

having again found a victim with which he might satisfy his desire for blood, on whose agony he might feast his eyes, whose dying sigh he might greedily inhale.

The king was never more cheerful than when he had signed a death-warrant. For then he was in full enjoyment of his greatness as lord over the lives and deaths of millions of other men, and this feeling made him proud and happy, and fully conscious of his exalted position.

Hence, as he now turned to Anne Askew, his countenance was calm and serene, and his voice friendly, almost tender.

"Anne Askew," said he, "do you know that the words you have now spoken make you guilty of high treason?"

"I know it, sire."

"And you know what punishment awaits traitors?"

"Death, I know it."

"Death by fire!" said the king with perfect calmness and composure.

A hollow murmur ran through the assembly. Only one voice dared give utterance to the word mercy.

It was Catharine, the king's consort, who spoke this one word. She stepped forward, and was about to rush to the king and once more implore his mercy and pity. But she felt herself gently held back. Archbishop Cranmer stood near her, regarding her with a serious and beseeching look.

"Compose yourself, compose yourself," murmured he. "You cannot save her; she is lost. Think of yourself, and of the pure and holy religion whose protectress you are. Preserve yourself for your Church and your companions in the faith!"

"And must she die?" asked Catharine, whose eyes filled with tears as she looked toward the poor young child, who was confronting the king with such a beautiful and innocent smile.

"Perhaps we may still save her, but this is not the moment for it. Any opposition now would only irritate the king the more, and he might cause the girl to be instantly

thrown into the flames of the fires still burning yonder! So let us be silent."

"Yes, silence," murmured Catharine, with a shudder, as she withdrew again to the embrasure of the window.

"Death by fire awaits you, Anne Askew!" repeated the king. "No mercy for the traitress who vilifies and scoffs at her king!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVALS.

AT the very moment when the king was pronouncing, in a voice almost exultant, Anne Askew's sentence of death, one of the king's cavaliers appeared on the threshold of the royal chamber and advanced toward the king.

He was a young man of noble and imposing appearance, whose lofty bearing contrasted strangely with the humble and submissive attitude of the rest of the courtiers. His tall, slim form was clad in a coat of mail glittering with gold; over his shoulders hung a velvet mantle decorated with a princely crown; and his head, covered with dark ringlets, was adorned with a cap embroidered with gold, from which a long white ostrich-feather drooped to his shoulder. His oval face presented the full type of aristocratic beauty; his cheeks were of a clear, transparent paleness; about his slightly pouting mouth played a smile, half contemptuous and half languid; the high, arched brow and delicately chiselled aquiline nose gave to his face an expression at once bold and thoughtful. The eyes alone were not in harmony with his face; they were neither languid like the mouth, nor pensive like the brow. All the fire and all the bold and wanton passion of youth shot from those dark, flashing eyes. When he looked down, he might have been taken for a completely worn-out, misanthropic aristocrat; but

when he raised those ever-flashing and sparkling eyes, then was seen the young man full of dashing courage and ambitious desires, of passionate warmth and measureless pride.

He approached the king, as already stated, and as he bent his knee before him, he said in a full, pleasant voice: "Mercy, sire, mercy!"

The king stepped back in astonishment, and turned upon the bold speaker a look almost of amazement.

"Thomas Seymour!" said he. "Thomas, you have returned, then, and your first act is again an indiscretion and a piece of foolhardy rashness?"

The young man smiled. "I have returned," said he, "that is to say, I have had a sea-fight with the Scots and taken from them four men-of-war. With these I hastened hither to present them to you, my king and lord, as a wedding-gift, and just as I entered the anteroom I heard your voice pronouncing a sentence of death. Was it not natural, then, that I, who bring you tidings of a victory, should have the heart to utter a prayer for mercy, for which, as it seems, none of these noble and proud cavaliers could summon up courage?"

"Ah!" said the king, evidently relieved and fetching a deep breath, "then you knew not at all for whom and for what you were imploring pardon?"

"Yet!" said the young man, and his bold glance ran with an expression of contempt over the whole assembly—"yet, I saw at once who the condemned must be, for I saw this young maiden forsaken by all as if stricken by the plague, standing alone in the midst of this exalted and brave company. And you well know, my noble king, that at court one recognizes the condemned and those fallen into disgrace by this, that every one flies from them, and nobody has the courage to touch such a leper even with the tip of his finger!"

King Henry smiled. "Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley, you are now, as ever, imprudent and hasty," said he.

"You beg for mercy without once knowing whether she for whom you beg it is worthy of mercy."

"But I see that she is a woman," said the intrepid young earl. "And a woman is always worthy of mercy, and it becomes every knight to come forward as her defender, were it but to pay homage to her sex, so fair and so frail, and yet so noble and mighty. Therefore I beg mercy for this young maiden!"

Catharine had listened to the young earl with throbbing heart and flushed cheeks. It was the first time that she had seen him, and yet she felt for him a warm sympathy, an almost tender anxiety.

"He will plunge himself into ruin," murmured she; "he will not save Anne, but will make himself unhappy. My God, my God, have a little compassion and pity on my anguish!"

She now fixed her anxious gaze on the king, firmly resolved to rush to the help of the earl, who had so nobly and magnanimously interested himself in an innocent woman, should the wrath of her husband threaten him also. But, to her surprise, Henry's face was perfectly serene and contented.

Like the wild beast, that, following its instinct, seeks its bloody prey only so long as it is hungry, so King Henry felt satiated for the day. Yonder glared the fires about the stake, at which four heretics were burned; there stood the scaffold on which the Countess of Somerset had just been executed; and now, within this hour, he had already found another new victim for death. Moreover, Thomas Seymour had always been his favorite. His audacity, his liveliness, his energy, had always inspired the king with respect; and then, again, he so much resembled his sister, the beautiful Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife.

"I cannot grant you this favor, Thomas," said the king. "Justice must not be hindered in her course, and where she has passed sentence, mercy must not give her the lie; and it was the justice of your king which pronounced

sentence at that moment. You were guilty, therefore, of a double wrong, for you not only besought mercy, but you also brought an accusation against my cavaliers. Do you really believe that, were this maiden's cause a just one, no knight would have been found for her?"

"Yes, I really believe it," cried the earl, with a laugh. "The sun of your favor had turned away from this poor girl, and in such a case your courtiers no longer see the figure wrapped in darkness."

"You are mistaken, my lord; I have seen it," suddenly said another voice, and a second cavalier advanced from the anteroom into the chamber. He approached the king, and, as he bent his knee before him, he said, in a loud, steady voice: "Sire, I also beg mercy for Anne Askew!"

At this moment was heard from that side of the room where the ladies stood, a low cry, and the pale, affrighted face of Lady Jane Douglas was for a moment raised above the heads of the other ladies. No one noticed it. All eyes were directed toward the group in the middle of the room; all looked with eager attention upon the king and these two young men, who dared protect one whom he had sentenced.

"Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey!" exclaimed the king; and now an expression of wrath passed over his countenance. "How! you, too, dare intercede for this girl? You, then, grudge Thomas Seymour the pre-eminence of being the most discreet man at my court?"

"I will not allow him, sire, to think that he is the bravest," replied the young man, as he fixed on Thomas Seymour a look of haughty defiance, which the other answered by a cold, disdainful smile.

"Oh," said he, with a shrug of his shoulders, "I willingly allow you, my dear Earl of Surrey, to tread behind me, at your convenience, the path, the safety of which I first tested at the peril of my life. You saw that I had not, as yet, lost either my head or my life in this reckless undertaking, and that has given you courage to follow my ex-

ample. That is a new proof of your *prudent* valor, my Honorable Earl of Surrey, and I must praise you for it."

A hot flush suffused the noble face of the earl, his eyes shot lightning, and, trembling with rage, he laid his hand on his sword. "Praise from Thomas Seymour is——"

"Silence!" interposed the king, imperatively. "It must not be said that two of the noblest cavaliers of my court have turned the day, which should be one of festivity to all of you, into a day of contention. I command you, therefore, to be reconciled. Shake hands, my lords, and let your reconciliation be sincere. I, the king command it!"

The young men gazed at each other with looks of hatred and smothered rage, and their eyes spoke the insulting and defiant words which their lips durst no longer utter. The king had ordered, and, however great and powerful they might be, the king was to be obeyed. They, therefore, extended their hands to each other, and muttered a few low, unintelligible words, which might be, perhaps, a mutual apology, but which neither of them understood.

"And now, sire," said the Earl of Surrey, "now I venture to reiterate my prayer. Mercy, your majesty, mercy for Anne Askew!"

"And you, Thomas Seymour, do you also renew your petition?"

"No, I withdraw it. Earl Surrey protects her; I, therefore, retire, for without doubt she is a criminal; your majesty says so, and, therefore, it is so. It would ill become a Seymour to protect a person who has sinned against the king."

This new indirect attack on Earl Surrey seemed to make on all present a deep but very varied impression. Here, faces were seen to turn pale, and there, to light up with a malicious smile; here, compressed lips muttered words of threatening, there, a mouth opened to express approbation and agreement.

The king's brow was clouded and troubled; the arrow which Earl Sudley had shot with so skilful a hand had

hit. The king, ever suspicious and distrustful, felt so much the more disquieted as he saw that the greater part of his cavaliers evidently reckoned themselves friends of Henry Howard, and that the number of Seymour's adherents was but trifling.

"These Howards are dangerous, and I will watch them carefully," said the king to himself; and for the first time his eye rested with a dark and hostile look on Henry Howard's noble countenance.

But Thomas Seymour, who wished only to make a thrust at his old enemy, had at the same time decided the fate of poor Anne Askew. It was now almost an impossibility to speak in her behalf, and to implore pardon for her was to become a partaker of her crime. Thomas Seymour had abandoned her, because, as traitress to her king, she had rendered herself unworthy of his protection. Who now would be so presumptuous as to still protect the traitress?

Henry Howard did it; he reiterated his supplication for Anne Askew's pardon. But the king's countenance grew darker and darker, and the courtiers watched with dread the coming of the moment when his wrath would dash in pieces the poor Earl of Surrey.

In the row of ladies also, here and there, a pale face was visible, and many a beautiful and beaming eye was dimmed with tears at the sight of this gallant and handsome cavalier, who was hazarding even his life for a woman.

"He is lost!" murmured Lady Jane Douglas; and, completely crushed and lifeless, she leaned for a moment against the wall. But she soon recovered herself, and her eye beamed with bold resolution. "I will try and save him!" she said to herself; and, with firm step, she advanced from the ladies' ranks, and approached the king.

A murmur of applause ran through the company, and all faces brightened and all eyes were bent approvingly on Lady Jane. They knew that she was the queen's friend, and an adherent of the new doctrine; it was, therefore, very

marked and significant when she supported the Earl of Surrey in his magnanimous effort.

Lady Jane bowed her beautiful and haughty head before the king, and said, in her clear, silvery voice: "Sire, in the name of all the women, I also beseech you to pardon Anne Askew, because she is a woman. Lord Surrey has done so because a true knight can never be false to himself and his ever high and sacred obligation: to be the protector of those who are helpless and in peril is enough for him. A real gentleman asks not whether a woman is worthy of his protection; he grants it to her, simply because she is a woman, and needs his help. And while I, therefore, in the name of all the women, thank the Earl of Surrey for the assistance that he has been desirous to render to a woman, I unite my prayer with his, because it shall not be said that we women are always cowardly and timid, and never venture to hasten to the help of the distressed. I, therefore, ask mercy, sire, mercy for Anne Askew!"

"And I," said the queen, as she again approached the king, "I add my prayers to hers, sire. To-day is the feast of love, *my* festival, sire! To-day, then, let love and mercy prevail."

She looked at the king with so charming a smile, her eyes had an expression so radiant and happy, that the king could not withstand her.

He was, therefore, in the depths of his heart, ready to let the royal clemency prevail for this time; but he wanted a pretext for this, some way of bringing it about. He had solemnly vowed to pardon no heretic, and he might not break his word merely because the queen prayed for mercy.

"Well, then," said he, after a pause, "I will comply with your request. I will pardon Anne Askew, provided she will retract, and solemnly abjure all that she has said. Are you satisfied with that, Catharine?"

"I am satisfied," said she, sadly.

"And you, Lady Jane Douglas, and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey?"

"We are satisfied."

All eyes were now turned again upon Anne Askew, who, although every one was occupied by her concerns, had been entirely overlooked and left unnoticed.

Nor had she taken any more notice of the company than they of her. She had scarcely observed what was going on about her. She stood leaning against the open door leading to the balcony, and gazed at the flaming horizon. Her soul was with those pious martyrs, for whom she was sending up her heart-felt prayers to God, and whom she, in her feverish exaltation, envied their death of torture. Entirely borne away from the present, she had heard neither the petitions of those who protected her, nor the king's reply.

A hand laid upon her shoulder roused her from her reverie.

It was Catharine, the young queen, who stood near her.

"Anne Askew," said she, in a hurried whisper, "if your life is dear to you, comply with the king's demand."

She seized the young girl's hand, and led her to the king.

"Sire," said she, in a full voice, "forgive the exalted and impassioned agony of a poor girl, who has now, for the first time, been witness of an execution, and whose mind has been so much impressed by it that she is scarcely conscious of the mad and criminal words that she has uttered before you! Pardon her, then, your majesty, for she is prepared cheerfully to retract."

A cry of amazement burst from Anne's lips, and her eyes flashed with anger, as she dashed the queen's hand away from her.

"I retract!" exclaimed she, with a contemptuous smile. "Never, my lady, never! No! as sure as I hope for God to be gracious to me in my last hour, I retract not! It is true, it was agony and horror that made me speak; but what I have spoken is yet, nevertheless, the truth. Horror caused me to speak, and forced me to show my soul undisguised. No, I retract not! I tell you, they who have been executed

over yonder are holy martyrs, who have ascended to God, there to enter an accusation against their royal hangman. Ay, they are holy, for eternal truth had illumined their souls, and it beamed about their faces bright as the flames of the fagots into which the murderous hand of an unrighteous judge had cast them. Ah, I must retract! I, forsooth, am to do as did Shaxton, the miserable and unfaithful servant of his God, who, from fear of earthly death, denied the eternal truth, and in blaspheming pusillanimity perjured himself concerning the holy doctrine.* King Henry, I say unto you, beware of dissemblers and perjurers; beware of your own haughty and arrogant thoughts. The blood of martyrs cries to Heaven against you, and the time will come when God will be as merciless to you as you have been to the noblest of your subjects! You deliver them over to the murderous flames, because they will not believe what the priests of Baal preach; because they will not believe in the real transubstantiation of the chalice; because they deny that the natural body of Christ is, after the sacrament, contained in the sacrament, no matter whether the priest be a good or a bad man.† You give them over to the executioner, because they serve the truth, and are faithful followers of the Lord their God!"

"And you share the views of these people whom you call martyrs?" asked the king, as Anne Askew now paused for a moment and struggled for breath.

"Yes, I share them!"

"You deny, then, the truth of the six articles?"

"I deny them!"

"You do not see in me the head of the Church?"

"God only is Head and Lord of the Church!"

A pause followed—a fearful, awful pause.

Every one felt that for this poor young girl there was no hope, no possible escape; that her doom was irrevocably sealed.

There was a smile on the king's countenance.

* Burnet, vol. i, p. 341.

† Ibid.

The courtiers knew that smile, and feared it yet more than the king's raging wrath.

When the king thus smiled, he had taken his resolve. Then there was with him no possible vacillation or hesitation, but the sentence of death was resolved on, and his bloodthirsty soul rejoiced over a new victim.

"My Lord Bishop of Winchester," said the king, at length, "come hither."

Gardiner drew near and placed himself by Anne Askew, who gazed at him with angry, contemptuous looks.

"In the name of the law I command you to arrest this heretic, and hand her over to the spiritual court," continued the king. "She is damned and lost. She shall be punished as she deserves!"

Gardiner laid his hand on Anne Askew's shoulder. "In the name of the law of God, I arrest you!" said he, solemnly.

Not a word more was spoken. The lord chief justice had silently followed a sign from Gardiner, and touching Anne Askew with his staff, ordered the soldiers to conduct her thence.

With a smile, Anne Askew offered them her hand, and surrounded by the soldiers and followed by the Bishop of Winchester and the lord chief justice, walked erect and proudly out of the room.

The courtiers had divided and opened a passage for Anne and her attendants. Now their ranks closed again, as the sea closes and flows calmly on when it has just received a corpse. To them all Anne Askew was already a corpse, as one buried. The waves had swept over her and all was again serene and bright.

The king extended his hand to his young wife, and, bending down, whispered in her ear a few words, which nobody understood, but which made the young queen tremble and blush.

The king, who observed this, laughed and impressed a kiss on her forehead. Then he turned to his court:

"Now, good-night, my lords and gentlemen," said he, with a gracious inclination of the head. "The feast is at an end, and we need rest."

"Forget not the Princess Elizabeth," whispered Archbishop Cranmer, as he took leave of Catharine, and pressed to his lips her proffered hand.

"I will not forget her," murmured Catharine, and, with throbbing heart and trembling with inward dread, she saw them all retire, and leave her alone with the king.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INTERCESSION.

"AND now, Kate," said the king, when all had withdrawn, and he was again alone with her, "now let us forget everything, save that we love each other."

He embraced her and with ardor pressed her to his breast. Wearied to death, she bowed her head on his shoulder and lay there like a shattered rose, completely broken, completely passive.

"You give me no kiss, Kate?" said Henry, with a smile. "Are you then yet angry with me that I did not comply with your first request? But what would you have me do, child? How, indeed, shall I keep the crimson of my royal mantle always fresh and bright, unless I continually dye it anew in the blood of criminals? Only he who punishes and destroys is truly a king, and trembling mankind will acknowledge him as such. The tender-hearted and gracious king it despises, and his pitiful weakness it laughs to scorn. Bah! Humanity is such a wretched, miserable thing, that it only respects and acknowledges him who makes it tremble. And people are such contemptible, foolish children, that they have re-

spect only for him who makes them feel the lash daily, and every now and then whips a few of them to death. Look at me, Kate: where is there a king who has reigned longer and more happily than I? whom the people love more and obey better than me? This arises from the fact that I have already signed more than two hundred death-warrants,* and because every one believes that, if he does not obey me, I will without delay send his head after the others!"

"Oh, you say you love me," murmured Catharine, "and you speak only of blood and death while you are with me."

The king laughed. "You are right, Kate," said he, "and yet, believe me, there are other thoughts slumbering in the depths of my heart, and could you look down into it, you would not accuse me of coldness and unkindness. I love you truly, my dear, virgin bride, and, to prove it, you shall now ask a favor of me. Yes, Kate, make me a request, and, whatever it may be, I pledge you my royal word, it shall be granted you. Now, Kate, think, what will please you? Will you have brilliants, or a castle by the sea, or, perhaps, a yacht? Would you like fine horses, or it may be some one has offended you, and you would like his head? If so, tell me, Kate, and you shall have his head; a wink from me, and it drops at your feet. For I am almighty and all-powerful, and no one is so innocent and pure, that my will cannot find in him a crime which will cost him his life. Speak, then, Kate; what would you have? What will gladden your heart?"

Catharine smiled in spite of her secret fear and horror.

"Sire," said she, "you have given me so many brilliants, that I can shine and glitter with them, as night does with her stars. If you give me a castle by the sea, that is, at the same time, banishing me from Whitehall and your presence; I wish, therefore, for no castle of

* Tytler, p. 428. Leti, vol. i, p. 187.

my own. I wish only to dwell with you in your castles, and my king's abode shall be my only residence."

"Beautifully and wisely spoken," said the king; "I will remember these words if ever your enemies endeavor to send you to a dwelling and a castle other than that which your king occupies. The Tower is also a castle, Kate, but I give you my royal word you shall never occupy that castle. You want no treasures and no castles? It is, then, somebody's head that you demand of me?"

"Yes, sire, it is the head of some one!"

"Ah, I guessed it, then," said the king with a laugh. "Now speak, my little bloodthirsty queen, whose head will you have? Who shall be brought to the block?"

"Sire, it is true I ask you for the head of a person," said Catharine, in a tender, earnest tone, "but I wish not that head to fall, but to be lifted up. I beg you for a human life—not to destroy it, but, on the contrary, to adorn it with happiness and joy. I wish to drag no one to prison, but to restore to one, dearly beloved, the freedom, happiness, and splendid position which belong to her. Sire, you have permitted me to ask a favor. Now, then, I beg you to call the Princess Elizabeth to court. Let her reside with us at Whitehall. Allow her to be ever near me, and share my happiness and glory. Sire, only yesterday the Princess Elizabeth was far above me in rank and position, but since your all-powerful might and grace have to-day elevated me above all other women, I may now love the Princess Elizabeth as my sister and dearest friend. Grant me this, my king! Let Elizabeth come to us at Whitehall, and enjoy at our court the honor which is her due." *

The king did not reply immediately; but in his quiet and smiling air one could read that his young consort's request had not angered him. Something like an emotion flitted across his face, and his eyes were for a moment dimmed with tears.

* Leti, vol. i, p. 147. Tytler, p. 410.

Perhaps just then a pale, soul-harrowing phantom passed before his mind, and a glance at the past showed him the beautiful and unfortunate mother * of Elizabeth, whom he had sentenced to a cruel death at the hands of the public executioner, and whose last word nevertheless was a blessing and a message of love for him.

He passionately seized Catharine's hand and pressed it to his lips. "I thank you! You are unselfish and generous. That is a very rare quality, and I shall always highly esteem you for it. But you are also brave and courageous, for you have dared what nobody before you has dared; you have twice on the same evening interceded for one condemned and one fallen into disgrace. The fortunate, and those favored by me, have always had many friends, but I have never yet seen that the unfortunate and the exiled have also found friends. You are different from these miserable, cringing courtiers; different from this deceitful and trembling crowd, that with chattering teeth fall down and worship me as their god and lord; different from these pitiful, good-for-nothing mortals, who call themselves my people, and who allow me to yoke them up, because they are like the ox, which is obedient and serviceable, only because he is so stupid as not to know his own might and strength. Ah, believe me, Kate, I would be a milder and more merciful king, if the people were not such an utterly stupid and contemptible thing; a dog, which is so much the more submissive and gentle the more you maltreat him. You, Kate, you are different, and I am glad of it. You know, I have forever banished Elizabeth from my court and from my heart, and still you intercede for her. That is noble of you, and I love you for it, and grant you your request. And that you may see how I love and trust you, I will now reveal to you a secret: I have long since wished to have Elizabeth with me, but I was ashamed, even to myself, of this weakness. I have long yearned once again

* Anne Boleyn.

to look into my daughter's large deep eyes, to be a kind and tender father to her, and make some amends to her for the wrong I perhaps may have done to her mother. For sometimes, in sleepless nights, Anne's beautiful face comes up before me and gazes at me with mournful, mild look, and my whole heart shudders before it. But I could not confess this to anybody, for then they might say that I repented what I had done. A king must be infallible, like God himself, and never, through regret or desire to compensate, confess that he is a weak, erring mortal, like others. You see why I repressed my longing and parental tenderness, which was suspected by no one, and appeared to be a heartless father, because nobody would help me and make it easy for me to be a tender father. Ah, these courtiers! They are so stupid, that they can understand only just what is echoed in our words; but what our heart says, and longs for, of that they know nothing. But you know, Kate; you are an acute woman, and a high-minded one besides. Come, Kate, a thankful father gives you this kiss, and this, ay, this, your husband gives you, my beautiful, charming queen."

CHAPTER VII.

HENRY THE EIGHTH AND HIS WIVES.

THE calm of night had now succeeded to the tempest of the day, and after so much bustle, festivity, and rejoicing, deep quiet now reigned in the palace of Whitehall, and throughout London. The happy subjects of King Henry might, without danger, remain for a few hours at least in their houses, and behind closed shutters and bolted doors, either slumber and dream, or give themselves to their devotional exercises, on account of which they had