

A Ladder of Swords

dience, she made Angèle sit at her feet and tell her whole story again from first to last. They were alone, and Elizabeth showed to this young refugee more of her own heart than any other woman had ever seen. Not by words alone, for she made no long story; but once she stooped and kissed Angèle upon the cheek, and once her eyes filled up with tears, and they dropped upon her lap unheeded. All the devotion shown herself as a woman had come to naught; and it may be that this thought stirred in her now. She remembered how Leicester and herself had parted, and how she was denied all those soft resources of regret which were the right of the meanest women in her realm. For, whatever she might say to her Parliament and people, she knew that all was too late—that she would never marry, and must go childless and uncomforted to her grave. Years upon years of delusion of her people, of sacrifice to policy, had at last become a self-delusion, to which her eyes were not full opened yet—she sought to shut them tight. But these refugees, coming at the moment of