

smile, and pressed both her hands to her heart, as she looked at him.

"I will justify myself before him at least," thought she.

The king had recovered from his first shock. He again raised himself up, and his countenance now exhibited a fearful, threatening coolness.

"You confess, then," asked he, "that you were not in your sleeping-room on that night?"

"I have already said so," exclaimed Catharine, impatiently.

The king compressed his lips so violently, that they bled. "And a man was with you?" asked he—"a man with whom you made an assignation, and whom you received in the lonely tower?"

"A man was with me. But I did not receive him in the lonely tower; and it was no assignation."

"Who was that man?" yelled the king. "Answer me! Tell me his name, if you do not want me to strangle you myself!"

"King Henry, I fear death no longer!" said Catharine, with a contemptuous smile.

"Who was that man? Tell me his name!" yelled the king once more.

The queen raised herself more proudly, and her defiant look ran over the whole assembly.

"The man," said she, solemnly, "who was with me on that night—he is named——"

"He is named John Heywood!" said this individual, as he seriously and proudly walked forward from behind the king's throne. "Yes, Henry, your brother, the fool John Heywood, had on that night the proud honor of accompanying your consort on her holy errand; but, I assure you, that he was less like the king, than the king is just now like the fool."

A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly. The king leaned back in his royal seat speechless.

"And now, King Henry," said Catharine, calmly—"now I will tell you whither I went with John Heywood on that night."

She was silent, and for a moment leaned back on her seat. She felt that the looks of all were directed to her; she heard the king's wrathful groan; she felt her lover's flashing, reproachful glances; she saw the derisive smile of those haughty ladies, who had never forgiven her—that she, from a simple baroness, had become queen. But all this made her only still bolder and more courageous.

She had arrived at the turning-point of her life, where she must risk everything to avoid sinking into the abyss.

But Lady Jane also had arrived at such a decisive moment of her existence. She, too, said to herself: "I must at this hour risk all, if I do not want to lose all." She saw Henry Howard's pale, expectant face. She knew, if the queen now spoke, the whole web of their conspiracy would be revealed to him.

She must, therefore, anticipate the queen. She must warn Henry Howard.

"Fear nothing!" whispered she to him. "We were prepared for that. I have put into her hands the means of escape!"

"Will you now at last speak?" exclaimed the king, quivering with impatience and rage. "Will you at last tell us where you were on that night?"

"I will tell!" exclaimed Catharine, rising up again boldly and resolutely. "But woe be to those who drive me to this! For I tell you beforehand, from the accused I will become an accuser who demands justice, if not before the throne of the King of England, yet before the throne of the Lord of all kings! King Henry of England, do you ask me whither I went on that night with John Heywood? I might, perhaps, as your queen and consort, demand that you put this question to me not before so many witnesses, but in the quiet of our chamber; but you seek publicity, and I do not shun it. Well, hear the truth, then, all of



you! On that night, between Monday and Tuesday, I was not in my sleeping-apartment, because I had a grave and sacred duty to perform; because a dying woman called on me for help and pity! Would you know, my lord and husband, who this dying woman was? It was Anne Askew!"

"Anne Askew!" exclaimed the king in astonishment; and his countenance exhibited a less wrathful expression.

"Anne Askew!" muttered the others; and John Heywood very well saw how Bishop Gardiner's brow darkened, and how Chancellor Wriothesley turned pale and cast down his eyes.

"Yes, I was with Anne Askew!" continued the queen—"with Anne Askew, whom those pious and wise lords yonder had condemned, not so much on account of her faith, but because they knew that I loved her. Anne Askew was to die, because Catharine Parr loved her! She was to go to the stake, that my heart also might burn with fiery pains! And because it was so, I was obliged to risk everything in order to save her. Oh, my king, say yourself, did I not owe it to this poor girl to try everything in order to save her? On my account she was to suffer these tortures. For they had shamefully stolen from me a letter which Anne Askew, in the distress of her heart, had addressed to me; and they showed this letter to you in order to cast suspicion on me and accuse me to you. But your noble heart repelled the suspicion; and now their wrath fell again on Anne Askew, and she must suffer, because they did not find me punishable. She must atone for having dared to write to me. They worked matters with you so that she was put to the rack. But when my husband gave way to their urging, yet the noble king remained still awake in him. 'Go,' said he, 'rack her and kill her; but see first whether she will not recant.'"

Henry looked astonished into her noble and defiant face. "Do you know that?" asked he. "And yet we

were alone, and no human being present. Who could tell you that?"

"When man is no longer able to help, then God undertakes!" said Catharine solemnly. "It was God who commanded me to go to Anne Askew, and try whether I could save her. And I went. But though the wife of a noble and great king, I am still but a weak and timid woman. I was afraid to tread this gloomy and dangerous path alone; I needed a strong manly arm to lean upon; and so John Heywood lent me his."

"And you were really with Anne Askew," interposed the king, thoughtfully—"with that hardened sinner, who despised mercy, and in the stubbornness of her soul would not be a partaker of the pardon that I offered her?"

"My lord and husband," said the queen, with tears in her eyes, "she whom you have just accused stands even now before the throne of the Lord, and has received from her God the forgiveness of her sins! Therefore, do you likewise pardon her; and may the flames of the stake, to which yesterday the noble virgin body of this girl was bound, have consumed also the wrath and hatred which had been kindled in your heart against her! Anne Askew passed away like a saint; for she forgave all her enemies and blessed her tormentors."

"Anne Askew was a damnable sinner, who dared resist the command of her lord and king!" interrupted Bishop Gardiner, looking daggers at her.

"And dare you maintain, my lord, that you at that time fulfilled the commands of your royal master simply and exactly?" asked Catharine. "Did you keep within them with respect to Anne Askew? No! I say; for the king had not ordered you to torture her; he had not bidden you to lacerate in blasphemous wrath a noble human form, and distort that likeness of God into a horrible caricature. And that, my lord, you did! Before God and your king, I accuse you of it—I, the queen! For you know, my lord and husband, I was there when Anne



Askew was racked. I saw her agony; and John Heywood saw it with me."

The eyes of all were now directed inquiringly to the king, of whose ferocity and choler every one expected a violent outbreak.

But this time they were mistaken. The king was so well satisfied to find his consort clear of the crime laid to her charge, that he willingly forgave her for having committed a crime of less weighty character. Besides, it filled him with respect to see his consort confronting her accusers so boldly and proudly; and he felt toward them just as burning wrath and hatred as he had before harbored against the queen. He was pleased that the malignant and persistent persecutors of his fair and proud wife should now be humbled by her before the eyes of all his court.

Therefore he looked at her with an imperceptible smile, and said with deep interest: "But how could this happen, my lady? By what path did you get thither?"

"That is an inquiry which any one except the king is authorized to make. King Henry alone knows the way that I went!" said Catharine, with a slight smile.

John Heywood, who was still standing behind the king's throne, now bent down close to Henry's ear, and spoke with him a long time in a quick, low tone.

The king listened to him attentively; then he murmured so loud that the bystanders could very well understand him: "By God, she is a spirited and brave woman; and we should be obliged to confess that, even were she not our queen!"

"Continue, my lady!" said he then aloud, turning to the queen with a gracious look. "Relate to me, Catharine, what saw you then in the torture-chamber?"

"Oh, my king and lord, it horrifies me only to think of it," cried she, shuddering and turning pale. "I saw a poor young woman who writhed in fearful agony, and whose staring eyes were raised in mute supplication to

Heaven. She did not beg her tormentors for mercy; she wanted from them no compassion and no pity; she did not scream and whine from the pain, though her limbs cracked and her flesh snapped apart like glass; she raised her clasped hands to God, and her lips murmured low prayers, which, perhaps, made the angels of heaven weep, but were not able to touch the hearts of her tormentors. You had ordered her to be racked, if she would not retract. They did not ask her whether she would do this—they racked her. But her soul was strong and full of courage; and, under the tortures of the executioner, her lips remained mute. Let theologians say and determine whether Anne Askew's faith was a false one; but this they will not dare deny: that in the noble enthusiasm of this faith, she was a heroine who at least did not deny her God. At length, worn out with so much useless exertion, the assistant executioners discontinued their bloody work, to rest from the tortures which they had prepared for Anne Askew. The lieutenant of the Tower declared the work of the rack ended. The highest degrees had been applied, and they had proved powerless; cruelty was obliged to acknowledge itself conquered. But the priests of the Church, with savage vehemence, demanded that she should be racked once more. Dare deny that, ye lords, whom I behold standing there opposite with faces pale as death! Yes, my king, the servants of the rack refused to obey the servants of God; for in the hearts of the hangman's drudges there was more pity than in the hearts of the priests! And when they refused to proceed in their bloody work, and when the lieutenant of the Tower, in virtue of the existing law, declared the racking at an end, then I saw one of the first ministers of our Church throw aside his sacred garments; then the priest of God transformed himself into a hangman's drudge, who, with bloodthirsty delight, lacerated anew the noble mangled body of the young girl, and more cruel than the attendants of the rack, unsparingly they broke and dislocated the limbs, which *they*



had only squeezed in their screws.\* Excuse me, my king, from sketching this scene of horror still further! Horrified and trembling, I fled from that frightful place, and returned to my room, shattered and sad at heart."

Catharine ceased, exhausted, and sank back into her seat.

A breathless stillness reigned around. All faces were pale and colorless. Gardiner and Wriothesley stood with their eyes fixed, gloomy and defiant, expecting that the king's wrath would crush and destroy them.

But the king scarcely thought of them; he thought only of his fair young queen, whose boldness inspired him with respect, and whose innocence and purity filled him with a proud and blissful joy.

He was, therefore, very much inclined to forgive those who in reality had committed no offence further than this, that they had carried out a little too literally and strictly the orders of their master.

A long pause had ensued—a pause full of expectation and anxiety for all who were assembled in the hall. Only Catharine reclined calmly in her chair, and with beaming eyes looked across to Thomas Seymour, whose handsome countenance betrayed to her the gratification and satisfaction which he felt at this clearing up of her mysterious night-wandering.

At last the king arose, and, bowing low before his consort, said in a loud, full-toned voice: "I have deeply and bitterly injured you, my noble wife; and as I publicly accused you, I will also publicly ask your forgiveness! You have a right to be angry with me; for it behooved me, above all, to believe with unshaken firmness in the truth and honor of my wife. My lady, you have made a brilliant vindication of yourself; and I, the king, first of all bow before you, and beg that you may forgive me and impose some penance."

"Leave it to me, queen, to impose a penance on this

\* Burnet's "History of the Reformation," vol. i, p. 132.

repentant sinner!" cried John Heywood, gayly. "Your majesty is much too magnanimous, much too timid, to treat him as roughly as my brother King Henry deserves. Leave it to me, then, to punish him; for only the fool is wise enough to punish the king after his deserts."

Catharine nodded to him with a grateful smile. She comprehended perfectly John Heywood's delicacy and nice tact; she apprehended that he wanted by a joke to relieve her from her painful situation, and put an end to the king's public acknowledgment, which at the same time must turn to her bitter reproach—bitter, though it were only self-reproach.

"Well," said she, smiling, "what punishment, then, will you impose upon the king?"

"The punishment of recognizing the fool as his equal!"

"God is my witness that I do so!" cried the king, almost solemnly. "Fools we are, one and all, and we fall short of the renown which we have before men."

"But my sentence is not yet complete, brother!" continued John Heywood. "I furthermore give sentence, that you also forthwith allow me to recite my poem to you, and that you open your ears in order to hear what John Heywood, the wise, has indited!"

"You have, then, fulfilled my command, and composed a new interlude?" cried the king, vivaciously.

"No interlude, but a wholly novel, comical affair—a play full of lampoons and jokes, at which your eyes are to overflow, yet not with weeping, but with laughter. To the right noble Earl of Surrey belongs the proud honor of having presented to our happy England her first sonnets. Well, now, I also will give her something new. I present her the first comedy; and as he sings the beauty of his Geraldine, so I celebrate the fame of Gammer Gurton's sewing-needle—Gammer Gurton's needle—so my piece is called; and you, King Henry, shall listen to it as a punishment for your sins!"



"I will do so," cried the king, cheerfully, "provided you permit it, Kate! But before I do so, I make also one more condition—a condition for you, queen! Kate, you have disdained to impose a penance on me, but grant me at least the pleasure of being allowed to fulfil some wish of yours! Make me a request, that I may grant it you!"

"Well, then, my lord and king," said Catharine with a charming smile, "I beg you to think no more of the incidents of this day, and to forgive those whom I accused, only because their accusation was my vindication. They who brought charges against me have in this hour felt contrition for their own fault. Let that suffice, king, and forgive them, as I do!"

"You are a noble and great woman, Kate!" cried the king; and, as his glance swept over toward Gardiner with an almost contemptuous expression, he continued: "Your request is granted. But woe to them who shall dare accuse you again! And have you nothing further to demand, Kate?"

"Nay, one thing more, my lord and husband!" She leaned nearer to the king's ear, and whispered: "They have also accused your noblest and most faithful servant; they have accused Cranmer. Condemn him not, king, without having heard him; and if I may beg a favor of you, it is this: talk with Cranmer yourself. Tell him of what they have charged him, and hear his vindication."

"It shall be so, Kate," said the king, "and you shall be present! But let this be a secret between us, Kate, and we will carry it out in perfect silence. And now, then, John Heywood, let us hear your composition; and woe to you, if it does not accomplish what you promised—if it does not make us laugh! For you well know that you are then inevitably exposed to the rods of our injured ladies."

"They shall have leave to whip me to death, if I do not make you laugh!" cried John Heywood, gayly, as he drew out his manuscript.

Soon the hall rang again with loud laughter; and in

the universal merriment no one observed that Bishop Gardiner and Earl Douglas slipped quietly away.

In the anteroom without, they stopped and looked at each other long and silently; their countenances expressed the wrath and bitterness which filled them; and they understood this mute language of their features.

"She must die!" said Gardiner in a short and quick tone. "She has for once escaped from our snares; we will tie them all the tighter next time!"

"And I already hold in my hand the threads out of which we will form these snares," said Earl Douglas. "We have to-day falsely accused her of a love-affair. When we do it again, we shall speak the truth. Did you see the looks that Catharine exchanged with the heretical Earl Sudley, Thomas Seymour?"

"I saw them, earl!"

"For these looks she will die, my lord. The queen loves Thomas Seymour, and this love will be her death."

"Amen!" said Bishop Gardiner, solemnly, as he raised his eyes devoutly to heaven. "Amen! The queen has grievously and bitterly injured us to-day; she has insulted and abused us before all the court. We will requite her for it some day! The torture-chamber, which she has depicted in such lively colors, may yet one day open for her, too—not that she may behold another's agonies, but that she may suffer agonies herself. We shall one day avenge ourselves!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### REVENGE.

MISS HOLLAND, the beautiful and much-admired mistress of the Duke of Norfolk, was alone in her magnificently adorned boudoir. It was the hour when ordinarily the