

which, in the first hours of his accession, claimed his attention. But he looked forward with impatient hope—hope which he hardly dared to analyse, to a renewal of constant intercourse with Mary; and no sooner was the ceremonial of the king's interment over, and the court restored to tranquillity and order, than he sent to request an interview with her. It was immediately granted, and with a beating heart the young king prepared to enter her presence.

She received him alone, in an apartment hung with black, and which, but for a ray of sunshine that streamed through a narrow painted window of stained glass, would have required some artificial aid to render the objects it contained discernable, amidst the doubtful gloom. Mary herself, dressed in the deepest mourning, her beautiful hair unornamented, and wreathed in simple and becoming braids around her head, was seated at a table covered with papers and implements of writing. Her page was in waiting, but she dismissed him to the ante-room when Francis was announced, and rising, advanced to meet the youthful monarch, with such a winning air of majesty and grace, that the enamoured prince involuntarily bent one knee to kiss the offered hand that she extended towards him. Mary blushed at this unlooked for and impassioned homage, and said with slight embarrassment:

"Your majesty, in doing me this honour, forgets perhaps, that my transient reign is ended, and that the simple Mary of England, is no longer entitled to the homage yielded to the queen of Louis."

"That homage which it has been the delight of all hearts to render her," said Francis, "was the voluntary tribute of an admiring people to her virtues and her beauty, and still, under whatever title she is henceforth known to them, she must retain the undivided empire of their love and admiration."

Mary was touched by the fervour and sincerity of his tone, and after a momentary pause she said:

"Your majesty has ever judged me with indulgent kindness, and I have to thank you, which from my heart I do, for many, many instances of your considerate friendship and regard. The remembrance of all I owe to your generous efforts, for cheering my hours of gloom, and promoting my happiness, during my constrained residence here, will ever dwell with me, and I pray heaven to grant me some opportunity to express by acts the undying gratitude of my heart."

"I ask but one expression of it, if indeed I am entitled to such an emotion from her to whom I owe the happiest moments of my life," said Francis with animation—"I have sought your grace at this time, to receive from you instructions respecting your future arrangements. Since the death of his late majesty, you have intimated to me your intention of returning to England—but permit me to deprecate that step—to intreat, as a proof of your friendship—your gratitude—if that word, misapplied as it now

is, will win you to my wish—that she, who for a brief space has lent such unequalled lustre to our court, will still remain to form its ornament and boast, to infuse into it the elegance of her accomplished mind, and lead its rising beauties, to imitate the model of all that is most lovely and attractive in their sex."

"The youthful beauties of your majesty's court," returned Mary, "can have no models worthier of imitation than your virtuous and exemplary queen; your talented and witty sister—women in whose society I have reaped instruction and delight, and whom I shall ever remember with affection and regret."

"May I not then name their united wishes, as another motive for your remaining with us?" asked the king, to whom, however, the praises of his queen sounded like a reproach to himself,—and from whom he would willingly have parted forever, could he have found any pretext for doing so, and have been assured of winning Mary in her stead.

"Did all the ladies of your majesty's court resemble the queen, and the Duchess of Alençon," answered Mary, "and were there no duties, and no attachments to call me elsewhere, I would wish for no happier asylum than this, nor feel a wish to quit the protection so courteously proffered me. But many reasons urge my return to England—my brief absence has but strengthened the ties that bind me to it, and I have already written to my brother," and she pointed to the letters lying on the table, "to claim his promise of welcome and protection, pledged me with his last farewell, in case I should survive the king."

As he listened to this steadfast announcement of her purpose, Francis could not conceal his agitation; when she alluded to the ties and attachments that bound her to England, he thought only of Suffolk, that envied rival, who might now win the peerless prize for which he would almost have surrendered his crown. He had hoped to retain the beautiful Mary as the ornament of his court,—to live still in the sunshine of her presence, to bask in the radiance of her smiles, and feast upon the hope of one day possessing her, and restoring her again to that regal height which she had so lately adorned with her beauty and her virtues. The delicate state of Queen Claude's health furnished natural ground for this hope, and he could not conceal from himself the happiness which he should feel to be released from a princess, who constantly immured herself in her apartments, to pursue her quiet and sedentary avocations, and who formed, in her habits and personal appearance, so striking and disagreeable a contrast to the brilliant and intellectual Mary. Cherishing such feelings as these, the bare idea of forever losing her whose taste, whose mental acquirements, and whose natural grace and elegance, rendered her so desirable a companion, so alive to his wishes,