

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"LE ROI EST MORT—VIVE LA REINE!"

KING HENRY lay a-dying. That life full of sin, full of blood and crime, full of treachery and cunning, full of hypocrisy and sanctimonious cruelty—that life was at last lived out. That hand, which had signed so many death-warrants, was now clutched in the throes of death. It had stiffened at the very moment when the king was going to sign the Duke of Norfolk's death-warrant.* And the king was dying with the gnawing consciousness that he had no longer the power to throttle that enemy whom he hated. The mighty king was now nothing more than a feeble, dying old man, who was no longer able to hold the pen and sign this death-warrant for which he had so long hankered and hoped. Now it lay before him, and he no longer had the power to use it. God, in His wisdom and His justice, had decreed against him the most grievous and horrible of punishments; He had left him his consciousness; He had not crippled him in mind, but in body only. And that motionless and rigid mass which, growing chill in death, lay there on the couch of purple trimmed with gold—that was the king—a king whom agony of conscience did not permit to die, and who now shuddered and was horrified in view of death, to which he had, with relentless cruelty, hunted so many of his subjects.

Catharine and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the noble Cranmer, stood at his bedside: and whilst in convulsive agony he grasped Catharine's hands, he listened to the devout prayers which Cranmer was saying over him.

Once he asked with mumbling tongue: "My lord, what kind of a world then is that where those who condemn others to die, are condemned to die themselves?" † And as the pious Cranmer, touched by the agonies and tortures of conscience which he read in the king's looks, and

* Historical. † The king's own words.—Leti, vol. i, p. 16.

full of pity for the dying tyrant, sought to comfort him, and spoke to him of the mercy of God which has compassion on every sinner, the king groaned out: "No, no! No mercy for him who knew no mercy!"

At length this awful struggle of death with life was ended; and death had vanquished life. The king had closed his eyes to earth, to open them again there above, as a guilt-laden sinner in the presence of God.

For three days his death was kept a secret. They wanted first to have everything arranged, and to fill up the void which his death must make. They wanted, when they spoke to the people of the dead king, to show them also at the same time the living king. And since they knew that the people would not weep for the dead, they were to rejoice for the living; since they would sing no funeral psalms, they were to let their hymns of joy resound.

On the third day the gates of Whitehall were thrown open, and a gloomy funeral train moved through the streets of London. In dead silence the populace saw borne past them the coffin of the king, before whom they had trembled so much, and for whom they now had not a word of mourning or of pity—no tears for the dead who for seven-and-thirty years had been their king.

They were bearing the coffin to Westminster Abbey to the splendid monument which Wolsey had built there for his royal master. But the way was long, and the panting horses with black housings, which drew the hearse, had often to stop and rest. And all of a sudden, as the carriage stood still on one of the large open squares, blood was seen to issue from the king's coffin. It streamed down in crimson currents and flowed over the stones of the streets. The people with a shudder stood around and saw the king's blood flowing, and thought how much blood he had spilt on that same spot, for the coffin was standing on the square where the executions were wont to take place, and where the scaffolds were erected and the stakes set.

As the people stood gazing at the blood which flowed from the king's coffin, two dogs sprang forth from the crowd and, with greedy tongue, licked the blood of King Henry the Eighth. But the people, shuddering and horror-stricken, fled in all directions, and talked among themselves of the poor priest who a few weeks before was executed here on this very spot, because he would not recognize the king as the supreme lord of the Church and God's vicegerent; of that unfortunate man who cursed the king, and on the scaffold said: "May the dogs one day drink the blood of this king who has shed so much innocent blood!" And now the curse of the dying man had found its fulfilment, and the dogs had drunk the king's blood.*

When the gloomy funeral train had left the palace of Whitehall, when the king's corpse no longer infected the halls with its awful stench of corruption, and the court was preparing to do homage to the boy Edward as the new king, Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley, entered the room of the young royal widow. He came in a magnificent mourning suit, and his elder brother, Edward Seymour, and Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, walked by his side.

With a blush and a sweet smile, Catharine bade them welcome.

"Queen," said Thomas Seymour with solemn air, "I come to-day to claim of you the fulfilment of your vow! Oh, do not cast down your eyes, nor blush for shame. The noble archbishop knows your heart, and he knows that it is as pure as the heart of a maiden, and that an unchaste thought has never sullied your pure soul. And my brother would not be here, had he not faith in and respect for a love which has preserved itself so faithful and constant amidst storms and dangers. I have selected these two noble friends as my suitors, and in their presence I will ask you: 'Queen Catharine, the king is dead, and no

* Historical.—See Tytler, p. 481.

fetters longer bind your heart; will you not give it me as my own? Will you accept me as your husband, and sacrifice for me your royal title and your exalted position?"

With a bewitching smile she gave him her hand. "You well know," whispered she, "that I sacrifice nothing for you, but receive from you all of happiness and love that I hope for."

"Will you then, in the presence of these two friends, accept me as your future husband, and plight me your vow of truth and love?"

Catharine trembled and cast down her eyes with the bashfulness of a young girl. "Alas!" whispered she, "do you not then see my mourning dress? Is it becoming to think of happiness, while the funeral lamentations have scarcely died away?"

"Queen Catharine," said Archbishop Cranmer, "let the dead bury their dead! Life also has its rights; and man should not give up his claim on happiness, for it is a most holy possession. You have endured much and suffered much, queen, but your heart is pure and without guilt; therefore you may now, with a clear conscience, bid welcome to happiness also. Do not delay about it. In God's name I have come to bless your love, and give to you your happiness a holy consecration."

"And I," said Edward Seymour, "I have begged of my brother the honor of being allowed to accompany him in order to say to your majesty that I know how to duly appreciate the high honor which you show our family, and that, as your brother-in-law, I shall ever be mindful that you were once my queen and I your subject."

"But I," cried Thomas Seymour, "I would not delay coming to you, in order that I might show you that love only brings me to you, and that no other consideration could induce me. The king's will is not yet opened, and I know not its contents. But however it may determine with respect to all of us, it cannot diminish or increase my happiness in possessing you. Whatever you may be, you

will ever be to me only the adored woman, the ardently loved wife; and only to assure you of this, I have come this very day."

Catharine extended her hand to him with a bewitching smile. "I have never doubted of you, Seymour," whispered she, "and never did I love you more ardently than when I wanted to renounce you."

She bowed her head on her lover's shoulder, and tears of purest joy bedewed her cheeks. The Archbishop of Canterbury joined their hands, and blessed them as betrothed lovers; and the elder Seymour, Earl Hertford, bowed and greeted them as a betrothed couple.

On that very same day the king's will was opened. In the large gilded hall, in which King Henry's merry laughter and thundering voice of wrath had so often resounded, were now read his last commands. The whole court was assembled, as it was wont to be for a joyous festival; and Catharine once more sat on the royal throne. But the dreaded tyrant, the bloodthirsty King Henry the Eighth, was no longer at her side; but the poor pale boy, Edward, who had inherited from his father neither energy nor genius, but only his thirst for blood and his canting hypocrisy. At his side stood his sisters, the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth. Both were pale and of a sad countenance; but with both, it was not for their father that they were grieving.

Mary, the bigoted Roman Catholic, saw with horror and bitter anguish the days of adversity which were about to befall her church; for Edward was a fanatical opponent of the Roman Catholic religion, and she knew that he would shed the blood of the papists with relentless cruelty. On this account it was that she mourned.

But Elizabeth, that young girl of ardent heart—she thought neither of her father nor of the dangers threatening the Church; she thought only of her love, she felt only that she had been deprived of a hope, of an illusion—that she had awoke from a sweet and enchanting dream to

the rude and barren reality. She had given up her first love, but her heart bled and the wound still smarted.

The will was read. Elizabeth looked toward Thomas Seymour during this solemn and portentous reading. She wanted to read in his countenance the impression made on him by these grave words, so pregnant with the future; she wanted to search the depths of his soul, and to penetrate the secret thoughts of his heart. She saw how he turned pale when, not Queen Catharine, but his brother, Earl Hertford, was appointed regent during Edward's minority; she saw the sinister, almost angry look which he threw at the queen; and with a cruel smile she murmured: "I am revenged! He loves her no longer!"

John Heywood, who was standing behind the queen's throne, had also observed the look of Thomas Seymour, yet not like Elizabeth, with a rejoicing, but with a sorrowful heart, and he dropped his head upon his breast and murmured: "Poor Catharine! He will hate her, and she will be very unhappy."

But she was still happy. Her eye beamed with pure delight when she perceived that her lover was, by the king's will, appointed High Admiral of England and guardian of the young king. She thought not of herself, but only of him, of her lover; and it filled her with the proudest satisfaction to see him invested with places of such high honor and dignity.

Poor Catharine! Her eye did not see the sullen cloud which still rested on the brow of her beloved. She was so happy and so innocent, and so little ambitious! For her this only was happiness, to be her lover's, to be the wife of Thomas Seymour.

And this happiness was to be hers. Thirty days after the death of King Henry the Eighth she became the wife of the high admiral, Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley. Archbishop Cranmer solemnized their union in the chapel at Whitehall, and the lord protector, now Duke of Somerset, formerly Earl of Hertford, the brother of Thomas Sey-

mour, was the witness of this marriage, which was, however, still kept a secret, and of which there were to be no other witnesses. When, however, they resorted to the chapel for the marriage, Princess Elizabeth came forward to meet the queen, and offered her hand.

It was the first time they had met since the dreadful day on which they confronted each other as enemies—the first time that they had again seen each other eye to eye.

Elizabeth had wrung this sacrifice from her heart. Her proud soul revolted at the thought that Thomas Seymour might imagine that she was still grieving for him, that she still loved him. She would show him that her heart was entirely recovered from that first dream of her youth—that she had not the least regret or pain.

She accosted him with a haughty, cold smile, and presented Catharine her hand. "Queen," said she, "you have so long been a kind and faithful mother to me, that I may well once more claim the right of being your daughter. Let me, therefore, as your daughter, be present at the solemn transaction in which you are about to engage; and allow me to stand at your side and pray for you, whilst the archbishop performs the sacred service, and transforms the queen into the Countess of Sudley. May God bless you, Catharine, and give you all the happiness that you deserve!"

And Princess Elizabeth knelt at Catharine's side, as the archbishop blest this new marriage tie. And while she prayed her eye again glided over toward Thomas Seymour, who was standing there by his young wife. Catharine's countenance beamed with beauty and happiness, but upon Thomas Seymour's brow still lay the cloud that had settled there on that day when the king's will was opened—that will which did *not* make Queen Catharine regent, and which thereby destroyed Thomas Seymour's proud and ambitious schemes.

And that cloud remained on Thomas Seymour's brow.

It sank down lower and still lower. It soon overshadowed the happiness of Catharine's love, and awakened her from her short dream of bliss.

What she suffered, how much of secret agony and silent woe she endured, who can wish to know or conjecture? Catharine had a proud and a chaste soul. She concealed from the world her pain and her grief, as bashfully as she had once done her love. Nobody suspected what she suffered and how she struggled with her crushed heart.

She never complained; she saw bloom after bloom fall from her life; she saw the smile disappear from her husband's countenance; she heard his voice, at first so tender, gradually harden to harsher tones; she felt his heart growing colder and colder, and his love changing into indifference, perhaps even into hate.

She had devoted her whole heart to love, but she felt day by day, and hour by hour, that her husband's heart was cooling more and more. She felt, with dreadful heartrending certainty, she was his with all her love. But he was no longer hers.

And she tormented her heart to find out why he no longer loved her—what she had been guilty of, that he turned away from her. Seymour had not the delicacy and magnanimity to conceal from her his inward thoughts; and at last she comprehended why he neglected her.

He had hoped that Catharine would be Regent of England, that he then would be consort of *the regent*. Because it had not hapened so, his love had died.

Catharine felt this, and she died of it. But not suddenly, not at once, did death release her from her sorrows and racking tortures. Six months she had to suffer and struggle with them. After six months she died.

Strange rumors were spread at her death; and John Heywood never passed by Earl Seymour without gazing at him with an angry look, and saying: "You have murdered the beautiful queen! Deny it, if you can!"

Thomas Seymour laughed, and did not consider it

worth his while to defend himself against the accusations of the fool. He laughed, notwithstanding he had not yet put off the mourning he wore for Catharine.

In these mourning garments he ventured to approach the Princess Elizabeth, to swear to her his ardent love, and sue for her hand. But Elizabeth repelled him with coldness and haughty contempt; and, like the fool, the princess also said: "You have murdered Catharine! I cannot be the wife of a murderer!"

And God's justice punished the murderer of the innocent and noble Catharine; and scarcely three months after the death of his wife, the high admiral had to ascend the scaffold, and was executed as a traitor.

By Catharine's wish, her books and papers were given to her true friend John Heywood, and he undertook with the greatest care an examination of the same. He found among her papers many leaves written by herself, many verses and poems, which breathed forth the sorrowfulness of her spirit. Catharine herself had collected them into a book, and with her own hand she had given to the book this title: "*Lamentations of a Sinner.*"

Catharine had wept much as she penned these "*Lamentations*"; for in many places the manuscript was illegible, and her tears had obliterated the characters.

John Heywood kissed the spots where the traces of her tears remained, and whispered: "The sinner has by her suffering been glorified into a saint; and these poems are the cross and the monument which she has prepared for her own grave. I will set up this cross, that the good may take comfort, and the wicked flee from it." And he did so. He had the "*Lamentations of a Sinner*" printed; and this book was the fairest monument of Catharine.

