

you shall be feasted with the best, and pleasantly diverted with the wit and wisdom of the wisest.

"Thanks, gracious lady, for thy hospitality, but it would be an ill seeming for Robin Hood to quit his woodland territory and banquet with lords and noble dames in bannered hall. Come thou with us, fair lady, and we will send to this gentle company and bring them also to our sylvan bower."

As he spoke, he approached the Queen with the air of one who had triumphed, and purposed to lead her off, which the Lady Guildford observing, again interposed:

"Thy disguise, bold Robin, is a cunning one, and baffles all conjecture—but if thou be of gentle blood, thou knowest well that thou art standing in presence of Her Majesty the Queen, and thou art an arrogant and daring knave, to sue for favours which none beneath his Grace would presume to ask."

"Madam," said he whom she addressed, "thou art in truth a wary counsellor, and a safe guardian for thy young and lovely mistress; but Robin Hood owns homage to no human power, unless it be to valor, or to beauty. So with thy matronly permission, I still will press my suit to her, in whose soft smiles, I only read encouragement."

So saying, he again approached the Queen, and stooping towards her, whispered a few low words in her ear. A deep glow overspread the lovely olive of Catherine's complexion, and she unhesitatingly gave her hand to the successful pleader. He cast a triumphant glance at the astonished Lady Guildford, and snatching a rose from the Queen's bouquet, said, as he gallantly placed it in her hair:

"'Tis well that England's blushing emblem, should grace the raven locks of England's beautiful Queen—but for thee, fair maid," addressing the Princess, "a lily will become thy beauty better, and the garland that shall wreath thy brow, is blooming in the gardens of France."

Mary coloured highly, and then grew pale at this confirmation of her fears, from the lips of one whose disguise she had long since penetrated, but she attempted no reply.

"Brave Robin Hood," said the Queen, "thou art not more cunning in wood-craft, than thou provest thyself in the persuasions, which our yielding sex want wit or wisdom to resist. We can no longer deny thy boon, so lead on to thy woodland banquet, to which we carry keen appetites, that I warrant me, shall soon leave empty thy whole service of oaken trenchers, and goblets of horn. My merry men, choose each a fair lady, wherewith to mate yourselves, and follow over turf and through copse, to the bower of bold Robin!"

The Queen tripped away with the leader of the band, and each one of the foresters seizing a fair and willing hand, followed their steps, singing in full and manly chorus, not unaided by the softer voices of the maidens:

"Huzza, for bold Robin Hood, valiant and free,  
No king is so lawless, so fearless as he!"

The Princess Mary was the last to join the gay procession—she had sought to avoid the Duke of Suffolk—for it was he, whom she had recognized in the forester, who removed from her feet the wounded bird, but he warily prevented her design, and when she found herself compelled to accept his offered hand, she did it silently, but with a grace and sweetness that tempered even her resentments. For a short space they passed on without speaking, nor did either join in the noisy chorus with which the forest reverberated. Mary's mind was filled with remembrances of the happy past, when in every dance Brandon had been her partner, in every mask and pageant like the shadow that followed her, and when, if the mutual passion which filled their hearts was cherished in silence, it was declared by the interchange of tender attentions, and significant tokens, and revealed in the eloquent and impassioned language of the eyes. Then, came in contrast to all these soft and thronging thoughts, the consciousness of their present estrangement, and the image of Margaret of Savoy, to whom as rumor said, he was positively affianced, nor could Mary doubt its truth, when she recalled the report of his devotion to her in Flanders, and remembered that the colours and the motto which he wore at the late tournament, signified his willingness, at least, to yield himself a captive to her chains. Mary had a heart as soft and susceptible as the humblest of her sex, but she had also the pride of her high spirited race, and although this was soothed by the knowledge, that if she had been deserted by a lover for her inferior in rank, it was for a princess, more illustrious by birth than herself, and who could open to his aspiring mind higher hopes, and gratify them to the utmost extent of his ambition—yet even this consideration, could not heal the wounds of disappointed affection, nor inspire her with fortitude to tear from her bosom the dear and cherished image, that had so long been enshrined in its innermost recesses.

Had she condescended since his return, to grant one of his reiterated petitions for an interview, all might have been well—but the rumours in circulation were so well authenticated, that she could not doubt their truth. She refused to believe him unhappy, for she knew not how far he was swayed by the will of those, whom to have resisted, would have been to cast away his life. Though still faithful to the object of his early love, and recoiling from the bare idea of a union with another, he felt that at this crisis, there was danger in the open avowal of his sentiments, since the intrigues of Henry, and the policy of Wolsey were united to bring about an alliance between himself and Margaret of Savoy, which with womanish coquetry she encouraged,