

captains of Warwick's own troops, on the march to Middleham, now bested him. Many of them were knights and gentlemen residing in the very districts through which he passed. They did not join him, but they did not oppose. Then, rapidly flocked to "the Sun of York,"—first, the adventurers and condottieri, who in civil war adopt any side for pay; next came the disappointed, the ambitious, and the needy. The hesitating began to resolve, the neutral to take a part. From the state of petitioners supplicating a pardon, every league the Yorkists marched advanced them to the dignity of assertors of a cause. Doncaster first, then Nottingham, then Leicester—true to the town spirit we have before described—opened their gates to the trader prince.

Oxford and Exeter reached Newark with their force. Edward marched on them at once. Deceived as to his numbers, they took panic and fled. When once the foe flies, friends ever start up from the very earth! Hereditary partisans—gentlemen, knights, and nobles—now flocked fast round the adventurer. Then came Lovell, and Cromwell, and D'Eyncourt, ever true to York; and Stanley, never true to any cause. Then came the brave knights Parr and Norris, and De Burgh; and no less than three thousand retainers belonging to Lord Hastings—the new man—obeyed the summons of his couriers and joined their chief at Leicester.

Edward of March, who had landed at Ravenspur with a handful of brigands, now saw a king's army under his banner.* Then, the audacious perjurer threw

* The perplexity and confusion which involve the annals of this period may be guessed by this—that two historians, eminent for research (Lingard and Sharon Turner), differ so widely as to the numbers who had now joined Edward, that

away the mask; then, forth went—not the prayer of the attainted Duke of York—but the proclamation of the indignant king. England now beheld *two* sovereigns, equal in their armies. It was no longer a rebellion to be crushed; it was a dynasty to be decided.

CHAPTER VI

LORD WARWICK, WITH THE FOE IN THE FIELD AND THE TRAITOR AT THE HEARTH

Every precaution which human wisdom could foresee had Lord Warwick taken to guard against invasion, or to crush it at the onset.* All the coasts on which it was most probable Edward would land had been strongly guarded. And if the Humber had been left without regular troops, it was because prudence might calculate that the very spot where Edward did land was the very last he would have selected—unless guided by fate to his destruction—in the midst of an unfriendly population, and in face of the armies of Northumberland and of Montagu. The moment the earl heard of Edward's reception at York—far from the weakness which the false Clarence (already in correspondence with Gloucester) imputed to him—he de-

Lingard asserts that at Nottingham he was at the head of fifty or sixty thousand men; and Turner gives him, at the most, between six and seven thousand. The latter seems nearer to the truth. We must here regret that Turner's partiality to the House of York induces him to slur over Edward's detestable perjury at York, and to accumulate all rhetorical arts to command admiration for his progress—to the prejudice of the salutary moral horror we ought to feel for the atrocious perfidy and violation of oath to which he owed the first impunity that secured the after triumph.

* Hall.

spatched to Montagu, by Marmaduke Nevile, peremptory orders to intercept Edward's path, and give him battle before he could advance farther towards the centre of the island. We shall explain presently why this messenger did not reach the marquis. But Clarence was some hours before him in his intelligence and his measures.

When the earl next heard that Edward had passed Pontefract with impunity, and had reached Doncaster, he flew first to London, to arrange for its defence; consigned the care of Henry to the Archbishop of York, mustered a force already quartered in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, and then marched rapidly back towards Coventry, where he had left Clarence with seven thousand men; while he despatched new messengers to Montagu and Northumberland, severely rebuking the former for his supineness, and ordering him to march in all haste to attack Edward in the rear. The earl's activity, promptitude, and all-provident generalship, form a mournful contrast to the errors, the pusillanimity, and the treachery of others, which hitherto, as we have seen, made all his wisest schemes abortive. Despite Clarence's sullenness, Warwick had discovered no reason, as yet, to doubt his good faith. The oath he had taken—not only to Henry, in London, but to Warwick, at Amboise—had been the strongest which can bind man to man. If the duke had not gained all he had hoped, he had still much to lose and much to dread by desertion to Edward. He had been the loudest in bold assertions when he heard of the invasion; and above all, Isabel, whose influence over Clarence, at that time, the earl overrated, had, at the tidings of so imminent a danger to her father, forgot all her displeasure and recovered all her tenderness.

During Warwick's brief absence, Isabel had, indeed, exerted her utmost power to repair her former wrongs, and induce Clarence to be faithful to his oath. Although her inconsistency and irresolution had much weakened her influence with the duke, for natures like his are governed but by the ascendancy of a steady and tranquil will, yet still she so far prevailed, that the duke had despatched to Richard a secret courier, informing him that he had finally resolved not to desert his father-in-law.

This letter reached Gloucester as the invaders were on their march to Coventry, before the strong walls of which the Duke of Clarence lay encamped. Richard, after some intent and silent reflection, beckoned to him his familiar Catesby.

"Marmaduke Nevile, whom our scouts seized on his way to Pontefract, is safe, and in the rear?"

"Yes, my lord; prisoners but encumber us; shall I give orders to the provost to end his captivity?"

"Ever ready, Catesby!" said the duke, with a fell smile. "No—hark ye, Clarence vacillates; if he hold firm to Warwick, and the two forces fight honestly against us, we are lost; on the other hand, if Clarence join us, his defection will bring not only the men he commands, all of whom are the retainers of the York lands and duchy, and therefore free from peculiar bias to the earl, and easily lured back to their proper chief; but it will set an example that will create such distrust and panic amongst the enemy, and give such hope of fresh desertions to our own men, as will open to us the keys of the metropolis. But Clarence, I say, vacillates; look you, here is his letter from Amboise to King Edward; see, his duchess, Warwick's very daughter, approves the promise it contains! If this letter reach

Warwick, and Clarence knows it is in his hand, George will have no option but to join us. He will never dare to face the earl, his pledge to Edward once revealed——”

“Most true; a very legal subtlety, my lord,” said the lawyer Catesby, admiringly.

“You can serve us in this. Fall back; join Sir Marmaduke; affect to sympathise with him; affect to side with the earl; affect to make terms for Warwick’s amity and favour; affect to betray us; affect to have stolen this letter. Give it to young Nevile, artfully effect his escape, as if against our knowledge, and commend him to lose not an hour—a moment—in gaining the earl, and giving him so important a forewarning of the meditated treason of his son-in-law.”

“I will do all—I comprehend: but how will the duke learn in time that the letter is on its way to Warwick?”

“I will see the duke, in his own tent.”

“And how shall I effect Sir Marmaduke’s escape?”

“Send hither the officer who guards the prisoner; I will give him orders to obey thee in all things.”

The invaders marched on. The earl, meanwhile, had reached Warwick,—hastened thence, to throw himself into the stronger fortifications of the neighbouring Coventry, without the walls of which Clarence was still encamped; Edward advanced on the town of Warwick thus vacated; and Richard, at night, rode along to the camp of Clarence.*

The next day, the earl was employed in giving orders to his lieutenants to march forth, join the troops of his son-in-law, who were a mile from the walls, and advance upon Edward, who had that morning quitted Warwick town—when, suddenly, Sir Marmaduke

* Hall, and others.

Nevile rushed into his presence, and, faltering out—“Beware, beware!” placed in his hands the fatal letter which Clarence had despatched from Amboise.

Never did blow more ruthless fall upon man’s heart! Clarence’s perfidy—that might be disdained, but the closing lines, which revealed a daughter’s treachery—words cannot express the father’s anguish.

The letter dropped from his hand, a stupor seized his senses, and, ere yet recovered, pale men hurried into his presence to relate how, amidst joyous trumpets and streaming banners, Richard of Gloucester had led the Duke of Clarence to the brotherly embrace of Edward.*

Breaking from these messengers of evil news, that could not now surprise, the earl strode on, alone, to his daughter’s chamber.

He placed the letter in her hands, and folding his arms, said—“What sayest thou of this, Isabel of Clarence?”

The terror, the shame, the remorse, that seized upon the wretched lady—the death-like lips—the suppressed shriek—the momentary torpor, succeeded by the impulse which made her fall at her father’s feet, and clasp his knees—told the earl, if he had before doubted, that the letter lied not—that Isabel had known and sanctioned its contents.

He gazed on her (as she grovelled at his feet) with a look that her eyes did well to shun.

* Hall. The chronicler adds—“It was no marvell that the Duke of Clarence, with so small persuasion and less exhorting turned from the Earl of Warwick’s party, for, as you have heard before, *this merchandise* was laboured, conducted, and concluded by a damsell, when the duke was in the French court, to the earl’s utter confusion.” Hume makes a notable mistake in deferring the date of Clarence’s desertion to the battle of Barnet.

"Curse me not—curse me not!"—cried Isabel, awed by his very silence. "It was but a brief frenzy. Evil counsel—evil passion! I was maddened that my boy had lost a crown. I repented—I repented—Clarence shall yet be true. He hath promised it—vowed it to me;—hath written to Gloucester to retract all—to——"

"Woman!—Clarence is in Edward's camp!"

Isabel started to her feet, and uttered a shriek so wild and despairing, that at least it gave to her father's lacerated heart the miserable solace of believing the *last* treason had not been shared. A softer expression—one of pity, if not of pardon—stole over his dark face.

"I curse thee not," he said; "I rebuke thee not. Thy sin hath its own penance. Ill omen broods on the hearth of the household traitor! Never more shalt thou see holy love in a husband's smile. His kiss shall have the taint of Judas. From his arms thou shalt start with horror, as from those of thy wronged father's betrayer—perchance his deathsmen! Ill omen broods on the cradle of the child for whom a mother's ambition was but a daughter's perfidy. Woe to thee, wife and mother! Even my forgiveness cannot avert thy doom!"

"Kill me—kill me!" exclaimed Isabel, springing towards him; but seeing his face averted, his arms folded on his breast—that noble breast, never again her shelter—she fell lifeless on the floor.*

* As our narrative does not embrace the future fate of the Duchess of Clarence, the reader will pardon us if we remind him that her firstborn (who bore his illustrious grandfather's title of Earl of Warwick) was cast into prison on the accession of Henry VII., and afterwards beheaded by that king. By birth, he was the rightful heir to the throne. The ill-fated Isabel died young (five years after the date at which our tale has arrived). One of her female attendants was tried and executed on the charge of having poisoned her. Clarence lost no time in seeking to supply her place. He solicited the hand

The earl looked round, to see that none were by to witness his weakness, took her gently in his arms, laid her on her couch, and, bending over her a moment, prayed God to pardon her.

He then hastily left the room—ordered her handmaids and her litter, and while she was yet unconscious, the gates of the town opened, and forth through the arch went the closed and curtained vehicle which bore the ill-fated duchess to the new home her husband had made with her father's foe! The earl watched it from the casement of his tower, and said to himself—

"I had been unmanned, had I known her within the same walls. Now for ever I dismiss her memory and her crime. Treachery hath done its worst, and my soul is proof against all storms!"

At night came messengers from Clarence and Edward, who had returned to Warwick town, with offers of *pardon* to the earl—with promises of favour, power, and grace. To Edward the earl deigned no answer; to the messenger of Clarence he gave this—"Tell thy master, I had liefer be always like myself, than like a false and a perjured duke, and that I am determined never to leave the war till I have lost mine own life, or utterly extinguished and put down my foes."*

After this terrible defection, neither his remaining forces, nor the panic amongst them which the duke's desertion had occasioned, nor the mighty interests involved in the success of his arms, nor the irretrievable advantage which even an engagement of equivocal re-

of Mary of Burgundy, sole daughter and heir of Charles the Bold. Edward's jealousy and fear forbade him to listen to an alliance that might, as Lingard observes, enable Clarence "to employ the power of Burgundy to win the crown of England;" and hence arose those dissensions which ended in the secret murder of the perjured duke.

* Hall.

sult with the earl in person, would give to Edward, justified Warwick in gratifying the anticipations of the enemy—that his valour and wrath would urge him into immediate and imprudent battle.

Edward, after the vain bravado of marching up to the walls of Coventry, moved on towards London. Thither the earl sent Marmaduke, enjoining the Archbishop of York and the lord mayor but to hold out the city for three days, and he would come to their aid with such a force as would insure lasting triumph. For, indeed, already were hurrying to his banner, Montagu, burning to retrieve his error—Oxford and Exeter, recovered from, and chafing at, their past alarm. Thither his nephew, Fitzhugh, led the earl's own clansmen of Middleham; thither were spurring Somerset from the west,* and Sir Thomas Dymoke from Lincolnshire, and the Knight of Lytton, with his hardy retainers, from the Peak. Bold Hilyard waited not far from London, with a host of mingled yeomen and bravos, reduced, as before, to discipline under his own sturdy energies, and the military craft of Sir John Coniers. If London would but hold out till these forces could unite, Edward's destruction was still inevitable.

* Most historians state that Somerset was then in London; but Sharon Turner quotes "Harleian MSS. 38," to show that he had left the metropolis "to raise an army from the western counties," and ranks him amongst the generals at the battle of Barnet.

BOOK XII

THE BATTLE OF BARNET

CHAPTER I

A KING IN HIS CITY HOPES TO RECOVER HIS REALM—A
WOMAN IN HER CHAMBER FEARS TO FORFEIT HER
OWN

Edward and his army reached St. Alban's. Great commotion—great joy, were in the Sanctuary of Westminster! The Jerusalem Chamber, therein, was made the high council-hall of the friends of York. Great commotion, great terror, were in the city of London—timid Master Stokton had been elected mayor; horribly frightened either to side with an Edward or a Henry, timid Master Stokton feigned or fell ill. Sir Thomas Cook, a wealthy and influential citizen, and a member of the House of Commons, had been appointed deputy in his stead. Sir Thomas Cook took fright also, and ran away.* The power of the city thus fell into the hands of Ursewike, the Recorder, a zealous Yorkist. Great commotion, great scorn, were in the breasts of the populace, as the Archbishop of York, hoping thereby to rekindle their loyalty, placed King Henry on horseback, and paraded him through the streets, from Chepeside to Walbrook, from Walbrook to St. Paul's; for the news of Edward's arrival,

* Fabyan.