

IN THE CARQUINEZ WOODS.

She raised her eyes to his. There was a slight film across them; the lids were blackened; the beautiful lashes gone forever. "I see you a little now, I think," she said with a smile, passing her hands vaguely over her face. "It must have happened when he fainted and I had to drag him through the blinding brush. Both my hands were full, and I could not cover my eyes."

THE QUEEN'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I. Hampton Court, during the early part of Elizabeth's reign, was a busy, bustling place. Never before or since her accession has the history of England presented such a crowd of ambassadors, suitors, petitioners, poets, painters, and court dependants generally, as then swarmed round the person of the sovereign. Hardly was she seated on the throne, when nearly every royal house in Europe sent forth a suitor for her hand, or an envoy to negotiate a matrimonial alliance.

out a moment's hesitation, assuring the envoy, that even if Leicester were not a subject, she would be loth to remove from the presence of her royal sister a nobleman so dear to her heart. This was not what Elizabeth expected. Indeed, the general belief was, that she trusted the Queen of Scots would accept Dudley, in order that, with a better grace, she might marry him herself. At length Dudley was proposed. He was a subject, it is true, but yet a cousin of Elizabeth, grandson of the Princess Margaret, and thus descended from the kings of both England and Scotland. He was, in the opinion of the well-affected of her nobles, a fit consort of their queen. Agata Elizabeth interposed to prevent the match, by naming Dudley a second time; and, to enhance the offer, created him Earl of Leicester. She informed Mary, if she accepted him, she would, as soon as possible, consider her claim to the succession, and probably admit it, provided she herself had made up her mind, as was very probable, to live a single life.

honor, without which the grave itself is a blessing; ay, even when the passage to it lies between the dungeon and the block. The Parliament, submitted to her the wishes of her subjects in reference to her marriage, and even proposed a number of matches, suitable both as to birth and political advantages. Elizabeth, too, was not tardy in her manifestations of regard for the happiness of her subjects, and the welfare of her kingdom. She had many a suitor to propose for the hand of the young widow. But Mary steadily withheld her consent; always ready with one objection or another to the nominees of her cabinet, and always cleared enough to detect in all the husbands of Elizabeth's choice some political manoeuvre to effect, or some foreign relation to strengthen. In fact, Mary Stuart had resolved on wedding Dudley, the man of her own choosing, and was too candid and too honorable to encourage others. Peace was already proclaimed by Charles IX. between England and France, and Elizabeth had now more leisure to pursue her designs on her rival sister, and mature those plans regarding the succession which her troubles abroad had so long interrupted. Every possible agony was now set to work at the Scotch court, and every imaginable inducement held out to the most disaffected or corruptible of the Scotch nobles, to abandon the cause of their royal mistress. Sir Nicholas Throckmorton was sent as ambassador, with secret instructions to take measures with the Lord James Stuart, now Earl of Murray, the Duke of Castileherant, and the Earls of Argyll and Routhes, for preventing the marriage of Dudley, and placing Murray at the head of the government. When Elizabeth first heard of Mary's intention to wed Dudley, she saw in an instant, as we have already stated, that his birth and royal connections would give him an influence over the Parliament which would be soon impossible for her to control, and therefore she determined to use all possible means to prevent the union. In the beginning she dissembled her dissatisfaction at the news, and even went so far as to send Mary letters of congratulation on her choice. But she soon changed her tone.

"Hast sayest thou so? And by our royal word, we need them much. As for the good archbishop, he hath been ever thoughtful of us, knowing, as well he might, how poorly our treasury hath been supplied. Well, that changes the case, my good Mistress Dalavero, so thou'd better take thy wares to the other ladies at present. Moreover, we promised an audience to that disconsolate gentleman at the door,—looking towards Plimpton,—and would fain despatch him without further delay. So take thy wares with thee, good woman, and Dame Fortune send thee better customers." As the Countess of Harrington and the French woman left the room, and Sir Thomas Plimpton approached, the queen drew herself up a little, and rubbed her hands across her forehead, as if to drive away all minor thoughts, in order to make room for those which she knew were soon to occupy her mind. Plimpton beat his knee reverently, but did not presume to touch her hand. "Well, Sir Thomas Plimpton, how go on affairs in Scotland?" began Elizabeth, looking round at the different doors of the apartment, and again drawing the shawl closer about her shoulders. "Please your majesty, as well as might be expected. There be many noble hearts in Scotland, devoted to the welfare of your majesty's person and throne."

we expect that all affairs of a certain character, entrusted to thy keeping, be conducted without regard to our knowledge of them." Plimpton bowed again. "And take these care," she continued, "that our favor do not make thee over bold to run thy head into a noose, trusting to our royal hand to release thee; for, by thy princely word of honor, we shall ourselves be the first to strangle thee for thy presumption." Such forwarding, however, was, in this instance, quite unnecessary. Plimpton had studied well the character and disposition of the woman with whom he had to deal. When he took service under Randolph and Throckmorton, he was soon made aware of the dangers to which his secret duties would expose him. He saw clearly that his life depended on his caution; for the moment any blunder of his tended to compromise the queen, his head would fall ere he could utter a word in defence. Though he was now three years or more in her employment, Elizabeth had never once directly entrusted him with the management of an intrigue at the Scotch court or elsewhere. She never gave him any direct handle by which he could successfully incaluate her, in the event of an unforeseen exposure. And so it was in her daily intercourse with her various other employees. Whether in her plots to compass the ruin of Mary Stuart, or in adding the Huguenots, or in her diplomatic relations with foreign powers, she took especial care that no agent of hers had whereby to charge her with criminal or dishonorable interference. She could smile her assent and frown her refusal, but there was no word or overt act to endanger her honor. As for Plimpton, he was a man every way fit for her purposes; cautious, persevering, insinuating, and devoid of all moral principle. Full of avarice and ambition, he was prepared to sacrifice every thing for wealth and titles. But what afforded her the strongest feeling of security was, that Plimpton had no family connection, and was therefore the fittest to trust in the common's mouth; for if he fell, there was no troublesome friends to take any interest in his fate.

CHAPTER II.

Mary Stuart, the ill-fated queen, had arrived in Scotland, and taken possession of her kingdom, amid the smiles of the many and the frowns of the few. Never, perhaps, did more devoted hearts surround the person of a sovereign, than were to be found among those who welcomed the young monarch to her realm, and followed in her triumphal procession, from the pier of Leith to her palace of Holyrood, on the 19th of August, 1561. Many a gallant Scot waved his tartan bonnet, and many a loyal heart beat high with pride, as Mary, seated on her milk-white palfrey, saluted her loving subjects that evening on her way to the benighted castle. Even the cold and cautious bigot forgot his sectarian animosity and captivated by her graceful mien and transcendent loveliness, joined for a time in the general welcome. What, he beheld so auspicious a commencement of her reign, could have thought it would close so soon and so terribly? Who, that listened to those shouts of welcome, those prayers poured forth that day from the hearts of thousands upon her young head, could have imagined that, in a few years, that face, so chaste, so pale, so trusting, and so beautiful, would yet lie, covered with its own blood, under the axe of the executioner? But so it was.

At this time the Countess of Lennox, mother of Lord Darnley, was in London enjoying the pleasures of the English court and the smiles of its queen. Suddenly she found herself a prisoner, and before she could ascertain the cause, or communicate with her friends, was lodged in the Tower. Throckmorton was again despatched in all possible haste to Edinburgh, to revoke the royal permit given to Lord Lennox to visit Scotland, and to summon him and Darnley to return to England, forthwith, under pain of forfeiture of their estates. On the same week, John Hay, a messenger from Mary to Elizabeth, on reaching London is conveyed to prison. It was on the morning of his arrest, and about the hour of noon, after the secretary, Sir William Cecil, had left the royal apartments, looking grave and solemn as usual, that a page, in gaudy livery, was observed to run down a private stairway, and addressing a man who had been proceeding the passage for some time, apparently expecting a summons, as Sir Thomas Plimpton informed him that her majesty had commanded his immediate presence in her private audience chamber. He instantly turned to obey the royal order.

Plimpton felt at a loss how to reply to this hint. "Dost not see," pursued the queen, "the value of such a packet, in the present state of Scotland, when the army of the Congregation requires all the help it can gather from every source?" Plimpton ventured to glance at Elizabeth for a second, and saw a peculiar expression on her lip, and a side look in her eye, that spoke to him plainly that she would dare venture in words. He caught her meaning in an instant. "It is probable, madam, that the vigilance of your majesty's friends may have intercepted some such papers since I had conferred last with the Scotch nobles; and now that your grace hath picked my dull memory," he said, laying his fore finger to his forehead, "let me think—truly yes—I do remember some such vague rumor, on my setting out from Edinburgh."

"Both, madam, have refused, and most contemptuously." "With all thy recommendations of purse and person, titles and ancestors. Gads me! And how many ye the silly wench?" "Wentworth, please your majesty; Alice Wentworth." "Wentworth! We have heard the name before—Wentworth." "Daughter of Sir Geoffrey Wentworth, of Brockton, in Worcestershire." "An old man, of great learning and eccentric habits—is he not so?" "The same, please your majesty, and an inveterate enemy of the church wifal." "A stanch recusant, eh? ready to renounce his allegiance to us at the bidding of the Pop?" "He had the boldness to laugh most irreverently when I tendered him the oath under your grace's sanction, particularly at that part touching your majesty's spiritual supremacy." "Fugh, man! we were prepared for all that. But what think he of the Pop's temporal power? That's what concerns us most," and her brows contracted as she put the question. "What thinks he of that? Are you to be bastardized and deposed at his pontifical nod?" "I crave your grace's pardon," responded Plimpton, still standing bent, and bowing before her. "I have not dared to hazard such a question, fearing the answer might provoke me to extremities." "Ay, thy loyalty would have been put to too severe a trial," quietly observed Elizabeth, smiling incredulously at the sycophant. "But thou wouldst marry the daughter, eh?" Plimpton assented. "The girl, or her lands?" "Both, your majesty." "And mayhap convert her?" "With God's help and your grace's." "But of the knight what wouldst thou?" "As your majesty pleaseth to direct."

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