

to her own eloquence. It was the theme of much wondering conversation among the courtiers present at the bridal, that the haughty Elizabeth should regard with favour, a union between one allied to herself and a simple commoner; but those who best understood her policy, shrewdly surmised that her motive lay in the very circumstance which excited the wonder of others. Derived from the same royal stock that gave to Henry VII. his right to the crown which Elizabeth had inherited from him the high descent of Agnes of Devonshire might excite some dangerous aspirings in any ambitious noble who should become her husband; but her marriage with a commoner effectually relieved the Queen from all such anxiety: departing, therefore, from her usual policy of keeping unmarried all who might take any part in the vexed question of the succession, she promoted the unambitious wishes of Agnes, by her own irresistible influence. The result we have already seen. Who could guess what darkness lay behind that splendid bridal?

Four happy years had passed away, and the Lady Agnes and her husband were still lovers. Her face still wore its brightest smile for him alone, and his eye still beamed on her as fondly as on their nuptial eve. But though unaltered in his love for her, a change had come over the spirit of Chidioc Tichbourne. For the first time since their marriage, he had spent some time in London without his wife, and after his return to Southampton, he was grave and thoughtful, and sometimes abstracted in anxious musings.

"Come hither, Agnes," he exclaimed, starting from one of these moods of thought, as he met her saddened gaze; "come, sit beside me, and look on this picture," drawing, as he spoke, a small miniature in a golden setting, from his bosom. "Saw you ever any thing so fair, except—" and he parted the hair from her forehead, and pressed his lips upon it—"in your own mirror, love?"

"Oh, beautiful! surely some cunning limner has here traced his own bright fancies of what woman ought to be, not what any woman is."

"Nay, dearest, it is a portrait, and scarce so fair as its original. What think you of her from this portraiture?"

The lady gazed long, in deep admiration, on that exquisite picture. "There might well be a diadem on this lofty brow where the dark hair parts so simply," she said at length, "and these large hazel eyes seem used to command. Indeed it is a queenly face. Yet there is a heaviness in the eyelids, and a beseeching softness

about the mouth, as if she had known sorrow—and known it long too, for it is a calm and gentle sadness that rests on her face, not a sudden burst of grief. Sweet Lady! whoever thou art, thou canst win hearts, for thou hast won mine, even now!"

"And if I should tell you, Agnes, that the sadness you discover has been caused by cruel wrong—that this fair and hapless lady suffers unmerited oppression, and that too from her kindred, and that there is one way of escape for her, though a perilous one—my Agnes, would you venture aught for her sake?"

"Say on! say on!"

"You have divined well, sweet one," continued Tichbourne, "that fair brow *has* borne a crown, and those bright eyes *are* familiar with tears, for a Queen is a prisoner."

"Mary Stuart!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Yes, Mary Stuart," repeated her husband sadly; "Mary, of Scotland, pines in a English prison. Betrayed by those to whom she trusted, deserted by her nearest kindred, persecuted by her to whom she fled for protection, her wrongs are an outrage upon the laws of nations and of nature. But though oppressed by England, not all in England are her enemies; a band of true and gallant hearts have sworn to set her free. Hear me, Agnes; you say she has won your heart, will you hazard ought to rescue a woman from her enemies, a Queen from a dungeon? To place Mary Stuart in safety and freedom on the soil of France?"

Lady Agnes looked earnestly on her husband, and as varying emotions chased each other across her beautiful features, she seemed irresolute. It was but for a moment, and then, while her face grew pale as if the blood were curdling at her heart, she answered in a firm, deep tone—

"Heaven forbid that I should seek to hold you back, Chidioc, where your own noble heart bids you on. I will peril my life in yours."

"Ever true to yourself, ever generous and unselfish!" cried her husband, "Heaven grant it may not be my lot to bring care and sorrow into this noble heart!"

The circumstances which Tichbourne now detailed to Lady Agnes, of the conspiracy formed by Babington to liberate the Queen of Scots are so fully narrated by the historians of that period, that we may pass over them very rapidly. Wrought upon by the jesuit emissaries of the Duke of Guise, the young and ambitious Babington became devoted to the cause of Mary, and he contrived to convey to her, even under the strict surveillance of Sir Amyas Paulet,