

hand. Invite him to a meeting to-night at the usual time and place."

"Oh, I shall at last have him again!" whispered Lady Jane; and she stepped to the writing-table and with trembling hand began to write.

But suddenly she stopped, and looked at her father sharply and suspiciously.

"You swear to me, my father, that no danger threatens him if he comes?"

"I swear to you, Jane, that you shall be the one to save his life! I swear to you, Jane, that you shall take vengeance on the queen—vengeance for all the agony, the humiliation and despair that you have suffered by her. To-day she is yet Queen of England! To-morrow she will be nothing more than a criminal, who sighs in the confinement of the Tower for the hour of her execution. And you will be Henry's seventh queen. Write, then, my daughter, write! And may love dictate to you the proper words!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FEAST OF DEATH.

FOR a long time the king had not appeared in such good spirits as on this festive evening. For a long time he had not been so completely the tender husband, the good-natured companion, the cheerful *bon-vivant*.

The pains of his leg seemed to have disappeared, and even the weight of his body seemed to be less burdensome than usual, for more than once he rose from his chair, and walked a few steps through the brilliantly lighted saloon, in which the ladies and lords of his court, in festive attire, were moving gently to and fro; in which music and laughter resounded.

How tender he showed himself toward the queen to-day; with what extraordinary kindness he met the Duke of Norfolk; with what smiling attention he listened to the Earl of Surrey, as he, at the king's desire, recited some new sonnets to Geraldine!

This marked preference for the noble Howards enraptured the Roman Catholic party at court, and filled it with new hopes and new confidence.

But one there was who did not allow himself to be deceived by this mask which King Henry had to-day put on over his wrathful face.

John Heywood had faith neither in the king's cheerfulness nor in his tenderness. He knew the king; he was aware that those to whom he was most friendly often had the most to fear from him. Therefore, he watched him; and he saw, beneath this mask of friendliness, the king's real angry countenance sometimes flash out in a quick, hasty look.

The resounding music and the mad rejoicing no more deceived John Heywood. He beheld Death standing behind this dazzling life; he smelt the reek of corruption concealed beneath the perfume of these brilliant flowers.

John Heywood no longer laughed and no longer chatted. He watched.

For the first time in a long while the king did not need to-day the exciting jest and the stinging wit of his fool in order to be cheerful and in good humor.

So the fool had time and leisure to be a reasonable and observant man; and he improved the time.

He saw the looks of mutual understanding and secure triumph that Earl Douglas exchanged with Gardiner, and it made him mistrustful to notice that these favorites of the king, at other times so jealous, did not seem to be at all disturbed by the extraordinary marks of favor which the Howards were enjoying this evening.

Once he heard how Gardiner asked Wriothesley, as he passed by, "And the soldiers of the Tower?" and how he

replied just as laconically, "They stand near the coach, and wait."

It was, therefore, perfectly clear that somebody would be committed to prison this very day. There was, therefore, among the laughing, richly-attired, and jesting guests of this court, one who this very night, when he left these halls radiant with splendor and pleasure, was to behold the dark and gloomy chambers of the Tower.

The only question was, who that one was for whom the brilliant comedy of this evening was to be changed to so sad a drama.

John Heywood felt his heart oppressed with an unaccountable apprehension, and the king's extraordinary tenderness toward the queen terrified him.

As now he smiled on Catharine, as he now stroked her cheeks, so had the king smiled on Anne Boleyn in the same hour that he ordered her arrest; so had he stroked Buckingham's cheek on the same day that he signed his death-warrant.

The fool was alarmed at this brilliant feast, resounding music, and the mad merriment of the king. He was horrified at the laughing faces and frivolous jests, which came streaming from all those mirthful lips.

O Heaven! they laughed, and death was in the midst of them; they laughed, and the gates of the Tower were already opened to admit one of those merry guests of the king into that house which no one in those days of Henry the Eighth left again, save to go to the stake or to ascend the scaffold!

Who was the condemned? For whom were the soldiers below at the carriage waiting? John Heywood in vain racked his brain with this question.

Nowhere could he spy a trace that might lead him on the right track; nowhere a clew that might conduct him through this labyrinth of horrors.

"When you are afraid of the devil, you do well to put yourself under his immediate protection," muttered John

Heywood; and sad and despondent at heart, he crept behind the king's throne and crouched down by it on the ground.

John Heywood had such a little, diminutive form, and the king's throne was so large and broad, that it altogether concealed the little crouching fool.

No one had noticed that John Heywood was concealed there behind the king. Nobody saw his large, keen eyes peeping out from behind the throne and surveying and watching the whole hall.

John Heywood could see everything and hear everything going on in the vicinity of the king. He could observe every one who approached the queen.

He saw Lady Jane likewise, who was standing by the queen's seat. He saw how Earl Douglas drew near his daughter, and how she turned deadly pale as he stepped up to her.

John Heywood held his breath and listened.

Earl Douglas stood near his daughter, and nodded to her with a peculiar smile. "Go, now, Jane, go and change your dress. It is time. Only see how impatiently and longingly Henry Howard is already looking this way, and with what languishing and enamored glances he seems to give a hint to the queen. Go then, Jane, and think of your promise."

"And will you, my father, also think of your promise?" inquired Lady Jane, with trembling lips. "Will no danger threaten him?"

"I will, Jane. But now make haste, my daughter, and be prudent and adroit."

Lady Jane bowed, and murmured a few unintelligible words. Then she approached the queen, and begged permission to retire from the feast, because a severe indisposition had suddenly overtaken her.

Lady Jane's countenance was so pale and deathlike, that the queen might well believe in the indisposition of her first maid of honor, and she allowed her to retire.

Lady Jane left the hall. The queen continued the conversation with Lord Hertford, who was standing by her.

It was a very lively and warm conversation, and the queen therefore did not heed what was passing around her; and she heard nothing of the conversation between the king and Earl Douglas.

John Heywood, still crouching behind the king's throne, observed everything and heard every word of this softly whispered conversation.

"Sire," said Earl Douglas, "it is late and the hour of midnight is drawing nigh. Will your majesty be pleased to conclude the feast? For you well know that at midnight we must be over there in the green summer-house, and it is a long way there."

"Yes, yes, at midnight!" muttered the king. "At midnight the carnival is at an end; and we shall tear off our mask, and show our wrathful countenance to the criminals! At midnight we must be over in the green summer-house. Yes, Douglas, we must make haste; for it would be cruel to let the tender Surrey wait still longer. So we will give his Geraldine liberty to leave the feast; and we ourselves must begin our journey. Ah, Douglas, it is a hard path that we have to tread, and the furies and gods of vengeance bear our torches. To work, then—to work!"

The king arose from his seat, and stepped to the queen, to whom he presented his hand with a tender smile.

"My lady, it is late," said he; "and we, who are king of so many subjects—we are, nevertheless, in turn, the subject of a king. This is the physician, and we must obey him. He has ordered me to seek my couch before midnight, and, as a loyal subject must do, I obey. We wish you, therefore, a good-night, Kate; and may your beautiful eyes on the morrow also shine as starlike as they do to-night."

"They will shine to-morrow as to-night, if my lord and husband is still as gracious to me to-morrow as to-day,"

said Catharine, with perfect artlessness and without embarrassment, as she gave her hand to the king.

Henry cast on her a suspicious, searching look, and a peculiar, malicious expression was manifested in his face.

"Do you believe then, Kate, that we can ever be ungracious to you?" asked he.

"As to that, I think," said she, with a smile, "that even the sun does not always shine; and that a gloomy night always succeeds his splendor."

The king did not reply. He looked her steadily in the face, and his features suddenly assumed a gentler expression.

Perhaps he had compassion on his young wife. Perhaps he felt pity for her youth and her enchanting smile, which had so often revived and refreshed his heart.

Earl Douglas at least feared so.

"Sire," said he, "it is late. The hour of midnight is drawing nigh."

"Then let us go," exclaimed the king, with a sigh. "Yes once again, good-night, Kate! Nay, do not accompany me! I will leave the hall quite unobserved; and I shall be pleased, if my guests will still prolong the fair feast till morning. All of you remain here! No one but Douglas accompanies me."

"And your brother, the fool!" said John Heywood, who long before had come out of his hiding-place and was now standing by the king. "Yes, come, brother Henry; let us quit this feast. It is not becoming for wise men of our sort to grant our presence still longer to the feast of fools. Come to your couch, king, and I will lull your ear to sleep with the sayings of my wisdom, and enliven your soul with the manna of my learning."

While John Heywood thus spoke, it did not escape him that the features of the earl suddenly clouded and a dark frown settled on his brow.

"Spare your wisdom for to-day, John," said the king; "for you would indeed be preaching only to deaf ears. I

am tired, and I require not your erudition, but sleep. Good-night, John."

The king left the hall, leaning on Earl Douglas's arm.

"Earl Douglas does not wish me to accompany the king," whispered John Heywood. "He is afraid the king might blab out to me a little of that diabolical work which they will commence at midnight. Well, I call the devil, as well as the king, my brother, and with his help I too will be in the green-room at midnight. Ah, the queen is retiring; and there is the Duke of Norfolk leaving the hall. I have a slight longing to see whether the duke goes hence luckily and without danger, or if the soldiers who stand near the coach, as Wriothsesley says, will perchance be the duke's bodyguard for this night."

Slipping out of the hall with the quickness of a cat, John Heywood passed the duke in the anteroom and hurried on to the outer gateway, before which the carriages were drawn up.

John Heywood leaned against a pillar and watched. A few minutes, and the duke's tall and proud form appeared in the entrance-hall; and the footman, hurrying forward, called his carriage.

The carriage rolled up; the door was opened.

Two men wrapped in black mantles sat by the coachman; two others stood behind as footmen, while a fifth was by the open door of the carriage.

The duke first noticed him as his foot had already touched the step of the carriage.

"This is not my equipage! These are not my people!" said he; and he tried to step back. But the pretended servant forced him violently into the carriage and shut the door.

"Forward!" ordered he. The carriage rolled on. A moment still, John Heywood saw the duke's pale face appear at the open carriage window, and it seemed to him as though he were stretching out his arms, calling for help—then the carriage disappeared in the night.

"Poor duke!" murmured John Heywood. "The gates of the Tower are heavy, and your arm will not be strong enough to open them again, when they have once closed behind you. But it avails nothing to think more about him now. The queen is also in danger. Away, then, to the queen!"

With fleet foot John Heywood hastened back into the castle. Through passages and corridors he slipped hurriedly along.

Now he stood in the corridor which led to the apartments of the queen.

"I will constitute her guard to-night," muttered John Heywood, as he hid himself in one of the niches in the corridor. "The fool by his prayers will keep far from the door of his saint the tricks of the devil, and protect her from the snares which the pious Bishop Gardiner and the crafty courtier Douglas want to lay for her feet. My queen shall not fall and be ruined. The fool yet lives to protect her."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE QUEEN

FROM the niche in which John Heywood had hid himself he could survey the entire corridor and all the doors opening into it—could see everything and hear everything without being himself seen, for the projecting pilaster completely shaded him.

So John Heywood stood and listened. All was quiet in the corridor. In the distance was now and then heard the deadened sound of the music; and the confused hum of many voices from the festive halls forced its way to the listener's ear.

This was the only thing that John Heywood perceived. All else was still.