

And now, oh, now, struck on Catharine's ear the sound of a voice only too well loved, and made her scream aloud with delight and desire.

But this cry frightened anew the enraged animal. For a moment, exhausted and panting, he had slackened in his mad race; now he sprang forward with renewed energy; now he flew on as if impelled by the wings of the wind.

But ever nearer and nearer sounded the loved voice, ever nearer the tramp of his horse.

They were now upon a large plain, shut in on all sides by woods. While the queen's horse circled the plain in a wide circuit, Seymour's, obedient to the rein, sped directly across it, and was close behind the queen.

"Only a moment more! Only hold your arms firmly around the animal's neck, that the shock may not hurl you off, when I lay hold of the rein!" shouted Seymour, and he set his spurs into his horse's flanks, so that he sprang forward with a wild cry.

This cry roused Hector to new fury. Panting for breath, he shot forward with fearful leaps, now straight into the thicket of the woods.

"I hear his voice no more," murmured Catharine. And at length overcome with anxiety and the dizzy race, and worn out with her exertions, she closed her eyes; her senses appeared to be about leaving her.

But at this moment, a firm hand seized with iron grasp the rein of her horse, so that he bowed his head, shaking, trembling, and almost ashamed, as though he felt he had found his lord and master.

"Saved! I am saved!" faltered Catharine, and breathless, scarcely in her senses, she leaned her head on Seymour's shoulder.

He lifted her gently from the saddle, and placed her on the soft moss beneath an ancient oak. Then he tied the horses to a bough, and Catharine, trembling and faint, sank on her knees to rest after such violent exertion.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DECLARATION.

THOMAS SEYMOUR returned to Catharine. She still lay there with closed eyes, pale and motionless.

He gazed on her long and steadily; his eyes drank in, in long draughts, the sight of this beautiful and noble woman, and he forgot at that moment that she was a queen.

He was at length alone with her. At last, after two years of torture, of resignation, of dissimulation, God had granted him this hour, for which he had so long yearned, which he had so long considered unattainable. Now it was there, now it was his.

And had the whole court, had King Henry himself, come right then, Thomas Seymour would not have heeded it; it would not have affrighted him. The blood had mounted to his head and overcome his reason. His heart, still agitated and beating violently from his furious ride and his anxiety for Catharine, allowed him to hear no other voice than that of passion.

He knelt by the queen and seized her hand.

Perhaps it was this touch which roused her from her unconsciousness. She raised her eyes and gazed around with a perplexed look.

"Where am I?" breathed she in a low tone.

Thomas Seymour pressed her hand to his lips. "You are with the most faithful and devoted of your servants, queen!"

"Queen!" This word roused her from her stupor, and caused her to raise herself half up.

"But where is my court? Where is the Princess Elizabeth? Where are all the eyes that heretofore watched me? Where are all the listeners and spies who accompany the queen?"

"They are far away from here," said Seymour in a tone

which betrayed his secret delight. "They are far away from here, and need at least an hour's time to come up with us. An hour, queen! are you aware what that is to me? An hour of freedom, after two years of imprisonment! An hour of happiness, after two years of daily torture, daily endurance of the torments of hell!"

Catharine, who had at first smiled, had now become grave and sad.

Her eye rested on the cap which had fallen from her head and lay near her on the grass.

She pointed with trembling finger to the crown, and said softly, "Recognize you that sign, my lord?"

"I recognize it, my lady; but in this hour, I no longer shrink back at it. There are moments in which life is at its crowning point, and when one heeds not the abyss that threatens close beneath. Such an hour is the present. I am aware that this hour makes me guilty of high treason and may send me to the block; but nevertheless I will not be silent. The fire which burns in my breast consumes me. I must at length give it vent. My heart, that for years has burned upon a funeral pyre, and which is so strong that in the midst of its agonies it has still ever felt a sensation of its blessedness—my heart must at length find death or favor. You shall hear me, queen!"

"No, no," said she, almost in anguish, "I will not, I cannot hear you! Remember that I am Henry the Eighth's wife, and that it is dangerous to speak to her. Silence, then, earl, silence, and let us ride on."

She would have arisen, but her own exhaustion and Lord Seymour's hand caused her to sink back again.

"No, I will not be silent," said he. "I will not be silent until I have told you all that rages and glows within me. The Queen of England may either condemn me or pardon me, but she shall know that to me she is not Henry the Eighth's wife, but only the most charming and graceful, the noblest and loveliest woman in England. I will tell her that I never recollect she is my queen, or, if I do

so, it is only to curse the king, who was presumptuous enough to set this brightly sparkling jewel in his bloody crown."

Catharine, almost horrified, laid her hand on Seymour's lips. "Silence, unhappy man, silence! Know you that it is your sentence of death which you are now uttering? Your sentence of death, if any soul hears you?"

"But no one hears me. No one save the queen, and God, who, however, is perhaps more compassionate and merciful than the queen. Accuse me then, queen; go and tell your king that Thomas Seymour is a traitor; that he dares love the queen. The king will send me to the scaffold, but I shall nevertheless deem myself happy, for I shall at least die by your instrumentality. Queen, if I cannot live for you, then beautiful it is to die for you!"

Catharine listened to him wholly stupefied, wholly intoxicated. This was, for her, language wholly new and never heard before, at which her heart trembled in blissful awe, which rushed around her in enchanting melodies and lulled her into a sweet stupefaction. Now she herself even forgot that she was queen, that she was the wife of Henry, the bloodthirsty and the jealous. She was conscious only of this, that the man whom she had so long loved, was now kneeling at her side. With rapture she drank in his words, which struck upon her ear like exquisite music.

Thomas Seymour continued. He told her all he had suffered. He told her he had often resolved to die, in order to put an end to these tortures, but that then a glance of her eye, a word from her lips, had given him strength to live, and still longer endure these tortures, which were at the same time so full of rapture.

"But now, queen, now my strength is exhausted, and it is for you to give me life or death. To-morrow I will ascend the scaffold, or you shall permit me to live, to live for you."

Catharine trembled and looked at him wellnigh as-

tounded. He seemed so proud and imperative, she almost felt a fear for him, but it was the happy fear of a loving, meek woman before a strong, commanding man.

"Know you," said she, with a charming smile, "that you almost have the appearance of wishing to command me to love you?"

"No, queen," said he, proudly, "I cannot command you to love me, but I bid you tell me the truth. I bid you do this, for I am a man who has the right to demand the truth of a woman face to face. And I have told you, you are not the queen to me. You are but a beloved, an adored woman. This love has nothing to do with your royalty, and while I confess it to you, I do not think that you abase yourself when you receive it. For the true love of a man is ever the holiest gift that he can present to a woman, and if a beggar dedicates it to a queen, she must feel herself honored by it. Oh, queen, I am a beggar. I lie at your feet and raise my hands beseechingly to you; but I want not charity, I want not your compassion and pity, which may, perhaps, grant me an alms to lessen my misery. No, I want you yourself. I require all or nothing. It will not satisfy me that you forgive my boldness, and draw the veil of silence over my mad attempt. No, I wish you to speak, to pronounce my condemnation or a benediction on me. Oh, I know you are generous and compassionate, and even if you despise my love and will not return it, yet, it may be, you will not betray me. You will spare me, and be silent. But I repeat it, queen, I do not accept this offer of your magnanimity. You are to make me either a criminal or a god; for I am a criminal if you condemn my love, a god if you return it."

"And do you know, earl," whispered Catharine, "that you are very cruel? You want me to be either an accuser or an accomplice. You leave me no choice but that of being either your murderess or a perjured and adulterous woman—a wife who forgets her plighted faith and her sacred duty, and defiles the crown which my husband has

placed upon my head with stains, which Henry will wash out with my own blood and with yours also."

"Let it be so, then," cried the earl, almost joyfully. "Let my head fall, no matter how or when, if you but love me; for then I shall still be immortal; for a moment in your arms is an eternity of bliss."

"But I have already told you that not only your head, but mine also, is concerned in this matter. You know the king's harsh and cruel disposition. The mere suspicion is enough to condemn me. Ah, if he knew what we have just now spoken here, he would condemn me, as he condemned Catharine Howard, though I am not guilty as she was. Ah, I shudder at the thought of the block; and you, Earl Seymour, you would bring me to the scaffold, and yet you say you love me!"

Seymour sunk his head mournfully upon his breast and sighed deeply. "You have pronounced my sentence, queen, and though you are too noble to tell me the truth, yet I have guessed it. No, you do not love me, for you see with keen eyes the danger that threatens you, and you fear for yourself. No, you love me not, else you would think of nothing save love alone. The dangers would animate you, and the sword which hangs over your head you would not see, or you would with rapture grasp its edge and say, 'What is death to me, since I am happy! What care I for dying, since I have felt immortal happiness!' Ah, Catharine, you have a cold heart and a cool head. May God preserve them both to you; then will you pass through life quietly and safely; but you will yet be a poor, wretched woman, and when you come to die, they will place a royal crown upon your coffin, but love will not weep for you. Farewell, Catharine, Queen of England, and since you cannot love him, give Thomas Seymour, the traitor, your sympathy at least."

He bowed low and kissed her feet, then he arose and walked with firm step to the tree where he had tied the horses. But now Catharine arose, now she flew to him,

and grasping his hand, asked, trembling and breathless, "What are you about to do? whither are you going?"

"To the king, my lady."

"And what will you do there?"

"I will show him a traitor who has dared love the queen. You have just killed my heart; he will kill only my body. That is less painful, and I will thank him for it."

Catharine uttered a cry, and with passionate vehemence drew him back to the place where she had been resting.

"If you do what you say, you will kill me," said she, with trembling lips. "Hear me, hear! The moment you mount your horse to go to the king, I mount mine too; but not to follow you, not to return to London, but to plunge with my horse down yonder precipice. Oh, fear nothing; they will not accuse you of my murder. They will say that I plunged down there with my horse, and that the raging animal caused my death."

"Queen, take good heed, consider well what you say!" exclaimed Thomas Seymour, his countenance clearing up and his face flaming with delight. "Bear in mind that your words must be either a condemnation or an avowal. I wish death, or your love! Not the love of a queen, who thinks to be gracious to her subject, when for the moment she elevates him to herself; but the love of a woman who bows her head in meekness and receives her lover as at the same time her lord. Oh, Catharine, be well on your guard! If you come to me with the pride of a queen, if there be even one thought in you which tells you that you are bestowing a favor on a subject as you take him to your heart, then be silent and let me go hence. I am proud, and as nobly born as yourself, and however love throws me conquered at your feet, yet it shall not bow my head in the dust! But if you say that you love me, Catharine, for that I will consecrate my whole life to you. I will be your lord, but your slave also. There shall be in me no thought,

no feeling, no wish that is not devoted and subservient to you. And when I say that I will be your lord, I mean not thereby that I will not lie forever at your feet and bow my head in the dust, and say to you: 'Tread on it, if it seem good to you, for I am your slave!'"

And speaking thus, he dropped on his knees and pressed to her feet his face, whose glowing and noble expression ravished Catharine's heart.

She bent down to him, and gently lifting his head, looked with an indescribable expression of happiness and love deep into his beaming eyes.

"Do you love me?" asked Seymour, as he put his arm softly around her slender waist, and arose from his kneeling attitude.

"I love you!" said she, with a firm voice and a happy smile. "I love you, not as a queen, but as a woman; and if perchance this love bring us both to the scaffold, well then we shall at least die together, to meet again there above!"

"No, think not now of dying, Catharine, think of living—of the beautiful, enchanting future which is beckoning to us. Think of the days which will soon come, and in which our love will no longer require secrecy or a veil, but when we will manifest it to the whole world, and can proclaim our happiness from a full glad breast! Oh, Catharine, let us hope that compassionate and merciful death will loose at last the unnatural bonds that bind you to that old man. Then, when Henry is no more, then will you be mine, mine with your entire being, with your whole life; and instead of a proud regal crown, a crown of myrtle shall adorn your head! Swear that to me, Catharine; swear that you will become my wife, as soon as death has set you free."

The queen shuddered and her cheeks grew pale. "Oh," said she with a sigh, "death then is our hope and perhaps the scaffold our end!"

"No, Catharine, love is our hope, and happiness our

end. Think of life, of our future! God grant my request. Swear to me here in the face of God, and of sacred and calm nature around us, swear to me, that from the day when death frees you from your husband you will be mine, my wife, my consort! Swear to me, that you, regardless of etiquette and unmindful of tyrannical custom, will be Lord Seymour's wife, before the knell for Henry's death has died away. We will find a priest, who may bless our love and sanctify the covenant that we have this day concluded for eternity! Swear to me, that, till that wished-for day, you will keep for me your truth and love, and never forget that my honor is yours also, that your happiness is also mine!"

"I swear it!" said Catharine, solemnly. "You may depend upon me at all times and at all hours. Never will I be untrue to you; never will I have a thought that is not yours. I will love you as Thomas Seymour deserves to be loved, that is with a devoted and faithful heart. It will be my pride to subject myself to you, and with glad soul will I serve and follow you, as your true and obedient wife."

"I accept your oath!" said Seymour, solemnly. "But in return I swear that I will honor and esteem you as my queen and mistress. I swear to you that you shall never find a more obedient subject, a more unselfish counsellor, a more faithful husband, a braver champion, than I will be. 'My life for my queen, my entire heart for my beloved'; this henceforth shall be my motto, and may I be disowned and despised by God and by you, if ever I violate this oath."

"Amen!" said Catharine, with a bewitching smile.

Then both were silent. It was that silence which only love and happiness knows—that silence which is so rich in thoughts and feelings, and therefore so poor in words!

The wind rustled whisperingly in the trees, among whose dark branches here and there a bird's warbling or

flute-like notes resounded. The sun threw his emerald light over the soft velvety carpet of the ground, which, rising and falling in gentle, undulating lines, formed lovely little hollows and hillocks, on which now and then was seen here and there the slender and stately figure of a hart, or a roe, that, looking around searchingly with his bright eyes, started back frightened into the thicket on observing these two human figures and the group of horses encamped there.

Suddenly this quiet was interrupted by the loud sound of the hunter's horn, and in the distance were heard confused cries and shouts, which were echoed by the dense forest and repeated in a thousand tones.

With a sigh the queen raised her head from the earl's shoulder.

The dream was at an end; the angel came with flaming sword to drive her from paradise.

For she was no longer worthy of paradise. The fatal word had been spoken, and while it brought her love, it had perjured her.

Henry's wife, his by her vow taken before the altar, had betrothed herself to another, and given him the love that she owed her husband.

"It is passed," said he, mournfully. "These sounds call me back to my slavery. We must both resume our rôles. I must become queen again."

"But first swear to me that you will never forget this hour; that you will ever think upon the oaths which we have mutually sworn."

She looked at him almost astounded. "My God! can truth and love be forgotten?"

"You will remain ever true, Catharine?"

She smiled. "See, now, my jealous lord, do I address such questions to you?"

"Oh, queen, you well know that you possess the charm that binds forever."

"Who knows?" said she dreamily, as she raised her

enthusiastic look to heaven, and seemed to follow the bright silvery clouds which were sailing slowly across the blue ether.

Then her eyes fell on her beloved, and laying her hand softly upon his shoulder, she said: "Love is like God—eternal, primeval, and ever present! But you must believe in it to feel its presence; you must trust it to be worthy of its blessing!"

But the hallooing and the clangor of the horns came nearer and nearer. Even now was heard the barking of the dogs and the tramp of horses.

The earl had untied the horses, and led Hector, who was now quiet and gentle as a lamb, to his mistress.

"Queen," said Thomas Seymour, "two delinquents now approach you! Hector is my accomplice, and had it not been that the fly I now see on his swollen ear had made him raving, I should be the most pitiable and unhappy man in your kingdom, while now I am the happiest and most enviable."

The queen made no answer, but she put both her arms around the animal's neck and kissed him.

"Henceforth," said she, "then I will ride only Hector, and when he is old and unfit for service——"

"He shall be tended and cared for in the stud of Countess Catharine Seymour!" interrupted Thomas Seymour, as he held the queen's stirrup and assisted her into the saddle.

The two rode in silence toward the sound of the voices and horns, both too much occupied by their own thoughts to interrupt them by trifling words.

"He loves me!" thought Catharine. "I am a happy, enviable woman, for Thomas Seymour loves me."

"She loves me!" thought he, with a proud, triumphant smile. "I shall, therefore, one day become Regent of England."

Just then they came out on the large level meadow, through which they had previously ridden, and over

which now came, scattered here and there in motley confusion, the entire royal suite, Princess Elizabeth at the head.

"One thing more!" whispered Catharine. "If you ever need a messenger to me, apply to John Heywood. He is a friend whom we can trust."

And she sprang forward to meet the princess, to recount to her all the particulars of her adventure, and her happy rescue by the master of horse.

Elizabeth, however, listened to her with glowing looks and thoughts distracted, and as the queen then turned to the rest of her suite, and, surrounded by her ladies and lords, received their congratulations, a slight sign from the princess called Thomas Seymour to her side.

She allowed her horse to curvet some paces forward, by which she and the earl found themselves separated a little from the rest, and were sure of being overheard by no one.

"My lord," said she, in a vehement, almost threatening voice, "you have often and in vain besought me to grant you an interview. I have denied you. You intimated that you had many things to say to me, for which we must be alone, and which must reach no listener's ear. Well, now, to-day I grant you an interview, and I am at last inclined to listen to you."

She paused and waited for a reply. But the earl remained silent. He only made a deep and respectful bow, bending to the very neck of his horse. "Well and good; I will go to this rendezvous were it but to blind Elizabeth's eyes, that she may not see what she never ought to see. That was all."

The young princess cast on him an angry look, and a dark scowl gathered on her brow. "You understand well how to control your joy," said she; "and any one to see you just now would think——"

"That Thomas Seymour is discreet enough not to let even his rapture be read in his countenance at this danger-

ous court," interrupted the earl in a low murmur. "When, princess, may I see you and where?"

"Wait for the message that John Heywood will bring you to-day," whispered Elizabeth, as she sprang forward and again drew near the queen.

"John Heywood, again!" muttered the earl. "The confidant of both, and so my hangman, if he wishes to be!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"LE ROI S'ENNUIT."

KING HENRY was alone in his study. He had spent a few hours in writing on a devout and edifying book, which he was preparing for his subjects, and which, in virtue of his dignity as supreme lord of the Church, he designed to commend to their reading instead of the Bible.

He now laid down his pen, and, with infinite complacency, looked over the written sheets, which were to be to his people a new proof of his paternal love and care, and so convince them that Henry the Eighth was not only the noblest and most virtuous of kings, but also the wisest.

But this reflection failed to make the king more cheerful to-day; perhaps because he had already indulged in it too frequently. To be alone, annoyed and disturbed him—there were in his breast so many secret and hidden voices, whose whispers he dreaded, and which, therefore, he sought to drown—there were so many recollections of blood, which ever and again rose before him, however often he tried to wash them out in fresh blood, and which the king was afraid of, though he assumed the appearance of never repenting, never feeling disquietude.

With hasty hand he touched the gold bell standing by him, and his face brightened as he saw the door open im-

mediately, and Earl Douglas make his appearance on the threshold.

"Oh, at length!" said the lord, who had very well understood the expression of Henry's features; "at length, the king condescends to be gracious to his people."

"I gracious?" asked the king, utterly astonished. "Well, how am I so?"

"By your majesty's resting at length from his exertions, and giving a little thought to his valuable and needful health. When you remember, sire, that England's weal depends solely and alone on the weal of her king, and that you must be and remain healthy, that your people likewise may be healthy."

The king smiled with satisfaction. It never came into his head to doubt the earl's words. It seemed to him perfectly natural that the weal of his people depended on his person; but yet it was always a lofty and beautiful song, and he loved to have his courtiers repeat it.

The king, as we have said, smiled, but there was something unusual in that smile, which did not escape the earl.

"He is in the condition of a hungry anaconda," said Earl Douglas to himself. "He is on the watch for prey, and he will be bright and lively again just as soon as he has tasted a little human flesh and blood. Ah, luckily we are well supplied in that way. Therefore, we will render unto the king what is the king's. But we must be cautious and go to work warily."

He approached the king and imprinted a kiss on his hand.

"I kiss this hand," said he, "which has been to-day the fountain through which the wisdom of the head has been poured forth on this blessed paper. I kiss this paper, which will announce and explain to happy England God's pure and unadulterated word; but yet I say let this suffice for the present, my king; take rest; remember awhile that you are not only a sage, but also a man."

"Yes and truly a weak and decrepit one!" sighed the

king, as with difficulty he essayed to rise, and in so doing leaned so heavily and the earl's arm that he almost broke down under the monstrous load.

"Decrepit!" said Earl Douglas, reproachfully. "Your majesty moves to-day with as much ease and freedom as a youth, and my arm was by no means needed to help you up."

"Nevertheless, we are growing old!" said the king, who, from his weariness, was unusually sentimental and low-spirited to-day.

"Old!" repeated Earl Douglas. "Old, with those eyes darting fire, and that lofty brow, and that face, in every feature so noble! No, your majesty, kings have this in common with the gods—they never grow old."

"And therein they resemble parrots to a hair!" said John Heywood, who just then entered the room. "I own a parrot which my great-grandfather inherited from his great-grandfather, who was hair-dresser to Henry the Fourth, and which to-day still sings with the same volubility as he did a hundred years ago: 'Long live the king! long live this paragon of virtue, sweetness, beauty, and mercy! Long live the king!' He has cried this for hundreds of years, and he has repeated it for Henry the Fifth and Henry the Sixth, for Henry the Seventh and Henry the Eighth! And wonderful, the kings have changed, but the song of praise has always been appropriate, and has ever been only the simple truth! Just like yours, my Lord Douglas! Your majesty may depend upon it, he speaks the truth, for he is near akin to my parrot, which always calls him 'My cousin,' and has taught him his immortal song of praise to kings."

The king laughed, while Earl Douglas cast at John Heywood a sharp, spiteful look.

"He is an impudent imp, is he not, Douglas?" said the king.

"He is a fool!" replied he, with a shrug.

"Exactly, and therefore I just now told you the truth.

For you know children and fools speak the truth. And I became a fool just on this account, that the king, whom you all deceive by your lies, may have about him some creature, besides his looking-glass, to tell him the truth."

"Well, and what truth will you serve up for me to-day?"

"It is already served, your majesty. So lay aside for a little your regal crown and your high priesthood, and conclude to be for awhile a carnivorous beast. It is very easy to become a king. For that, nothing more is necessary than to be born of a queen under a canopy. But it is very difficult to be a man who has a good digestion. It requires a healthy stomach and a light conscience. Come, King Henry, and let us see whether you are not merely a king, but also a man that has a good stomach." And with a merry laugh he took the king's other arm and led him with the earl into the dining-room.

The king, who was an extraordinary eater, silently beckoned his suite to take their places at the table, after he had seated himself in his gilded chair. With grave and solemn air he then received from the hands of the master of ceremonies the ivory tablet on which was the bill of fare for the day. The king's dinner was a solemn and important affair. A multitude of post-wagons and couriers were ever on the way to bring from the remotest ends of the earth dainties for the royal table. The bill of fare, therefore, to-day, as ever, exhibited the choicest and rarest dishes; and always when the king found one of his favorite ones written down he made an assenting and approving motion of the head, which always lighted up the face of the master of ceremonies like a sunbeam. There were birds' nests brought from the East Indies by a fast-sailing vessel, built specially for the purpose. There were hens from Calcutta and truffles from Languedoc, which the poet-king, Francis the First of France, had the day before sent to his royal brother as a special token of affection. There was the sparkling wine of Champagne, and the fiery

wine of the Island of Cyprus, which the Republic of Venice had sent to the king as a mark of respect. There were the heavy wines of the Rhine, which looked like liquid gold, and diffused the fragrance of a whole bouquet of flowers, and with which the Protestant princes of Northern Germany hoped to fuddle the king, whom they would have gladly placed at the head of their league. There, too, were the monstrous, gigantic partridge pastries, which the Duke of Burgundy had sent, and the glorious fruits of the south, from the Spanish coast, with which the Emperor Charles the Fifth supplied the King of England's table. For it was well known that, in order to make the King of England propitious, it was necessary first to satiate him; that his palate must first be tickled, in order to gain his head or his heart.

But to-day all these things seemed insufficient to give the king the blissful pleasure which, at other times, was wont to be with him when he sat at table. He heard John Heywood's jests and biting epigrams with a melancholy smile, and a cloud was on his brow.

To be in cheerful humor, the king absolutely needed the presence of ladies. He needed them as the hunter needs the roe to enjoy the pleasure of the chase—that pleasure which consists in killing the defenceless and in declaring war against the innocent and peaceful.

The crafty courtier, Earl Douglas, readily divined Henry's dissatisfaction, and understood the secret meaning of his frowns and sighs. He hoped much from them, and was firmly resolved to draw some advantage therefrom, to the benefit of his daughter, and the harm of the queen.

"Your majesty," said he, "I am just on the point of turning traitor, and accusing my king of an injustice."

The king turned his flashing eyes upon him, and put his hand, sparkling with jewelled rings, to the golden goblet filled with Rhenish wine.

"Of an injustice—me—your king?" asked he, with stammering tongue.

"Yes, of an injustice, inasmuch as you are for me God's visible representative on earth. I would blame God if He withdrew from us for a day the brightness of the sun, the gorgeousness and perfume of His flowers, for since we children of men are accustomed to enjoy these glories, we have in a certain measure gained a right to them. So I accuse you because you have withdrawn from us the embodied flowers and the incarnate suns; because you have been so cruel, sire, as to send the queen to Epping Forest."

"Not so; the queen wanted to ride," said Henry, peevishly. "The spring weather attracted her, and since I, alas! do not possess God's exalted attribute of ubiquity, I was, no doubt, obliged to come to the resolution of being deprived of her presence. There is no horse capable of carrying the King of England."

"There is Pegasus, however, and in masterly manner you know how to manage him. But how, your majesty! the queen wanted to ride, though she was deprived of your presence thereby? She wanted to ride, though this pleasure-ride was at the same time a separation from you? Oh how cold and selfish are women's hearts! Were I a woman, I would never depart from your side, I would covert no greater happiness than to be near you, and to listen to that high and exalted wisdom which pours from your inspired lips. Were I a woman——"

"Earl, I opine that your wish is perfectly fulfilled," said John Heywood seriously. "You make in all respects the impression of an old woman!"

All laughed. But the king did not laugh; he remained serious and looked gloomily before him.

"It is true," muttered he, "she seemed excited with joy about this excursion, and in her eyes shone a fire I have seldom seen there. There must be some peculiar circumstance connected with this ride. Who accompanied the queen?"

"Princess Elizabeth," said John Heywood, who had heard everything, and saw clearly the arrow that the earl

had shot at the queen. "Princess Elizabeth, her true and dear friend, who never leaves her side. Besides, her maids of honor, who, like the dragon in the fable, keep watch over the beautiful princess."

"Who else is in the queen's company?" inquired Henry, sullenly.

"The master of horse, Earl of Sudley," said Douglas, "and——"

"That is an observation in the highest degree superfluous," interrupted John Heywood; "it is perfectly well understood by itself that the master of horse accompanies the queen. That is just as much his office as it is yours to sing the song of your cousin, my parrot."

"He is right," said the king quickly. "Thomas Seymour must accompany her, and it is my will also. Thomas Seymour is a faithful servant, and this he has inherited from his sister Jane, my much loved queen, now at rest with God, that he is devoted to his king in steadfast affection."

"The time has not yet come when one may assail the Seymours," thought the earl. "The king is yet attached to them; so he will feel hostile toward the foes of the Seymours. Let us then begin our attack on Henry Howard—that is to say, on the queen."

"Who accompanied the queen besides?" inquired Henry the Eighth, emptying the golden beaker at a draught, as though he would thereby cool the fire which already began to blaze within him. But the fiery Rhenish wine instead of cooling only heated him yet more; it drove, like a tempest, the fire kindled in his jealous heart in bright flames to his head, and made his brain glow like his heart.

"Who else accompanied her beside these?" asked Earl Douglas carelessly. "Well, I think, the lord chamberlain, Earl of Surrey."

A dark scowl gathered on the king's brow. The lion had scented his prey.

"The lord chamberlain is not in the queen's train!" said John Heywood earnestly.

"No," exclaimed Earl Douglas. "The poor earl. That will make him very sad."

"And why think you that will make him sad?" asked the king in a voice very like the roll of distant thunder.

"Because the Earl of Surrey is accustomed to live in the sunshine of royal favor, sire; because he resembles that flower which always turns its head to the sun, and receives from it vigor, color, and brilliancy."

"Let him take care that the sun does not scorch him," muttered the king.

"Earl," said John Heywood, "you must put on your spectacles so that you can see better. This time you have confounded the sun with one of its satellites. Earl Surrey is far too prudent a man to be so foolish as to gaze at the sun, and thereby blind his eyes and parch his brain. And so he is satisfied to worship one of the planets that circle round the sun."

"What does the fool intend to say by that?" asked the earl contemptuously.

"The wise will thereby give you to understand that you have this time mistaken your daughter for the queen," said John Heywood, emphasizing sharply every word, "and that it has happened to you, as to many a great astrologer, you have taken a planet for a sun."

Earl Douglas cast a dark, spiteful look at John Heywood, who answered it with one equally piercing and furious.

Their eyes were firmly fixed on each other's, and in those eyes they both read all the hatred and all the bitterness which were working in the depths of their souls. Both knew that they had from that hour sworn to each other an enmity burning and full of danger.

The king had noticed nothing of this dumb but significant scene. He was looking down, brooding over his

gloomy thoughts, and the storm-clouds rolling around his brow gathered darker and darker.

With an impetuous movement he arose from his seat, and this time he needed no helping hand to stand up. Wrath was the mighty lever that threw him up.

The courtiers arose from their seats in silence, and nobody besides John Heywood observed the look of understanding which Earl Douglas exchanged with Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, and Wriothesley, the lord chancellor.

"Ah, why is not Cranmer here?" said John Heywood to himself. "I see the three tiger-cats prowling, so there must be prey to devour somewhere. Well, I will at any rate keep my ears open wide enough to hear their roaring."

"The dinner is over, gentlemen!" said the king hastily; and the courtiers and gentlemen in waiting silently withdrew to the anteroom.

Only Earl Douglas, Gardiner, and Wriothesley, remained in the hall, while John Heywood crept softly into the king's cabinet and concealed himself behind the hanging of gold brocade which covered the door leading from the king's study to the outer anteroom.

"My lords," said the king, "follow me into my cabinet. As we are dull, the most advisable thing for us to do is to divert ourselves while we occupy ourselves with the weal of our beloved subjects, and consult concerning their happiness and what is conducive to their welfare. Follow me then, and we will hold a general consultation."

"Earl Douglas, your arm!" and as the king leaned on it and walked slowly toward the cabinet, at the entrance of which the lord chancellor and the Bishop of Winchester were waiting for him, he asked in a low voice: "You say that Henry Howard dares ever intrude himself into the queen's presence?"

"Sire, I did not say that; I meant only that he is constantly to be seen in the queen's presence."

"Oh, you mean that she perhaps authorizes him to do so," said the king, grinding his teeth.

"Sire, I hold the queen to be a noble and dutiful wife."

"I should be quite inclined to lay your head at your feet if you did not!" said the king, in whose face the first lightning of the bursting cloud of wrath began to flash.

"My head belongs to the king!" said Earl Douglas respectfully. "Let him do with it as he pleases."

"But Howard—you mean, then, that Howard loves the queen?"

"Yes, sire, I dare affirm that."

"Now, by the Mother of God, I will tread the serpent under my feet, as I did his sister!" exclaimed Henry, fiercely. "The Howards are an ambitious, dangerous, and hypocritical race."

"A race that never forgets that a daughter of their house has sat on your throne."

"But they shall forget it," cried the king, "and I must wash these proud and haughty thoughts out of their brain with their own blood. They have not then learned, from the example of their sister, how I punish disloyalty. This insolent race needs another fresh example. Well, they shall have it. Only put the means in my hand, Douglas, only a little hook that I can strike into the flesh of these Howards, and I tell you, with that little hook I will drag them to the scaffold. Give me proof of the earl's criminal love, and I promise you that for this I will grant you what you ask."

"Sire, I will give you this proof."

"When?"

"In four days, sire! At the great contest of the poets, which you have ordered to take place on the queen's birthday."

"I thank you, Douglas, I thank you," said the king with an expression almost of joy. "In four days you will have rid me of the troublesome race of Howards."