

THE QUEEN'S SECRET

CHAPTER XLII.—Continued.

But now there was another cause for general indignation against him, namely, that he had in a certain measure compromised the queen, by making an indiscreet allusion on the subject of the Catholicism assemblage at Whitstone Hollow, and putting to death no less than fifteen, including the priest, under cover of her majesty's warrant. For this the queen should be held responsible to the public; the massacre having been perpetrated in her name, and under sanction of her authority, notwithstanding she intended to grant merely the right of search and capture. So the nobility looked upon the transaction.

With the people, however, the case was entirely different. Ignorant of his real character, they attributed his persecution of the Catholics to his extraordinary zeal for the extinction of Popery, and the propagation of the true faith. In their estimation, he was a very Glendon; in fact, as great a champion of the church of England as John Knox was of the kirk of Scotland; and hence it was they could easily afford to pardon his excesses. But the people were not so easily deceived. They knew that he was a man of high position, whose good opinion he should stand or fall; they might crown him with laurels, but they could not save him from the gallows or the block.

And even his rabble popularity, what was to become of it when, it matters not, he was strictly investigated, it would be seen that his love of religion was assumed merely to aggrandize himself, and that, as in this very last instance of his zeal, the possession of a rich and beautiful woman was at the bottom of all his hatred of Popery and love of truth?

Such were the thoughts that passed through his mind in rapid succession, after waking from a disturbed sleep late on the morning after the massacre of Whitstone Hollow. Dark and gloomy enough they were for a morning meditation; but still they left him not entirely without a ray of hope to brighten them. For, let the worst come to the worst, the queen had made him an unconditional promise of the hand or the fortune of Alice Wentworth. Either of these let him once gain possession of, and he cared not a jot for friends or enemies.

As his servant drew back the curtains of the windows, he rose slowly from his couch, where he had thrown himself in his dressing gown, looking haggard and weary.

"What's the hour?" he demanded.

"Just twelve, noble sir."

"Ah, so late? Hath any one called?"

"Ay, sir, a messenger from court with this paper. And the servant handed him an official looking missive."

"Humph! as I had expected; a citation before her majesty's council at four of the clock; well, we shall see. Any thing else?"

"Sergeant Houghton awaits your noble pleasure since the early morning."

"Ah, he hath come at last, then; send him hither instantly."

A moment after, Houghton entered his master's bed chamber, covered with sweat and dust, his clothes torn, and his face swollen and dotted with blotches. As he stood there in the centre of the apartment awaiting his employer's pleasure, he looked the very impersonation of ferocity.

"Well," muttered Sir Thomas, leaning sideways in his arm chair, and turning up a look at the trooper, "thou hast at length arrived."

"Ay, sir; I am here."

"An so hast burnt Brockton Hall and its master; ha, ha!"

"Nay, I did neither," replied Houghton, drawing down his bushy eyebrows, and apparently disposed to resent by his short and angry reply the ungracious reception he had met with after all his toil and suffering.

"Neither?"

"What! is not the mansion burnt to the ground?"

"Ay, but not by my hand."

"Well, then hast the credit, at least; what of the profit?"

"The door of the deed hath the profit; who else could deserve it so well?"

"Ah! and who may he be?"

"Sawall, the steward."

"What! burnt the house, and carried off the gold?"

"Ay, and the plate also."

"Confusion! cheated us—fled—gone—left nothing!" demanded Plimpton, turning suddenly in his chair and staring at the trooper. "Death and force! can he have thus befuddled us?"

"Most truly he hath."

"And the other servants—Stinson, Biddle, and the rest—what of them?"

"Fled, with all they could carry off."

"And thou?"

"Outwitted by a dog of an Irishman, who bound me with bowstrings, donned my garments, and then carried off my men at a moment when I fancied everything within my reach."

"Well, proceed," groaned Plimpton, leaning his cheek on his knuckles, and eying the trooper. "Go on with the tale; hast nothing more? By my hallows, the story's quite refreshing; ha, ha! As to the knight of Brockton, what sayest thou? consumed in the flames?"

"Ay, we left him in the library when the fire broke out, and have not seen him since."

"Oh? what? not seen his dead?"

"He could not escape but by the windows, and the fall had killed him."

"Ah! so then he died by the fall or the flames?"

"The trooper nodded assent."

"Gramercy, I wonder thou hadst not saved him, that he might be a further stumbling block in my way. Mary, I would have only been of a piece with the rest of thy bungling. And the oath—hast thou tendered it?"

"Ay, did I; and right soonfully he treated the same."

"Again?"

"Yes, and called her majesty most villainous ill names—a royal bastard, strumpet, Jezabel."

"Hush! hold thee there; thou must not repeat such blasphemies."

"Blasphemies! marry, if to speak evil of the queen be blasphemy, why, then the old recusant deserved the flames; the which, if every blasphemer of her majesty's divinity suffered by my orders, she would soon have but few subjects."

"And the witnesses to the tender—thou hast not forgotten them."

"Truly, nay; I remembered thy instructions thereon. And here be the names written at the bottom," he said, drawing a bundle from his pocket, and taking from it the copy of the oath; "William Waplington, to wit, and his coward, Andrew Johnson. And this," he added, placing a square parcel in his employer's hand, after the latter had examined the signatures, "this I found concealed amongst the knight's books, and have carried hither to thy inspection."

"Ah, a gold shoe buckle," muttered Plimpton, having broken the cord and opened the

box which the reader will remember the trooper to have secreted so carefully under his wrapper, or inner jerkin. "A gold shoe buckle; ay, and by all the gods and devils, of King Henry VIII's. Nay, I'll bound, the very one the queen hath rated my head flowers, so roundly for losing. Ay, marry, H.R., with a crown between. Humph! how found this the way to Brockton? Mayhap a keeskape from the earl to Mistress Alice, when he first met her during her majesty's progress in Worcestershire. Report saith she then found much favor in his sight. Ah, my good lord, we must let thy loving queen see this trinket; doubtless she may know it again, and, moreover, put these some puzzling questions concerning it. And the parchment—what may this mean? hah! Verily, a *Baptistarium*." And Sir Thomas read it carefully over and over again, and then, replacing it in the box, committed it to the drawer of the table near which he sat.

"I fancied it might be of some value in thy hands," said Houghton, carelessly, "and therefore have I preserved it."

"Well, of this anon; for the present keep thy counsel, and eschew the ale barrel."

"Humph! one may easily do that when he hath not sixpence in his purse to buy a draught of small beer."

"Thy purse shall be filled, and thy garments mended, to befit thee again for thy calling. But hark thee; dost thou know aught of this Jeanie Bontroun, whom of Evesham, spoken of in this parchment?"

"Nay, but I've seen one Robert Southron; mayhap her brother or cousin; he liveth at Evesham, and is keeper of Ashby Park."

"And Oliver Goodniff—thinkst thou this honest Oliver, of the Whitehorse of Wimbledon?"

"Doubtless the same, being born in those parts."

"Ah, good; then shall I intrust thee with a matter of some moment. Thou'lt change thy garments, crop thy beard, and fill thy purse (albeit gold is somewhat scarce now), and forthwith hie thee to the Whitehorse, and ferret from the cautious Oliver what he knoweth appertaining to this Whitet Macbair; whether he be still living, and where he may be found; for I would fain know something more respecting his birth and lineage. Hast thou, then, and hie thee to Wimbledon; the time passes, and I must prepare to meet the council respecting this ugly brawl. And hark thee, once more; look to it that thou daily not by the road, nor sit long by the hearth or wine cup."

Houghton left the room as he entered it without showing the slightest mark of respect for his employer, either by word or nod, and prepared to start on his mission to the Whitehorse of Wimbledon.

Plimpton, also, having dressed and breakfasted, issued forth and passed through the village on his way to court, somewhat apprehensive of the result of the investigation, but fully satisfied it would terminate his fears and anxieties, at least, respecting the estates of Brockton.

CHAPTER XLIII.

When Plimpton had reached the palace, he found the massacre of the preceding night had created an unusual sensation among the courtiers. In the different rooms, and seated on the benches along the corridors, as he passed, several groups were engaged warmly discussing the subject. Some were for arraigning him for murder, some for demanding his immediate imprisonment, some for petitioning the queen to expel him from court, as one who brought disgrace both on her majesty and the church. Indeed, the conduct of Plimpton appeared so disgusting and inhuman to all those who could look dispassionately on the matter, that it was generally felt he should be called to account; and not alone for the butchery in Whitstone Hollow, but also for the murder of Sir Geoffrey Wentworth, and the destruction of Brockton Hall. As he wended his way, therefore, through the rooms and passages of the court, he heard his name frequently pronounced, and various opprobrious epithets levelled at him from all sides; so that the farther he went, the stronger was his conviction that his pretended zeal for religion could no longer be made a cover for his crimes, and that even at the court of Elizabeth, it was not always an easy matter to play the accomplished villain with impunity.

Being one of the queen's messengers, and having easy access to her majesty at all times, he now resolved to see her before the trial took place, and thus ascertain what course it might be best for him to pursue on the occasion. Pushing open the door, therefore, of the antechamber, he boldly entered, and requested Bonyer, the usher, who stood there conversing with other gentlemen of the court, to inform her majesty that he craved an interview of a few moments on business of special importance.

The assurance with which Plimpton entered the antechamber and addressed the usher induced the latter to suspect his business might be some political affair requiring immediate attention, and, therefore, bowing coldly to the royal messenger, retired to present his request.

The door had been closed somewhat longer than usual on such occasions; but it opened at last, and Bonyer appeared, motioning Plimpton to enter.

As the latter disappeared, the usher announced to the gentlemen in waiting, that her majesty was graciously pleased to dispense with their services for the present, and that the trial, or investigation into the Whitstone Hollow affair would take place in open court, at four o'clock on the morrow, the queen herself presiding in person. "In the meantime," added Bonyer, "her majesty hath seen fit to send thee good greeting, Sir Edward Turnbull," addressing that functionary, "as *senechal* of the Court of High Commission, and commanding thee, by these presents, forthwith to take into thy custody the bodies of one Alice Wentworth and one Roger O'Brien, both at present sojourning in the palace of Hampton Court, and both safely kept in separate rooms, and to send speech of all men, until the queen shall order their production for trial; and, furthermore, you are commanded by her majesty to provide by sound of trumpet, of order and herald, that her liege subjects be invited to witness the proceedings thereunto appertaining, so that all may see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears, how a sovereign should act who hath respect for the law, and love for her subjects."

As Plimpton entered the privy chamber, the queen had been walking up and down the apartment, apparently agitated; for her step was bolder and more hurried than usual, and she kept tapping her palm quickly and sharply with her fan.

"Come hither, sir," she said, halting on her step and scanning his dark countenance for a moment, as if she expected to realize in it something she had been just thinking of him. "Come hither, Sir Thomas, and acquaint us with thy good pleasure."

"Please your most gracious majesty," he replied, kneeling, and taking an oath of the queen's secret to him, in sign of his humble gratitude—"please your most gracious majesty—"

"Hold, sir," interrupted Elizabeth, suddenly drawing back and snatching her

fan from his hand; "thou must not presume even thus far whilst in disgrace with thy sovereign. But touching that charge, we shall investigate it on the morrow. For the present, what wouldst thou with us?"

And sitting down, she crossed her arms, and waited for Plimpton to begin.

"It's but a trifle, my liege," said he, concealing it easier to defer speaking of himself till after he had conciliated her in some measure by the communications he had to make. "It's in itself a mere trifle; and yet, in good truth, it somewhat concerns your majesty."

"Humph! mayhap it's on that account but a trifle," said the queen, bitterly; "our peace and happiness being of small moment to our courtiers of late."

"To me, your humble and dutiful slave and servant, your majesty's peace and happiness must be ever dearer than life."

"Faulth! we understand this tamaraude but too well; what is thy business?"

"Please your grace," he replied, drawing from his breast the little iron box while Houghton had given him a few minutes before, "I have brought this to your majesty's inspection," and unfolding the parchment, he respectfully handed it to her.

"Humph! what sayest thou to this?" she demanded, without deigning to look at it; "oh? dost presume so far as to expect we should examine every paltry, filthy thing thou'lt pleased to hand us?"

"Under your majesty's favor," replied Plimpton, bowing humbly, "it purports to be a *baptistarium*, or baptismal registry of a royal infant."

"A royal infant!" ejaculated the queen, instantly turning white as paper, and staring at Plimpton, whilst the parchment in her hand trembled like an autumn leaf.

The latter, affrighted at so startling a change in her majesty's countenance and manner, drew back in terror; and then instantly recollecting the midnight scene at the court-yard gate, and the subsequent conversation in that very room between her majesty and the countess regarding the babe, he shrunk back still more, and gazed down on the floor horror-stricken at his indiscretion, and unable to speak a word.

In this manner, both for a time remained silent—the one in speechless agony from the conviction that her guilt was discovered, and the other from dread of immediate imprisonment or death.

"A royal infant!" repeated Elizabeth, "what meanest thou, sir?" she asked, the blood rushed back again to her face, and then, starting up, her feet, she glared at Plimpton's bent form as a panther does when preparing to spring on a prey, and Plimpton quailed and covered before her like a heron under the wings of an eagle.

"Speak, dog, what meanest thou—this royal infant? hah! who dares—"

"Nay, nay, your majesty," altered out the terrified courtier, dropping on his knees, and losing all self-possession in the fear of utter annihilation, "it's not of that—it's not of that—look to the date."

"Of that of that! 'decent! what, sir? slave—dog—wretch—answer me; darest thou venture thus to malign—"

"Mercy, mercy!" cried Plimpton; "spare me, gracious madam, spare me, and vouchsafe to listen for one instant. I meant not that—it's not—nay, it's a royal infant baptised some twenty years ago."

"Twenty years ago?" repeated Elizabeth; "then it's not—hah! he, sir? twenty years?"

"Even so, please your majesty."

"Ah, marry; twenty years ago; didst say twenty years ago? art sure thou saidst not lately—within a month, or a year, or—"

and whilst endeavoring to retract herself, she was trying to hit on some pretext by which she might naturally account for her precipitancy.

"Please your grace, the child was born long ago, as your majesty will see by the registry, and far from hence."

"Gramercy for the bat! what doth it concern us, man?" she muttered, drawing back, confused and excited. "But, God's death! we have so many calculations about the court, that we know not what evil things may be said of us, and therefore thy words sounded somewhat equivocal in our ears."

"Your majesty will pardon my rude speech, when your grace remembers that it was only when greatly encouraged by your royal favor, I first ventured to enter your majesty's presence; and that now, after spending so many years in court, I am still confused when your highness condescendeth to speak."

"Nevertheless, thou hast not spent thy time fruitlessly, I trow; and if thou hadst learnt nothing else, thou hast learnt at least to play the eavesdropper whilst acting the waiting gentleman."

"I have the misfortune not to understand your grace's allusion," returned Plimpton. "Humph! I merely said thou'lt learnt as many court secrets as thy place gave thee opportunities."

"Nay, please thee, gracious madam, I have learnt none but those intrusted to me by your royal self, the which are locked within my breast, where no key can enter, save the master key of your majesty's will."

"And yet," muttered the queen, still eying him doubtfully, "we fancied, but a moment gone, when speaking of this royal infant baptised some twenty years ago, thou wert somewhat more confident by thy foolish mistake than the simple fact could well account for."

"I leave your majesty was displeased," replied Plimpton, "and not being conscious of any offence, I was troubled lest your grace might harbor some suspicion, against which, not knowing it, I could ill defend myself."

"Enough," said the queen; "a thy ways come back again, and thou hast encountered thy secrets but ad thy wonted prudence and discretion once more; so it would be useless to question thee further on the matter; but let us examine this *baptistarium*. Humph! To Sir Geoffrey Wentworth, our good friend and loving brother, greeting; ay, a royal babe; ha, ha! in Evesham, Godparents, Oliver Goodniff and Eleanor Gower; the mother, Jane or Jeanette Southron. Humph! 'Tis thy child, the daughter of Anne Howard, her faith, for the preserving of which her noble now resigns his fortune and his name! 'Sdeath! here's the wretched again; this is thine own fair lady, eh? is she not?" Inquired Elizabeth, looking up at Plimpton. "This daughter of Anne Howard; and who may her uncle be?"

"H.R.—Henry Howard, mayhap. Ah, marry, this is doubtless Lord Henry Howard, who hath been so long missing from England, and supposed to have taken orders in Italy or Spain. Dost know aught of this Henry Howard?" she demanded, folding the parchment and laying it on the table.

"Nought, save that he wanders about somewhere in Scotland. John Knox hath seen him in Edinburgh of late."

"John Knox?"

"Ay, please your majesty."

"Hast spoken with Knox?"

"Nay, but Davidson, my servant, hath. He saw him with the Abbot of Kilwinning, soon after the arrival of my Lord Murray. Knox charged this Howard with making much mischief among the Catholic adherents of the

Queen of Scots, and of greatly injuring your majesty's reputation with the lords of the Oregregation, by the calumnies he hath circulated."

"And of this royal babe knowest thou aught? The letter attached to the registry here is in the handwriting of the late Duke of Richmond, (whom our royal father foolishly raised to that title), and moreover doth truly acknowledge the paternity of the babe in due form of such presents. Thinkst thou the child yet liveth?"

"I know not, your grace; but I could find out something concerning it from Nell Tower, or Oliver Goodniff."

"And this same Oliver Goodniff—what is he?"

"Keeper of a hostelry called the Whitehorse, in Wimbledon, within a league or two of the city. I can have speech of him within the hour."

"Nay, we will not trouble thee now; 'tis but a matter of little moment at least."

"And yet, please your grace, if this child liveth, it might breed dispute, especially in these days of disputed successions. How know we but France or Spain may some day claim royal rights for this grandson of Henry VIII?"

"We shall ourselves provide against that," said Elizabeth, decisively, waving her hand to preclude further conversation on the point. Plimpton, seeing there was no likelihood of his being confidentially employed in this affair, on the credit of which he had prided himself much, was now apparently about to take leave of her majesty, and had made a motion to that effect, when something fell from his breast.

"Ah! what is that, pray?" exclaimed Elizabeth, whose quick eye caught the glittering object in his fall.

"Verily, it's but a shoe buckle," please your majesty," replied Plimpton, stooping to pick it up.

"It's of large size," said the queen, fixing her eyes intently on it. "Hah! let us examine it more closely. But what! how's this?" she exclaimed; "'Sdeath, sir, how came this in thy possession?"

"It came from Brockton," please your majesty.

"From Brockton, eh? From this Sir Geoffrey Wentworth's?"

"Even so, your grace; seeing the initials of his sovereign majesty engraved thereon, I carefully preserved it; and yet, verily, had it not fallen, I might have left without showing it to your grace."

"How came it there?"

"Nay, I know not; but a troop sergeant of my company found it in a room of that house."

"A room of that house," repeated the queen, endeavoring to repress her ire, and to speak collectedly.

"Ay, amongst some ribbons and brooches in the drawer of a lady's dressing table."

"Humph, didst question this man further as to the quality of these brooches, and other such trinkets as he saw there?"

"Nay, your majesty; but I shall if it so please thee." And Plimpton, though he looked not in her face, was conscious the while that a fire raged deep in her heart, which, if well fed, might yet grow strong enough to consume the supercilious and haughty Leicester.

"We have lost or mislaid, or—given away a trinket to some one," said Elizabeth, "and cannot well recollect; 'twas a ring, with a large ruby—hem—thou'lt heard nought of it?"

"Nought, please your majesty."

"Ah, well, let it pass. Touching this buckle, however, we must endeavor to ascertain how it came to travel so far away as Worcestershire."

"Stolen, mayhap," observed Plimpton, carelessly.

"Ay, doubtless; or dropped in the streets. Well, sir, hast aught further to say?" she suddenly demanded, beginning to grow impatient of his presence the moment he had no further secret information to communicate.

"Have this broil at Whitstone Hollow, please your grace."

"Nay, sir; depend not on us for thy clearance. If thou hast exceeded thy authority, thou shalt answer for it; for by our royal soul, we defend thee not."

"Please your majesty—"

"Away sir! we have spoken. What, 'sdeath, wouldstst palter with us?" And stamping on the floor she vented on her unfortunate confidant the rage that had been so long silently devouring her. "Away, fellow, away! quit the room, we command thee; and learn to chasten thy presumption. God's mercy and patience! we shall soon be but a very puppet in our palace."

"Gracious mistress, I have but executed the warrant, and—"

"Begone!" she said, pointing to the door; "begone, and leave us."

Plimpton fell on his knees before her, and raised his hands in supplication.

"By our hopes of mercy—slave, dog, villain! If thou rise not instantly, we send thee to the Tower."

Seeing there was no hope of assuaging her anger, he rose up at length, and bowing low, retreated to the door, not venturing to utter a word.

The queen followed him step by step, as if she could have brushed him on the face. For an instant he paused at the door with his hand upon the handle. He felt that if he left her in this rage, he might never again have an opportunity to retrieve his blunder about the royal infant.

"What, sir, dost still refuse to leave?"

"If your majesty thus cast me off, I am undone. Nay, I may be tempted—"

"Tempted! what, to reveal state secrets? Hah, there, Bonyer! come hither."

"Not so, not so, gracious madam; I meant not that but—"

"Hah! there, Bonyer!" she continued, not deigning to hear a word in explanation of what, in the madness of the moment, she took for a threat. "Hah, there, Bonyer! she cried, as the usher hurriedly entered a convey this fellow to prison; and let this be your warrant," she added, taking a paper from her bosom and handing it to the officer.

"Hah! we have not left ourselves entirely unprepared for this treacherous hind. Away with him to prison, and let him there learn respect for his sovereign, till the hour of trial come to-morrow; and see to it—that we charge these on the peril of thy life—that he have speech of no one."

CHAPTER XLIII.

On Plimpton's exit from the privy chamber, Elizabeth retired to her boudoir, and, flinging herself on her furniture, began to reflect, as dispassionately as she could under such exciting circumstances on the dangers to which she was now, on all sides, exposed. Long and sadly did she ponder over the events of the last few days; and many a secret scheme did she devise for offsetting the evil consequences which might result therefrom.

In the council room she failed not to observe what little value the French and Spanish ambassadors set upon her integrity, during the examination of the Earl of Murray, and how readily Melville detected collusion be-

tween her and the arch rebel. She was too shrewd a woman not to see, in their conduct, and bearing on that occasion, a clear evidence of the opinions entertained of her by their respective sovereigns. So far, then, she had completely failed in blinding these two great powers to her infamous complicity.

Nay, more, she had overreached herself. When De Foys and Quadra's reports of that day's proceedings should come to the ears of Charles and Philip her faithlessness and duplicity would be exhibited in a clearer light than ever, and these jealous neighbors begin to watch more narrowly, in future all her movements, both at home and abroad.

Philip, her correspondence with the Low Countries, and Charles, her intrigues with the disaffected nobles of Scotland. And yet she dare not abandon the Netherlands. Such a step would ruin her forever with her Protestant subjects, to the most influential of whom she had already given a solemn promise of sending money and ammunition to the insurgents.

Neither could she relinquish her designs on Mary Stuart, lest she might disappoint the hopes of the Calvinists, suffer the old French influence to revive, and thus, perhaps, finally endanger her own throne.

On the other hand, what would become of her if her Protestant subjects at length discovered, that instead of a virgin queen, in whom they had hitherto felt so much pride, they had, in reality, but a lewd and corrupt woman—a worthy daughter of the most infamous of sires. What if the child yet came to light, furnished with undeniable proofs of its royal parentage? In a word, what if she who had so often whined and wept before her council and her people, over the weakness and frailty of her royal cousin, was found herself to be no better than the paramour of the most licentious noble of her realm?

Again, as to the Catholics, what would they say of the reformed church, whose director vowed her virginity to God, in order, as she declared, the more uninterruptedly to watch over both the eternal and temporal interests of her people? nay, had even gone so far as to pronounce the marriage of the clergy incompatible with the faithful discharge of their duties, whilst, at that very time, she was leading the life of a mistress of the most dissolute and abandoned man?

There was, therefore, but one course open to her—the old one—namely, to conciliate France and Spain as far as might comport with her sovereignty, and thus endeavor to gain time to work out her designs in Scotland, hoping that when she had effectually crushed the Queen of Scots, her own thriving power might then be great enough to cope with her more distant and dangerous neighbors.

But yet, how could she venture to carry out this intricate and dangerous policy, while the fear of exposure was ever acting as a drag on her energy and a weight upon her heart. Were she certain of the death of the child, or even of the earl's safe disposal of it, she might courageously go to work; but, alas! she knew the child was living, and would still live as long as Leicester could preserve it.

Last of all, there was Plimpton. What was to be done with him? It was evident from his shuffling and blundering answers respecting the young Richmond, he had come to the knowledge of the secret, and perhaps, if permitted to remain longer at court, might become extremely troublesome.

Having long and seriously pondered over these matters, each in its turn, and in the order of its importance, she then slowly raised her head from her hand, and yoked about her as one awakening from a midday slumber. The shoe buckle was still in her hand, but she had not felt it till now, so absorbed was she in her reflections.

"As to that," she muttered, looking at it, "it gives me little uneasiness, for I have resolved to despatch the wretched fellow to Heaven not Plimpton. For myself, would to Heaven I could hate him, and have some fair pretext for sending him to the headsman."

At this moment, the Countess of Harrington entered, and approaching her majesty, kissed her hand as usual.

"We have just been thinking, Harrington," said Elizabeth, "of ridding us of this Plimpton fellow."

"Hath he begun to grow troublesome to your majesty?" inquired the countess.

"Ay, he knoweth now somewhat too much for a court messenger."

"And yet," replied the countess, "he had been crafty enough, methought, to dissemble his knowledge of state secrets."

"Marry, even in that he's but a poor blunderer. 'Tis hardly half an hour gone since he betrayed his knowledge of the—of that—the child," she faltered out with painful hesitation.

"What! good Heavens! your majesty doth not mean—"

"Ay, he knoweth every thing concerning it."

"Did he presume to—?"

"Nay; but he let the secret slip his tongue in his confusion of the moment."

"And doth your majesty know him?"

"We fear everyone," she replied quickly.

The countess looked up in her face. "Even your majesty's old and faithful servants?" she murmured.

"Marry, are they faithful, we need fear them not. Nay, nay, be of good cheer, countess, and look not so downcast; thou art safe by thy prudence and caution; when they forsake thee, then thou mayst dread the block."

"Ah, then I shall dread nothing," responded the countess with a smile.

"Dread nothing?"

"Verily, nay, for then I shall be dead, and are are can no longer harm me."

"Well, well, be it so. Hast seen the girl?" she inquired, suddenly, changing her tone, and again looking at the buckle, while her lips twitched and her cheek grew paler.

"I have, your majesty; the earl hath confided her to the safe keeping of his cousin, Madam Ann Dudley."

"Is she very handsome?"

"Truly, she is somewhat good-looking; but a mere toy withal."

"Of old bearing?"

"Nay, basili! as a Yorkshire peasant."

"Of stately presence?"

"Indifferently well."

"Humph! she's but a bawble, then, to break with the toy?"

"Yes, truly, something of that kind, your majesty."

"Thou'lt seen Mary Stuart; how compares she with her?"

"Greatly alike, please your grace, save that the maiden hath not so commanding a figure nor so fair a skin."

"Commanding a figure and fair skin," repeated the queen, snappishly. "'Sdeath, I know not how every eye seeth beauties in that lovesick woman."

(To be continued.)

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Backache,
Headache, Toothache,
Sore Throat,
Quinsy, Swellings,
Sprains,
Soreness, Cuts, Bruises,
Frostbites,
BURNS, SCALDS,
And all other bodily aches and pains.

FIFTY CENTS A