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LORD DACRE OF GILSLAND; OR, The Rising in the North: AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF ELIZABETH. By E. M. Stewart.

CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

A confused uproar as of an assembled multitude met her ears as she approached the upper part of the Corn Market. Several persons hurried past her conversing with great eagerness, and more than once the name of Edward Wood, the warden of the watch met her ears, accompanied with some epithet of reproach: considerable numbers too seemed hastening towards the Chepe. Now, with all her very superior endowments, our fair Gertrude was not altogether exempt from a failing which has been attributed, we do think, rather to exclusivity of her sex. She was not free from curiosity, and at a less anxious moment she would probably have paused to enquire the meaning of the tumult. As it was, however, she hurried on, a tear for her cousin occasionally stealing down her cheek, and her heart full of apprehension for the success of her mission to Vitelli. A long walk was before her, for the Envoy lodged in Blackfriars, at that time a fashionable quarter of the town. Hastening along with her eyes cast down, at the top of the Corn Market, she was startled by feeling herself suddenly clasped in the arms of a person who was running so fast in the opposite direction that it was with difficulty he could preserve either her or himself from falling. The cracked tones of the voice of Master Williams, however, reassured her, and with a just at their rude meeting, she was about to pass on, when she was delayed by the unusual disorder and earnest entreaty of the old man.

Master Williams was an ancient coxcomb of the days of Queen Elizabeth, most particular as to the make and fashion of his doublet, superintending himself the construction of every loop and button-hole, though this might have been something of a professional prejudice; however that might be, the habit of Master Williams was always made of the finest cloth, and brushed with the nicest care, adorned too with such fopperies as crystal buttons and gold twist. Not a worn thread or a speck of dust was, till this fatal morning, ever seen on this little, carefully kept person. Indeed it had been observed by Gertrude and two or three malicious damsels of her acquaintance, that in color and size the wizen faced little tailor presented no insignificant resemblance to a dried cockchafer; and yet the creature thought himself a beau, twisted up his copper-tinted features, nodded, and winked, and insinuated an awful degree of favor among the dames of the city. With them he was indeed a favorite, for the enormity of his vanity was to them a source of much amusement, which their victim most happily, and to his own complete content, attributed to a very sentimental emotion, a hint by the bye, to many a self-esteemed Adonis, both young and old, in a more modern era than that of Queen Elizabeth.

Alas! however, for poor Master Williams, who now appeared in the Corn Market in a pair of grey worsted hose, an old doublet patched and stained with continual wear; and his wig—oh, that delightful invention of a wig!—famous in the days of Master Williams. His wig was twisted hind part before, and showed that it was not assumed, as he would have had all the dames of the city believe, in humble compliance with the courtly fashion which decked the cavalier or a lady, one day in locks of imberian hue, and the next seemed to have stolen the color of the hair from a sunbeam, but was worn to hide a very bald pate indeed. The disorder of Master Williams' dress fully developed all the secrets of his household. There had, it is true, been sundry spiteful whisperings from certain envious young men, that the little tailor, when safely concealed in the recesses of his dwelling, was in the habit of saluting himself with some-what more substantial refreshment than the smiles of the fair; and that on those occasions when he courted the goodly wine flask or the fat chine, he was not quite so curious in his apparel; and this scandal his present appearance very fully confirmed.

With all his monstrous folly, and quiet as monstrous cowardice, the old fellow was not really ill-natured, and when no serious danger seemed like-

ly to threaten his own precious person he could even forget his vanity in anxiety to serve others. It was with no small astonishment that Gertrude looked at the old man as he stood for a moment, panting and unable from mere want of breath to speak. The unusual violence with which he had run from his own house immediately upon the receipt of a very good breakfast, and the great heat of the morning, had brought big drops of perspiration chasing each other over his face, in which appeared so strange a mixture of piety and afright, that Gertrude paused in real alarm to ask him what was the matter.

"Alas, the day!" answered the old man. "I marvel not, pretty Gertrude, that you have no ear for any news which relates not to your cousin, but if the city smart not for last night's prank, our gracious Queen hath no share in the spirit of her regal ire, which, God's blessing rest on her anointed person, she hath never yet seemed to lack. Alas, Master Wood! courteous Master Edward Wood, it makes my heart sore that thou shouldst bear the penalty of this deed."

"Good Master Williams," said Gertrude. "I pray you tell me without delay what other disorderly deed hath been committed? Was it not enough in one night that a poor maiden should be torn from the house of her father and conveyed as yet, I grieve to tell thee, we know not where. What evil hath been done by Master Wood? The kind youth was occupied during the night in attempts to discover the villains who have deprived us of my cousin, and since the morning hath he been in the house of my father endeavoring to comfort my poor uncle in his loss."

"Well," returned Master Williams, with a look of terrible alarm. Then approaching his lips to the ear of Gertrude he whispered. "Certainly the poor warden will be hanged. Ten thousand blessings on the great Elizabeth; she liketh not delays or idleness in office; she illeth not herself; and if her servants have a mind to be lazy, their laziness will surely prefer them to an eminence more lofty than agreeable, you understand—a royal command, a great elevation, rather a tight collar—a little struggle, and they are never more troubled with any work for her Highness!"

"For heaven's sake, Master Williams!" said Gertrude, what is the matter; how hath our good warden of the watch come under the Queen's displeasure? Alas! you well know he spent the best part of last night in an attempt to recover for us our poor Lucy."

"There is the matter, my Lily Gertrude. While this good warden was looking after thy cousin, he chanced to neglect a more special duty. When the cat is away, my Gertrude; if the mice take liberties in her absence she must look out for due punishment of her carelessness in return; and to some purpose have the mice played this night. Thou knowest Eleanor's Cross in the Chepe?"

"Nay," exclaimed Gertrude, at once startled to attention. "After the orders of her Grace surely the Puritans have not again ventured to deface it?"

"By my troth, sweet Gertrude, even so much have they ventured. The image of the Virgin is again torn down, and oh! look not at the Cross as you pass by, my pretty maiden. It were not meet that the eyes of an innocent damsel should behold the figure which these self-elected men of the Lord have been bold enough to put up in its place. This must they have done during the latter watches of the night; but all blame falls upon our poor friend the Warden, whose duty it is to guard against such breaking of the peace within the limits of the city. Hor Graceto, ill it haps for Master Wood, has heard the news, and cometh her self to inspect the Cross in the Chepe, and the damage which has been done. Poor youth, he will certainly be hanged. So says every one in the crowd about the Cross, and no one knows either where the warden now is. But I guessed, Gertrude; and so when I heard what had happened, I set out even in my morning attire for the house of thy father. Nay, look not so red and pale by turns, my tender heart. Go thy ways, I will put thy friend Edward on his guard. Let him but keep out of the way for a few weeks till the first burst of the Queen's displeasure be past or till they find these dull witted saints."

"Heaven grant that they may," said Gertrude anxiously.

"Oh," returned Master Williams, "I pray you think not I retain any preference for the old religion, unauthorised by the wisdom of our sagacious queen; but yet I am free to confess I most truly hate these Puritans—fellows with a pursued up lip and a leering eye, sour and licentious, inflicting a penance only on the tongue, with whose uncharitable words they would fain hide a heart full of all worldly corruptions. A bitter set they are, Mistress Gertrude. They would rob a man of his very bread. Would you believe it, they have lectured me upon the sin of trimming the doublets of my customers with gold lace, and named me a son of Beelzebub, that I live by the fabrication of such vanities. Nay, thy uncle's villain servant, Ralph, told me one day that, did we wear our habits in compliance with the injunctions of the Lord, we should appear clad only in the undressed skins of beasts; for, in sooth, Adam possessed no more curious covering. Think of that, Miss Gertrude, a man to walk through the Corn Market with a calf or a sheepskin over his shoulders. Such is the decency of these saints. Oh, I could forgive them for any thing but such malicious attempts to destroy the credit of a Christian apparel; and then the figure in the Chepe."

"Good Master Williams," interposed Gertrude, "delay not, I pray you, if you were going to the house of my father. Master Wood is indeed there and if you really think that aught of danger threatens him, hasten, I pray, to give him warning of it."

"I will be as fleet-footed as myself on an errand that is to give thee pleasure, Gertrude, barring that I have a most true affection for our honest Warden. Fare you well, sweet. God speed you on your errand, and I on mine." So saying, the old man warmly pressed the hand of Gertrude and hastened towards the house of her father.

"Filled now with a new anxiety, added to the many cares that before had oppressed her, the damsel pursued her way. The unquiet times in which

she lived had given her, at seventeen years of age, all those prophetic apprehensions of sorrow which naturally belong only to an advanced period of life—the bitter fruits of constant disappointment and unmerited neglect. The caution of Master Williams that she should not look too curiously at the figure which had been so audaciously put up during the night at the cross of Chepping was quite unnecessary, for so dense a crowd of the citizens had collected that it was with difficulty that Gertrude made her way through them. Yet a short time before this beautiful specimen of Gothic art had been covertly defaced by the zeal of the Puritans, by whom it was bitterly hated as a remnant of Popery highly offensive to all discreet eyes.

Their gracious sovereign happened, however, to entertain a different opinion, and the Cross being repaired she ordered that the figures of the Virgin and child with which it was before decorated should be replaced; but these Papistical figures were not to be tolerated even at the command of Elizabeth, and accordingly, on the night of Lucy Fenton's abduction, they were again torn down. The persons concerned in this daring act—fixing upon the Cross a licentious figure of Diana, no doubt intending thereby to convey to the Queen, and to posterity a correct notion of their modesty, forbearance, and other highly Christian virtues. The anxious mind of Gertrude did not prevent her observance of the anxiety depicted on the countenances of many of the loiterers in the Chepe. Queen Elizabeth being known for a lady quite as self-willed as could be any of her Puritan subjects, a sort of nervous apprehension prevailed among the inhabitants of the city as to the full results of the past night's adventure. The scene was however marked by a worse character. It was not merely the idle inquiry, the unconcerned gaze of a simply curious crowd, or even an honest apprehension of the Queen's anger. The dreadful spirit of suspicion or selfishness lurked in many a cunning, half-closed eye, many a sly question, for he only felt himself secure who could legally criminate another. Fear now added fire to the step of Gertrude. Knowing how her family was implicated in Edward Wood's absence from his post, and secure that the latter would be warned of his danger by the good-natured little tailor, she shrank in appalling apprehension from the curious gaze of the citizens. Breathless and exhausted, she paused for a few minutes when she reached the dwelling of the Italian. It was an old and gloomy house, built in the reign of Henry the Sixth. A large garden surrounded it, and though within the precincts of the Blackfriars, it was considerably secluded, standing in the midst of a garden which swept down towards the river. At noon-day even, there was something dreary in the stillness of this spot. The wall which encircled the garden was green with age, and in some places garlanded with ivy, and the old beech trees that stood on either side the gate-way, with the red leaves that yet remained on their already half-stripped boughs, presented only a stately image of desolation. With all her heroism, Gertrude was not quite free from the nervous affections which so largely predominate in the temperament of modern fine ladies, and her heart beat somewhat quicker than usual as she struck upon the portal bell, and thought of the weighty secret with which she had been entrusted. The gate was at once opened, and she found herself surrounded by a crowd of gaping menials, the customary effrontery of whose manners her youth and beauty were not uncalculated to check.

"I pray you," said Gertrude, whose sensitive modesty recoiled from their rude gaze, "I pray you, will the Italian captain give me audience for a moment?"

"Fair damsel," cried a youth of some three and twenty years, waving back the lacqueys with an air that bespoke his station in his master's household to be superior to theirs, "the bright sun of la bella Italia has shone in vain on the head of our gallant Captain, if he refuse to see a petitioner. But the potent Elizabeth honors him at the mid-day meal, and he is at present fully occupied in preparations for his august visitor, and scarce will his leisure allow a moment even for so lovely a guest as thyself. Might the most humble service of a poor secretary suffice in the interim, or prevail for the withdrawal of the envious crowd, whose malicious attempt to conceal the face beneath it is so ineffectual?"

"I beseech you, sir," returned Gertrude, "as your speech and appearance mark you of gentle birth, do not disgrace them by so uncivil a bearing. Though only the daughter of a citizen, I am little used to freedoms such as these."

As she spoke thus, she vainly strove to extricate herself from the youth, who, firmly clasping her round the waist, had pushed back her hood, and exposed her blushing countenance to the gaze of his companions. This young man was attired in a doublet of scarlet cloth puffed with black and trimmed with gold. On his head he wore a small cap with a plume of scarlet and blue feathers. His deep olive complexion and piercing dark eyes bespoke him a native of the "sunny south," though his language was very slightly marked by a foreign accent. The serving men who stood round him were habited in murky colored cloth guarded with white. Another person there was, who, at the moment of Gertrude's entrance, had been conversing with the secretary, but who was now drawn forwards by her sweet and imploring accents.

"Fie on you, Mancini," he exclaimed, "let the maiden go, and fulfil her errand to thy master; she hath rebuked thee well. Canst thou not read a difference between that blushing face and the bold looks of thy light o' love?"

"Faith," answered Mancini, "to my eyes this face differs most from those of other damsels, in that it is without offence to the best born beauties of the land, the fairest that ever gladdened mine eyes to behold. But you, my ascetic, my frozen hermit of the north, with dreams of an unapproachable star, content you with the cold visions it bestows. And be assured, that even this lowliest of Eve's daughters leaves Mancini heart-frozen, when her brow is darkened by a frown. Here ends thy penalty, and my offence, my beauty."

So saying, Mancini bent down and kissed the crimsoned brow of Gertrude. Then releasing her and doffing his plumed cap, he extended his hand with an air of respectful and courtly politeness.

"Fair maiden," he said, "if you will please accept my conduct I will make an effort to obtain you an audience of Vitelli."

"I thank you, sir," she answered, at once reassured by his altered manner, "and you, too, most gentle stranger," she added, turning towards the gentleman who had checked the rudeness of Mancini. His appearance, however, fixed her attention, and she lingered for a moment ere she accompanied Mancini towards the house.

Though he was seemingly very young, the tall figure of the stranger was marked by that bending of the neck and shoulders which is usually the characteristic of advanced years. Luxuriant but neglected curls of chestnut hair clustered round a countenance, the expression of which was equally wild and sad. Even in her transitory glance, Gertrude almost fancied that she could trace something of the wavering of insanity in the deep blue eyes, and more than common grief in the furrowed brow and marble paleness of the cheek. The face was one, too, whose earliest and most natural expression the beholder might have thought would have been amiable and joyous.—The fair complexion, the finely cut lips, the Grecian outline seemed unfitting to the look of fierce severity that marred their beauty, and awoke in the hearts of others a mingled feeling of terror and surprise. The heavy folds, too, of his black mantle, the sable plume that nodded over his pale face, gave an additional air of wildness and singularity to the appearance of this young man. A cold "Thou art welcome, maiden," was his only reply to the thanks of Gertrude, folding his arms in his cloak, he was strolling down one of the quaint and trimmed avenues of the garden, when the voice of Mancini arrested his steps.

"Stay you, Antonio, mio," he said, "take this key and go to the garden entrance at the back of the house. It will admit to my chamber. I will be with you anon. Now, gentle damsel," he continued, taking the hand of Gertrude, and leading her down one of the paths, the tall form of his friend slowly progressing among the trees at the other side of the garden. More than once Mancini cast his eyes in that direction. "Oime," he muttered to himself in his native tongue. "Oime, il povero Antonio! Antonio! mio!"

Signs of the bustle attendant on the promised visit of the queen to Vitelli, appeared, as Gertrude approached the house. Servants hastily crossed the narrow paths of the garden. The voice of the sewer was heard in a loud tone through the open window of the buttery; while his attendants were seen hurrying through the hall, bearing pasties, dishes of spiced meats, and curious confections.

"I almost doubt me, gentle maid," said Mancini, "if after all I be able to procure you speech with the Marquis; but I will essay my best."

"Could you, sir, obtain me that grace even for a moment," answered Gertrude, "I should feel most truly grateful."

While thus speaking, they reached the principal entrance of the house. It was a somewhat spacious but very gloomy looking mansion, built, as before observed, in the troubled reign of the sixth Henry. The unquiet nature of the times when civil disturbances exposed even those who would fain have avoided all share in the conflict to be alternately plundered by either of the contending parties, had, perhaps, induced the original proprietors of the house to secure it by defenses not common in those days to a city dwelling.—The casements were few and narrow, deep sunk in the wall, and defended on the interior by shutters of massy oak lined with iron. The house itself was of deep red brick, with copings and buttresses of stone; before it stretched a small lawn, mowed smooth, and dotted here and there with a tall elm. Heavy folding-doors of oak, lined like the shutters with iron, adorned Gertrude and Mancini to the hall of the dwelling. This was a somewhat spacious apartment, obscurely lighted by two narrow arched casements, and with its roof strengthened by ponderous beams of oak. At either side was an open door, from that on the left issued the attendants of the sewer. In the apartments to the right, Gertrude perceived as she passed it, a long table being set out for the Queen's entertainment. At the upper end of the hall was a broad staircase, on ascending which, she found herself in a vaulted gallery.

"Fair maid," said Mancini, on unclosing a door, "this is the apartment in which I am used to wait the summons of my master. Will it please you tarry here while I crave him to give you audience? Should you, however, hear voices approaching before my return, you will perhaps step into this corridor."

So saying, Mancini removed the crimson hangings of the apartment and pushed open a small door, through which Gertrude perceived a narrow and misty passage. Accustomed as she was to perilous adventures, her heart beat with a nervous rapidity when the secretary disappeared. The room in which she now waited was situated at the back of the house. It had a deep bay window overlooking the garden and the Thames. It was furnished in the fashion of the time, with cumbersome chairs and piles of cushions. Gertrude was well aware of the dangerous nature of her own undertaking, and the promised visit of the Queen to the Italian, did not excite any very pleasurable emotion. Her idolatry of the Queen of Scots had wrought in her mind a corresponding horror and dislike of Elizabeth. She shrank as from a basilisk at the bare idea of a near approach to that terrible woman, whose will to commit evil was, she believed, only equalled by her power to subvert good. Perhaps, even in her deep-rooted aversion, Gertrude's mind had hitherto failed somewhat in its accustomed acuteness, and she did not render justice to the abilities of the sovereign whose evil passions were ever paramount in her thoughts. Elizabeth—the mean, malicious woman, the tyrant of a beautiful and hapless rival, the ungenerous, the unjust—she who promised shelter like the unyielding oak, and broke as the frail willow wand beneath the trusting grasp.—Evelly was Elizabeth pictured in the soul of Gertrude—the foremost figure on the canvass, marked strongly by its own deformity—the better points of the portrait, the unyielding energy, the keen penetration, all obscured, the crafty counsellors all forgotten; but behind that figure lurked a

dark triumvirate—Cecil, Walsingham, Leicester—serpents at the ear of Eve, prompt with the whippers of sleepless cunning and never dying malice. The mind of the humble daughter of John Harding yielded not in energy and activity to that of the stern Tudor herself, and a world of wild thoughts chased each other through her brain as she leaned in the deep embrasure of the window awaiting a summons to the Italian Captain; ever prominent was the fair form of Mary on the English throne, and her rival drooping in some dreary prison in her stead. From these reflections she was roused by the sound of rapidly approaching steps and loud voices in the vaulted gallery. True to the instructions of Mancini, she raised the hangings and glided into the passage he had pointed out to her. The mistiness of twilight prevailed there, one very small casement placed high in the wall and half covered by the broad-leaved ivy, alone admitting the broken sunbeams. Gertrude now heard voices and steps in the apartment which she had just left, and instinctively she crept further into the long passage. What, however, was her terror, when she perceived that she was not alone.—The figure of a man muffled in a dark mantle steadily approached her. She had thrown back her hood on entering the passage, and as she stood at the moment immediately beneath the casement, the faint light that stole through it settled full upon her features. She perceived at once that she was recognized by the intruder, who, suddenly clasping her in his arms, drew her into the obscure part of the passage, and kissed her lips and brow with a violence which excited her astonishment and terror. A scream half stifled by the remembrance of the important mission with which she had been entrusted by Lord Dacre, rose to her lips, as she struggled in the embrace of the bold stranger.

"Hush, pretty Papist! for your life, or for what it may be you value more, for your plots," said he in a voice, the tones of which were unrecognized by Gertrude, while a pair of penetrating eyes glared down upon her, sparkling through the obscurity that veiled the other features of her assailant. "How were it," he continued, clasping her yet more closely, "if I inform the she-lynx of your visit to Vitelli; think you that the darkness shrouded your father's visitant from every eye, or that the Dacre, once seen, were readily forgotten?"

A low sob of terror, a half-muttered prayer for mercy, was Gertrude's only reply.

"Fear not, lowliest of traitors," returned the stranger, "thou dost not kneel more devoutly to the idols of the ancient faith than I will kneel to thee; one tress of thy golden hair, fair daughter of Babylon, were dearer to me than all the gems which mock the deifying beauty of the vain Elizabeth."

"Who, who art thou?" gasped the terror-stricken Gertrude.

"One who knows well how the old leaven of Papistry taints the heart of John Harding, and how he has nursed his fair daughter amid the delusions of that forbidden faith; one too, who, even for that daughter's sake, would spare his life, already forfeit to the law. But look thou sweet, and thy old father shall yet remain proof against suspicion."

"Villain!" exclaimed Gertrude, "whoever you are, let me go; my voice, if not my strength, may free me from this ruffian grasp."

"Doubtless" returned the stranger ironically, but still speaking in a subdued tone, "your shrieks will soon summon assistance, why then brook that I should detain you for a moment? Above all, when it will so well accord with the fame of a modest damsel to be found lurking in a dark passage of the gallant Vitelli's abode. Would it like you best, beautiful Gertrude, to declare the real motives of your visit, or would chose rather to be made a tale for the dames and damsels of the city and the Court, and let them flout at her frailty, whose charms have alike filled the heart of the proud peeress and the merchant's wife with gall? Know you neither why the Queen visits Vitelli? She is on her way to the Cross of Chepping, incensed at the late audacious violation of her command, resolved at once to see what injury had been committed, and to heap the full measure of her wrath upon the heads of the offenders. So much did the Italian learn at court this morning, and he prayed her to grace his house by passing to take in it the mid-day meal. Now, bethink you, Gertrude, how thy father or thyself may be implicated with the offenders of the Chepe?"

"Man! man!" said Gertrude, "thy craft equals not thy malice. If my father and myself be suspected of clinging to the ancient faith, even that suspicion shall be as a shield of brass to screen us from all charge of confederacy with the bold men who dared deface the cross. Would a Catholic tear down the sculptured form of the Madonna?"

"Have you lived, Gertrude," returned the stranger with a low biting laugh, "even through your brief period of existence, and have you yet to learn that envy and hatred call not on reason to snuff their banquet of revenge? A charge of guilt in these days, at least, will not fail, because it may happen to be incongruous."

"Good heaven!" cried Gertrude, "what will become of me?" She felt the bitter truth of the concluding remark.

"Give me but a token" answered the stranger—"a glove, the ribbon that binds your hair, or the girdle from your waist, that by its possession you may know me, and hard must be that trait in which my power would be insufficient to preserve you."

"Never!" replied Gertrude. "I know not whether your power to execute be as great as your will to treat; but neither threats nor such bold conjectures as you may hazard respecting the visitants and the faith of my father can appeal me into a compromise of my honor by a bestowal of a token upon I know not whom, but upon one whose present conduct, indeed, speaketh but slenderly in his favor."

(TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.)

Boldness is blind; whereof it is still in counsel, but good in execution. For in counsel it is good to see dangers; in execution, not to see them; except they be very great.