasts, he would condemn thee as a sorceress, and give me up to the secret hate of my old foes, the Woodvilles. But fie! be not so appalled, my Sibyll; Edward's passions, though fierce, are changeful, and patience will reward us both."

"Meanwhile, thou lovest me, Hastings!" said Sibyll, with great emotion. "Oh, if thou knewest how I torment myself in thine absence!—I see thee surrounded by the fairest and the loftiest, and say to myself, 'Is it possible that he can remember me?' But thou lovest me still—still—still, and ever! Dost thou not?"

And Hastings said and swore.

"And the Lady Bonville?" asked Sibyll, trying to smile archly, but with the faltering tone of jealous fear.

"I have not seen her for months," replied the noble,

with a slight change of countenance. "She is at one of their western manors. They say her lord is sorely ill; and the Lady Bonville is a devout hypocrite, and plays the tender wife. But enough of such ancient and worn-out memories. Thy father—sorrows he still for his Eureka? I can learn no trace of it."

"See," said Sibyll, recalled to her filial love, and pointing to Warner as they now drew near the house, "see, he shapes another Eureka from his thoughts!"

"How fares it, dear Warner?" asked the noble, taking the scholar's hand.

"Ah!" cried the student, roused at the sight of his powerful protector. "Bringest thou tidings of it? Thy cheerful eye tells me that—no—no—thy face changes! They have destroyed it! Oh that I could be young once more!"

"What!" said the world-wise man, astonished. "If thou hadst another youth, wouldst thou cherish the same delusion, and go again through a life of hardship, persecution, and wrong?"

"My noble son," said the philosopher, "for hours when I have felt the wrong, the persecution, and the hardship, count the days and the nights when I have felt only the hope, and the glory, and the joy! God is kinder to us all than man can know; for man looks only to the sorrow on the surface, and sees not the consolation in the deeps of the unwitnessed soul."

Sibyll had left Hastings by her father's side, and tripped lightly to the farther part of the house, inhabited by the rustic owners who supplied the homely service, to order the evening banquet,—the happy banquet; for hunger gives not such flavour to the viand, nor thirst such sparkle to the wine, as the presence of a beloved guest.

And as the courtier seated himself on the rude settle, under the honeysuckles that wreathed the porch, a delicious calm stole over his sated mind. The pure soul of the student, released awhile from the tyranny of an earthly pursuit—the drudgery of a toil that, however grand, still but ministered to human and material science—had found for its only other element the contemplation of more solemn and eternal mysteries. Soaring naturally, as a bird freed from a golden cage, into the realms of heaven, he began now, with earnest and spiritual eloquence, to talk of the things and visions lately made familiar to his thoughts. Mounting from philosophy to religion, he indulged in his large ideas upon life and nature: of the stars that now came forth in heaven; of the laws that gave harmony to the universe; of the evidence of a God in the mechanism of creation; of the spark from central divinity, that, kindling in a man's soul, we call "genius;" of the eternal resurrection of the dead, which makes the very principle of being, and types, in the leaf and in the atom, the immortality of the great human race. He was sublimer, that grey old man, hunted from the circle of his kind—in his words, than ever is action in its deeds; for words can fathom truth, and deeds but blunderingly and lamely seek it.

And the sad, and gifted, and erring intellect of Hastings, rapt from its little ambition of the hour, had no answer when his heart asked, "What can courts and a king's smile give me in exchange for serene tranquillity and devoted love?"

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AWAKES IN THE SAGE, AND THE SHE-WOLF
AGAIN TRACKED THE LAMB

From the night in which Hastings had saved from the knives of the tymbesteres Sibyll and her father, his honour and chivalry had made him their protector. The people of the farm (a widow and her children, with the peasants in their employ) were kindly and simple folks. What safer home for the wanderers than that to which Hastings had removed them? The influence of Sibyll over his variable heart or fancy was renewed. Again, vows were interchanged, and faith plighted. Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers, who, however gallant an enemy, was still more than ever, since Warwick's exile, a formidable one, and who shared his sister's dislike to Hastings, was naturally, at that time, in the fullest favour of King Edward, anxious to atone for the brief disgrace his brother-in-law had suffered during the later days of Warwick's administration. And Hastings, offended by the manners of the rival favourite, took one of the disgusts so frequent in the life of a courtier, and, despite his office of chamberlain, absented himself much from his sovereign's company. Thus, in the reaction of his mind, the influence of Sibyll was greater than it otherwise might have been. His visits to the farm grew regular and frequent. The widow believed him nearly related to Sibyll, and suspected Warner to be some attainted Lancastrian, compelled to hide in secret till his pardon was obtained; and no scandal was attached to the noble's visits, nor any surprise evinced at his attentive

care for all that could lend a grace to a temporary refuge unfitting the quality of his supposed kindred.

And, in her entire confidence and reverential affection, Sibyll's very pride was rather soothed than wounded by obligations which were but proofs of love, and to which plighted troth gave her a sweet right. As for Warner, he had hitherto seemed to regard the great lord's attentions only as a tribute to his own science, and a testimony of the interest which a statesman might naturally feel in the invention of a thing that might benefit the realm. And Hastings had been delicate in the pretexts of his visits. One time he called to relate the death of poor Madge, though he kindly concealed the manner of it, which he had discovered, but which opinion, if not law, forbade him to attempt to punish: drowning was but the orthodox ordeal of a suspected witch, and it was not without many scruples that the poor woman was interred in holy ground. The search for the Eureka was a pretence that sufficed for countless visits; and then, too, Hastings had counselled Adam to sell the ruined house, and undertaken the negotiation; and the new comforts of their present residence, and the expense of the maintenance, were laid to the account of the sale. Hastings had begun to consider Adam Warner as utterly blind and passive to the things that passed under his eyes; and his astonishment was great when, the morning after the visit we have just recorded, Adam suddenly lifting his eyes, and seeing the guest whispering soft tales in Sibyll's ear, rose abruptly, approached the nobleman, took him gently by the arm, led him into the garden, and thus addressed him:—

“Noble lord, you have been tender and generous in our misfortunes. The poor Eureka is lost to me and

the world for ever. God's will be done! Methinks Heaven designs thereby to rouse me to the sense of nearer duties; and I have a daughter whose name I adjure you not to sully, and whose heart I pray you not to break. Come hither no more, my Lord Hastings.”

This speech, almost the only one which showed plain sense and judgment in the affairs of this life that the man of genius had ever uttered, so confounded Hastings, that he with difficulty recovered himself enough to say—

“My poor scholar, what hath so suddenly kindled suspicions which wrong thy child and me?”

“Last eve, when we sate together, I saw your hand steal into hers, and suddenly I remembered the day when I was young, and wooed her mother! And last night I slept not, and sense and memory became active for my living child, as they were wont to be only for the iron infant of my mind, and I said to myself—‘Lord Hastings is King Edward's friend; and King Edward spares not maiden honour. Lord Hastings is a mighty peer, and he will not wed the dowerless and worse than nameless girl!’ Be merciful! Depart—depart!”

“But,” exclaimed Hastings, “if I love thy sweet Sibyll in all honesty—if I have plighted to her my troth—”

“Alas—alas!” groaned Adam.

“If I wait but my king's permission to demand her wedded hand, couldst thou forbid me the presence of my affianced?”

“She loves thee, then?” said Adam, in a tone of great anguish—“she loves thee—speak!”

“It is my pride to think it.”

"Then go—go at once; come back no more till thou hast wound up thy courage to brave the sacrifice; no, not till the priest is ready at the altar—not till the bridegroom can claim the bride. And as that time will never come—never—never—leave me to whisper to the breaking heart,—'Courage;—honour and virtue are left thee yet, and thy mother from heaven looks down on a stainless child!'"

The resuscitation of the dead could scarcely have startled and awed the courtier more than this abrupt development of life and passion and energy, in a man who had hitherto seemed to sleep in the folds of his thought, as a chrysalis in its web. But as we have always seen that ever, when this strange being woke from his ideal abstraction, he awoke to honour and courage and truth,—so now, whether, as he had said, the absence of the Eureka left his mind to the sense of practical duties, or whether their common suffering had more endeared to him his gentle companion, and affection sharpened reason, Adam Warner became puissant and majestic in his rights and sanctity of father; greater in his homely household character, than when, in his mania of inventor, and the sublime hunger of aspiring genius, he had stolen to his daughter's couch, and waked her with the cry of "Gold!"

Before the force and power of Adam's adjuration,—his outstretched hand—the anguish, yet authority, written on his face—all the art and self-possession of the accomplished lover deserted him, as one spell-bound.

He was literally without reply; till, suddenly, the sight of Sibyll, who, surprised by this singular conference, but unsuspecting its nature, now came from the house, relieved and nerved him; and his first im-

pulse was then, as ever, worthy and noble, such as showed, though dimly, how glorious a creature he had been, if cast in a time and amidst a race, which could have fostered the impulse into habit.

"Brave old man!" he said, kissing the hand still raised in command—"thou hast spoken as beseems thee; and my answer I will tell thy child." Then hurrying to the wondering Sibyll, he resumed: "Your father says well, that not thus, dubious and in secret, should I visit the home blest by thy beloved presence—I obey;—I leave thee, Sibyll. I go to my king, as one who hath served him long and truly, and claims his guerdon—*thee!*"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Sibyll, in generous terror; "bethink thee well—remember what thou saidst but last eve. This king so fierce—my name so hated! No—no! leave me. Farewell for ever, if it be right, as what thou and my father say must be. But thy life—thy liberty—thy welfare—*they* are my happiness—thou hast no right to endanger *them!*" And she fell at his knees. He raised, and strained her to his heart; then resigning her to her father's arms, he said in a voice choked with emotion—

"Not as peer and as knight, but as man, I claim my prerogative of home and hearth! Let Edward frown—call back his gifts—banish me his court—thou art more worth than all! Look for me—sigh not—weep not—*smile* till we meet again!" He left them with these words—hastened to the stall where his steed stood, caparisoned it with his own hands, and rode with the speed of one whom passion spurs and goads, towards the Tower of London.

But as Sibyll started from her father's arms, when she heard the departing hoofs of her lover's steed,—to

listen and to listen for the last sound that told of *him*, a terrible apparition, ever ominous of woe and horror, met her eye. On the other side of the orchard fence, which concealed her figure, but not her well-known face, which peered above, stood the tymbestere, Graul. A shriek of terror at this recognition burst from Sibyll, as she threw herself again upon Adam's breast; but when he looked round, to discover the cause of her alarm—Graul was gone.

CHAPTER III

VIRTUOUS RESOLVES SUBMITTED TO THE TEST OF VANITY AND THE WORLD

On reaching his own house, Hastings learned that the court was still at Shene. He waited but till the retinue which his rank required were equipped and ready, and reached the court, from which of late he had found so many excuses to absent himself, before night. Edward was then at the banquet, and Hastings was too experienced a courtier to disturb him at such a time. In a mood unfit for compatronship, he took his way to the apartments usually reserved for him, when a gentleman met him by the way, and apprised him, with great respect, that the Lord Scales and Rivers had already appropriated those apartments to the principal waiting-lady of his countess,—but that other chambers, if less commodious and spacious, were at his command.

Hastings had not the superb and more than regal pride of Warwick and Montagu; but this notice sensibly piqued and galled him.

“My apartments as Lord Chamberlain—as one of the captain-generals in the king's army, given to the waiting-lady of Sir Anthony Woodville's wife!—At whose orders, sir?”

“Her highness the queen's—pardon me, my lord,” and the gentleman, looking round, and sinking his voice, continued—“pardon me, her highness added, ‘If my Lord Chamberlain returns not ere the week ends, he may find not only the apartment, but the office, no longer free.’ My lord, we all love you—forgive my zeal, and look well if you would guard your own.”

“Thanks, sir.—Is my lord of Gloucester in the palace?”

“He is—and in his chamber. He sits not long at the feast.”

“Oblige me, by craving his grace's permission to wait on him at leisure—I attend his answer here.”

Leaning against the wall of the corridor, Hastings gave himself up to other thoughts than those of love!—So strong is habit—so powerful vanity or ambition, once indulged, that this puny slight made a sudden revulsion in the mind of the royal favourite;—once more the agitated and brilliant court life stirred and fevered him!—that life, so wearisome when secure, became sweet when imperilled. To counteract his foes—to humble his rivals—to regain the king's countenance—to baffle, with the easy art of his skilful intellect, every hostile stratagem—such were the ideas that crossed and hurtled themselves, and Sibyll was forgotten.

The gentleman reappeared. “Prince Richard besought my lord's presence with loving welcome;” and to the duke's apartment went Lord Hastings. Richard, clad in a loose chamber robe, which concealed the defects of his shape, rose from before a table covered with

papers, and embraced Hastings with cordial affection.

"Never more gladly hail to thee, dear William. I need thy wise counsels with the king, and I have glad tidings for thine own ear."

"*Pardieu*, my prince; the king, methinks, will scarce heed the counsels of a dead man."

"Dead?"

"Ay. At courts it seems men are dead—their rooms filled, their places promised or bestowed, if they come not, morn and night, to convince the king that they are alive." And Hastings, with constrained gaiety, repeated the information he had received.

"What would you, Hastings?" said the duke, shrugging his shoulders, but with some latent meaning in his tone. "Lord Rivers were nought in himself; but his lady is a mighty heiress,* and requires state, as she bestows pomp. Look round, and tell me what man ever maintained himself in power without the strong connections, the convenient dower, the acute, unseen, unsleeping woman-influence of some noble wife? How can a poor man defend his repute, his popular name, that airy but all puissant thing we call *dignity* or *station*, against the pricks and stings of female intrigue and female gossip? But he marries, and, lo, a host of fairy champions, who pinch the rival lozels unawares: his wife hath her army of courtpie and jupon, to array against the dames of his foes! Wherefore, my friend, while thou art unwedded, think not to cope with Lord Rivers, who hath a wife, with three sisters, two aunts, and a score of she-cousins!"

* Elizabeth secured to her brother, Sir Anthony, the greatest heiress in the kingdom—in the daughter of Lord Scales—a wife, by the way, who is said to have been a mere child at the time of the marriage.

"And if," replied Hastings, more and more unquiet under the duke's truthful irony,—“if I were now come to ask the king permission to wed——”

"If thou wert, and the bride-elect were a lady, with power and wealth and manifold connections, and the practice of a court, thou wouldst be the mightiest lord in the kingdom since Warwick's exile."

"And if she had but youth, beauty, and virtue?"

"Oh, then, my Lord Hastings, pray thy patron saint for a war—for in peace thou wouldst be lost amongst the crowd. But truce to these jests; for thou art not the man to prate of youth, virtue, and such like, in sober earnest, amidst this work-day world, where nothing is young and nothing virtuous;—and listen to grave matters."

The duke then communicated to Hastings the last tidings received of the machinations of Warwick. He was in high spirits; for those last tidings but reported Margaret's refusal to entertain the proposition of a nuptial alliance with the earl, though, on the other hand, the Duke of Burgundy, who was in constant correspondence with his spies, wrote word that Warwick was collecting provisions, from his own means, for more than 60,000 men; and that, with Lancaster or without, the earl was prepared to match his own family interest against the armies of Edward.

"And," said Hastings, "if all his family joined with him, what foreign king could be so formidable an invader? Maltravers and the Mowbrays, Fauconberg, Westmoreland, Fitzhugh, Stanley, Bonville, Worcester——"

"But happily," said Gloucester, "the Mowbrays have been allied also to the queen's sister; Worcester detests Warwick; Stanley always murmurs against us,

a sure sign that he will fight for us; and Bonville—I have in view a trusty Yorkist to whom the retainers of *that* house shall be assigned. But of that anon. What I now wish from thy wisdom is, to aid me in rousing Edward from his lethargy: he laughs at his danger, and neither communicates with his captains nor mans his coasts. His courage makes him a dullard."

After some further talk on these heads, and more detailed account of the preparations which Gloucester deemed necessary to urge on the king, the duke, then moving his chair nearer to Hastings, said, with a smile,—

"And now, Hastings, to thyself: it seems, that thou hast not heard the news which reached us four days since—the Lord Bonville is dead—died three months * ago at his manor house in Devon. Thy Katherine is free, and in London. Well, man, where is thy joy?"

"Time *is*—time *was!*" said Hastings gloomily. "The day has passed when this news could rejoice me."

"Passed! nay, thy good stars themselves have fought for thee in delay. Seven goodly manors swell the fair widow's jointure; the noble dowry she brought returns to her. Her very daughter will bring thee power. Young Cecily Bonville, the heiress,† Lord Dorset demands in betrothal. Thy wife will be mother-in-law to thy queen's son; on the other hand, she is already aunt to the Duchess of Clarence; and George, be sure, sooner or later, will desert Warwick, and win his pardon. Powerful connections—vast possessions—

* To those who have read the "Paston Letters," it will not seem strange that in that day the death of a nobleman at his country seat should be so long in reaching the metropolis—the ordinary purveyors of communication were the itinerant attendants of fairs. And a father might be ignorant for months together of the death of his son.

† Afterwards married to Dorset.

a lady of immaculate name and surpassing beauty, and thy first love!—(thy hand trembles!)—thy first love—thy sole love, and thy last!"

"Prince—Prince! forbear! Even if so—in brief, Katherine loves me not!"

"Thou mistakest! I have seen her, and she loves thee not the less because her virtue so long concealed the love."

Hastings uttered an exclamation of passionate joy, but again his face darkened.

Gloucester watched him in silence; besides any motives suggested by the affection he then sincerely bore to Hastings, policy might well interest the duke in the securing to so loyal a Yorkist the hand and the wealth of Lord Warwick's sister; but, prudently, not pressing the subject further, he said, in an altered and careless voice, "Pardon me if I have presumed on matters on which each man judges for himself. But as, despite all obstacle, one day or other Anne Nevile *shall* be mine, it would have delighted me to know a near connection in Lord Hastings. And now, the hour grows late, I prithee let Edward find thee in his chamber."

When Hastings attended the king, he at once perceived that Edward's manner was changed to him. At first, he attributed the cause to the ill-offices of the queen and her brother; but the king soon betrayed the true source of his altered humour.

"My lord," he said, abruptly, "I am no saint, as thou knowest; but there are some ties, *par amour*, which, in my mind, become not knights and nobles about a king's person."

"My liege, I arede you not!"

"Tush, William!" replied the king, more gently, "thou hast more than once wearied me with applica-

tion for the pardon of the nigromancer Warner—the whole court is scandalised at thy love for his daughter. Thou hast absented thyself from thine office on poor pretexts! I know thee too well not to be aware that love alone can make thee neglect thy king—thy time has been spent at the knees or in the arms of this young sorceress! One word for all times—he whom a witch snares cannot be a king's true servant! I ask of thee as a right, or as a grace—see this fair *ribaude* no more! What, man, are there not ladies enough in merry England, that thou shouldst undo thyself for so unchristian a fere?”

“My king! how can this poor maid have angered thee thus?”

“Knowest thou not”—began the king, sharply, and changing colour as he eyed his favourite's mournful astonishment,—

“Ah, well!” he muttered to himself, “they have been discreet hitherto, but how long will they be so? I am in time yet. It is enough,”—he added, aloud and gravely—“it is enough that our learned * Bungey holds her father as a most pestilent wizard, whose spells are muttered for Lancaster and the rebel Warwick; that the girl hath her father's unholy gifts, and I lay my command on thee, as liege king, and I pray thee, as loving friend, to see no more either child or sire! Let this suffice—and now I will hear thee on state matters.”

Whatever Hastings might feel, he saw that it was no time to venture remonstrance with the king, and strove to collect his thoughts, and speak indifferently on the high interests to which Edward invited him; but he

* It will be remembered that Edward himself was a man of no learning.

was so distracted and absent that he made but a sorry counsellor, and the king, taking pity on him, dismissed his chamberlain for the night.

Sleep came not to the couch of Hastings; his acuteness perceived that whatever Edward's superstition, and he was a devout believer in witchcraft, some more worldly motive actuated him in his resentment to poor Sibyll. But, as we need scarcely say, that neither from the abstracted Warner, nor his innocent daughter, had Hastings learned the true cause, he wearied himself with vain conjectures, and knew not that Edward involuntarily did homage to the superior chivalry of his gallant favourite, when he dreaded that, above all men, Hastings should be made aware of the guilty secret which the philosopher and his child could tell. If Hastings gave his name and rank to Sibyll, how powerful a weight would the tale of a witness now so obscure suddenly acquire!

Turning from the image of Sibyll, thus beset with thoughts of danger, embarrassment, humiliation, disgrace, ruin, Lord Hastings recalled the words of Gloucester; and the stately image of Katherine surrounded with every memory of early passion—every attribute of present ambition—rose before him, and he slept at last, to dream not of Sibyll and the humble orchard, but of Katherine in her maiden bloom—of the trysting-tree, by the Halls of Middleham—of the broken ring—of the rapture and the woe of his youth's first high-placed love.