which only one could emerge, he contented himself with hissing into Hermia's ear the words—

"Fool! You may detain me, because I may not hurt you—but to what end? Can you arrest the king's messengers? Do you not understand they wait for him outside, and that in consequence I am here?"

Lady Hermia gazed for a moment in his face incredulously; then seeing the hard, intense look of satisfaction that was obviously settled there, she changed in an instant her whole behaviour.

She unclasped her hand, let him loose, rose to her feet, and then burst into a kind of hysteric laughter mingling with tears.

Lord Langton spoke to her, tried to caress her, but she pushed him away, then stopped, looked intently at a vacancy, drew back her hair—as if feeling she needed a cooler brain to see with—then turned, and said with a most sad and touching laugh, that was, indeed, more of a sob than a laugh—

"Oh, Cecil, brother—dear, dear brother—my only one; do you forget that we two are alone? I have no brother, if not you! You have no sister, if not me! Cecil, forgive me—on my knees I ask it—if I said bitter, angry, unjust things. Listen to me—listen!" Then unconsciously her pleading, passionate tone changed again to one of solemn invocation. "You cannot intend to have this man's blood on your head? No, no—impossible! assure me it is impossible! Hark, Cecil! I tell my story very badly: but you can forgive that. This—my husband—is no rebel!"

"Few rebels are after failure," interposed Lord Cecil, with a sneer that seemed to freeze Hermia's blood.

She gazed at him with an averted form and gesture, as if asking herself whether she should longer urge him, or rise and defy him, and brave all consequences.

No doubt she would have done so, were it only herself she had to consider; but a single thought of, and glance at, her husband, who stood proudly apart, gazing with folded arms and a half-smiling face on the fury of Lord Cecil, caused her again passionately to address her brother—

"Brother! Cecil! before it is too late I again address myself to you. My husband has, with rare bravery and dignity, gone in person to the Pretender and formally renounced his allegiance. He has risked much in so doing; and now he comes back to his own countrymen, confiding in their justice, their liberality, and their good sense."

"Their good sense, my sister!" said Lord Cecil. "I pray you tell me how the rebel is to rely on their good sense to aid him?"

"He relies," responded Hermia, calmly, "on the good sense of his countrymen, when he comes back to throw himself upon their considerate feeling, while reminding them that if ever England is to be one, and relieved from the cruel strife of dynastic parties, then she can only have such unity by welcoming with open arms every fugitive who comes honourably from the opposing camp and asks to be received."

"Very well. Then let this particular rebel have the full benefit of his logic after he has put it before a jury and before his abused king. Are we agreed?"

"On what?" demanded Hermia, her eye gazing in a kind of distracted manner about.

"That he calmly gives himself up, and then relies on his logic to save him!"

"Cecil, the gulf between us I see, widens and widens every minute. Oh, brother, you know not what you do! But so surely as you make yourself the instrument of the arrest of my husband, so surely will the curses of the bereaved widow cling to you if he comes to any harm.

"Take your own course. I will degrade myself no further by appealing to a man who is insensible alike to the ties of blood, to affection, to honour! Betrayer of the unfortunate and the confiding, call in and let loose your bloodhounds. From this moment I will never exchange word or touch with you!"

Then she went to Lord Langton, and taking his hand, said—

"My dear, noble husband—dearer infinitely to me, and a thousand times more noble in this, your adversity and danger, than while all England trembled at your name, and prepared itself for it knew not what, your victory or defeat—can you, Stephen, ever forgive me, that I debased myself, and humiliated myself—*your* wife—by stooping to ask for kindly and honourable consideration from so despicable and poor a creature as this?"

"Hermia," responded Lord Langton, "to clasp you thus—to listen to you thus—is to me so ravishing a bliss, that I would consciously incur all the danger over again—ay, rush into it with my eyes open—if in no other way I might reap such a harvest of happiness."

Lord Cecil gazed on them both, as if he might be hesitating, even at this last moment, to complete the work he had begun; but there was no such stuff in his thoughts, as they soon learned.

With a scowl at both their faces, Lord Cecil went to the door, threw it open, and cried, in a loud voice—

"Arrest a traitor—the so-called Lord Langton!"

Nearly a dozen armed men advanced, with a superior officer at their head, who paused and stood for a moment irresolute, on seeing Hermia clasped in her husband's arms, though obviously, his clasp was only in fond reply to the passionate hold of him she maintained.

She turned her head a little, and said—

"Sir, do your duty, whatever it be, fearlessly. And to prevent mistakes, let me say that it is my brother who sets this business on: this is my husband, who has but newly returned from Rome, where he has been to renounce his allegiance, and now throws himself on the clemency of his sovereign?"

The man came forward, having a bag in his hand, from which he produced a pair of bright, shining steel handcuffs.

"For him?" And Lady Hermia pointed to her husband incredulously.

"Hermia, would I could believe I were worthy to share these manacles with some of the men who have also worn them, and to whom it has been permitted to walk this earth for its shame and redemption Do not fear it, Hermia—they will not hurt me!"

So saying, he held out his hands with a smile—and a smile that, when it became fixed on his wife's face, calmed her, even amid the stormy and passionate heart-currents that were beating within.

"Hermia," he said, "I look for you at the earliest possible hour. You will get to me, I know that. Happily, we are no obscure unfortunates, whom mighty men like your brother might make sport of, and be no worse in their own characters and position. This business of to-day will fly far and wide. My crimes, if they are crimes, have not been done in a corner. I shall wait, darling, be sure of that, for the end of all, in a calm and assured spirit, asking nothing but that you, too, will show to the world we both alike know how to live and how to die."

He turned, and folding his arms, he said to the officer—

"It is my safety as a captive you seek by this measure, not my personal annoyance, I presume?"

"Certainly, sir," said the officer.

"Then I think it will only be creditable to His Majesty and myself if we keep this indignity unknown."

He then folded his arms so as, with the aid of his upper garment—a kind of loose over-coat—to conceal the irons, and walked straight out of the room, not even giving a single look back.

In rather undignified haste the armed troop bustled after him, and when he reached the hall he found another batch of men waiting to precede him; and so they marched off to the Thames, there to take the barge that waited to carry him on to the Tower.

CHAPTER CVII.—THE TOWER.

Shutting his eyes to all passing sights of the river, and refusing to think just yet of the future, Lord Langton allowed himself to fall back on the happiness he had enjoyed in his brief honeymoon of a night, and on the character of his wife, that now more than realised his utmost hopes of her.

The barge sped swiftly on, rowed by so many expert boatmen. The dangerous sterlings of the bridge were shot in safety, and presently the speed was slackened. Lord Langton was thus roused from his reverie, and beheld a low arched gateway, through which they were about to pass.

"What is the name of this gateway?" asked Lord Langton of the officer.

"It is called Traitor's Gate."

Lord Langton rose to his feet, and said in an animated tone—

"God bless King George! If any man has a right now to say that, I have, and I hope there may be among those who hear me men who will repeat to His Majesty my words, for they are honest."

The prow of the barge struck suddenly against the wide stone steps that rose upwards out of the water, and the prisoner, hampered with the irons, had nearly fallen through the impetus.

Raising his manacled arms to enable himself to recover his balance, he struck his cheek so violently with the irons as to draw blood. But he would not allow the officer to minister to him, made light of the incident, and ceased to notice it.

Presently they came to a grand-looking—but also most tragic-looking—tower, and again Lord Langton, who had never seen the Tower, while always hearing so much about it in connection with friends and victims of the Jacobite cause, asked its name.

"The Bloody Tower," responded the officer; and Lord Langton seemed to see inscribed on it the sanguinary records of the many men and women who had passed through it, never to return, except when on their way to death.

There was a crowd collected by this gateway, idlers of the Tower population—always a considerable one—women only too glad of a new excitement, with possibly a sprinkling of the friends and relations of prisoners, who had by lapse of time been permitted extra indulgences.

A curious custom of the Tower now challenged the prisoner's attention. One of the officials came forward and demanded the upper garment of the prisoner as his perquisite.

Lord Langton turned inquiringly to the officer by his side, who answered—

"Yes, it is the custom—a custom more honoured in the breach than in the observance, I should say, but so it is."

Lord Langton smiled, and asked the official himself to remove the garment, a costly one, lined with the richest silk, which it was found could not be done without the previous removal of the irons.

These, however, the officer caused to be taken off, with the kindly remark—

"I hope there will be no need to put them on again."

"I hope so, too," said Lord Langton. Then, addressing the tower official who was removing his coat, he said with a smile, "Exchange is no robbery: the weather is cold; have you nothing to lend me till I repurchase this from you?"

"Oh, yes," said the personage addressed; "I will immediately provide you with something warm; the dungeons are terribly cold!"

The spectators naturally gazed with interest on this little episode.

Suddenly the group opened in obedience to the impulse of a strong moving power from behind, and there emerged from it the very lad who had been so long on the watch outside Lord Bridgeminster's house, and who, it will be remembered, had seen the figure enter the gates secretly—that figure which ultimately proved to be Lord Langton.

Except that this lad was cleaner, and exhibited no broom in token of his vocation, he appeared with one exception, exactly as he had previously appeared, at the street crossing, when he had received on the occasion alms from Lord Langton himself.

That exception was a very large exception. The street-sweeper's face had been bright and