

CHAPTER XLVI

THAT was a great day for my lord, but it was also, I truly believe, one of the saddest of a not unhappy life. He had gained the battle, but at a cost known only to himself, though guessed by some. The story of the old weakness had been told, as he had foreseen it must be told; and even while his friends pressed round him and crying, *Salve Imperator!* rejoiced in the fall he had given his foes, he was aware of the wound bleeding inwardly, and in his mind was already borne out of the battle.

Yet in that room was one sadder. Sir John, remaining at the foot of the table, frowned along it, gloomy and downcast; too proud to ask or earn the King's favour, yet shaken by the knowledge that now—now was the time; that in a little while the door would close on him, and with it the chance of life—life with its sunshine and air, and freedom, its whirligigs and revenges. Some thought that in consideration of the trick which had been played upon him, the King might properly view him with indulgence; and were encouraged in this by the character for clemency which even his enemies allowed that Sovereign. But William had other views on this occasion; and when the hubbub which Smith's removal had caused had completely died away, he addressed Sir John, advising him to depend rather on deserving his favour by a frank and full discovery, than on such ingenious contrivances as that which had just been exposed.

"I was no party to it," the unhappy gentleman answered.

"Therefore it shall tell neither for nor against you," the King retorted. "Have you anything more to say."

"I throw myself on your Majesty's clemency."

"That will not do, Sir John," the King answered.