



TREVELL'S INTERVIEW WITH AMY, page 195.

INTRODUCTION

A CERTAIN degree of success, real or supposed, in the delineation of Queen Mary, naturally induced the Author to attempt something similar respecting 'her sister and her foe,' the celebrated Elizabeth. He will not, however, pretend to have approached the task with the same feelings; for the candid Robertson himself confesses having felt the prejudices with which a Scotsman is tempted to regard the subject; and what so liberal a historian avows, a poor romance-writer dares not disown. But he hopes the influence of a prejudice, almost as natural to him as his native air, will not be found to have greatly affected the sketch he has attempted of England's Elizabeth. I have endeavoured to describe her as at once a high-minded sovereign, and a female of passionate feelings, hesitating betwixt the sense of her rank and the duty she owed her subjects on the one hand, and, on the other, her attachment to a nobleman who, in external qualifications at least, amply merited her favour. The interest of the story is thrown upon that period when the sudden death of the first Countess of Leicester seemed to open to the ambition of her husband the opportunity of sharing the crown of his sovereign.

It is possible that slander, which very seldom favours the memories of persons in exalted stations, may have blackened the character of Leicester with darker shades than really belonged to it. But the almost general voice of the times attached the most foul suspicions to the death of the unfortunate countess, more especially as it took place so very opportunely for the indulgence of her lover's ambition. If we can trust Ashmole's Antiquities of Berkshire, there was but too much ground for the traditions which charge Leicester with the murder of his wife. In the following extract of the passage the reader will find the authority I had for the story of romance:—

'At the west end of the church is the ruins of a manor, anciently belonging (as a cell or place of

removal, as some report) to the monks of Abington. At the Dissolution the said manor or lordship was conveyed to one — Owen (I believe), the possessor of Galsworthy then.

'In the hall, over the chimney, I find Abington arms cut in stone, viz. a pance between four martlets; and also another escutcheon, viz. a lion rampant, and several mitres cut in stone about the house. There is also in the said house a chamber called Dudley's chamber, where the Earl of Leicester's wife was murdered; of which this is the story following:—

'Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, a very goodly personage, and singularly well featured, being a great favourite to Queen Elizabeth, it was thought, and commonly reported, that had he been a bachelor or widower the queen would have loved him her husband; to this end, to free himself of all obstacles, he commands, or perhaps, with fair flattering entreaties, desires his wife to repose herself here at his servant Anthony Forster's house, who then lived in the aforesaid manor-house; and also prescribed to Sir Richard Varney (a prompter to this design), at his coming hither, that he should first attempt to poison her, and if that did not take effect, then by any other way whatsoever to dispatch her. This, it seems, was proved by the report of Dr. Walter Bayly, sometime fellow of New College, then living in Oxford, and professor of physic in that university; who, because he would not consent to take away her life by poison, the earl endeavoured to displace him the court. This man, it seems, reported for most certain, that there was a practice in Cunnor among the conspirators to have poisoned this poor innocent lady a little before she was killed, which was attempted after this manner:—They seeing the good lady sad and heavy (as one that well knew by her other handling that her death was not far off), began to persuade her that her present disease was abundance of melancholy and other humours, etc., and therefore would needs