

sister," he said at length; "or is it," he added with startling abruptness, "that you have read my thoughts, and grown pale at the very apprehension of a queenly crown?"

"It is a toy that I covet not," said Mary, with a bursting sigh; "and were it mine, would gladly give it in exchange for the wild flower wreath of the humble cottage girl, if like her, I might be permitted still to dwell in the sweet and sunny glades of my own beloved land."

"I know that young as you are, you have already had the courage to reject a crown, proffered by a youthful and gallant prince—a crown, too, which at some future day, may grace an imperial brow, but I scarcely dreamed, that you inherited so little of our father's kingly pride, as to prefer a calm and lowly lot, that should make you still a dweller in the seagirt island of your birth, to the illustrious destiny, which the race of Tudor are born to inherit."

A cloud darkened the king's haughty brow as he uttered these words—Mary observed it and hastened to reply.

"My brother, I know to what this conversation tends; I am prepared for it, and you shall not have me reproach me with being a degenerate daughter of Henry the Seventh. You have already spoken to me of this alliance with the King of France, you have told me, that it would bind the two nations in perpetual amity, strengthen your power, and increase your consequence—and—and, I have schooled my heart, till I have almost learned to think of it without shuddering."

Henry, who expected to meet only opposition from his sister, had prepared himself accordingly, with many, and cogent arguments, was astonished at this unlooked for passiveness, and gazed earnestly upon her to ascertain if she were really serious. One glance at her pale, but calm and dejected countenance, satisfied his doubts, and solicitous to say all that might console and reassure her, he replied:

"Whatever I may have said touching the advantages to be derived from this alliance, for myself personally, and for the realm which I am destined to govern, is strictly true, and from my soul, sweet sister, do I thank you for the noble and disinterested manner in which you consent to forward and fulfil my views. Your own personal aggrandizement is not the least object of my desire, and should you survive the king, the arms of my love shall be open to receive and welcome you—neither, shall any motive of policy, induce me a second time, to put force or restraint upon your inclinations."

"Old as he is, Louis will probably outlive me," said Mary, with a sigh; "or if perchance he should grow weary of so spiritless a bride, and repudiate her, to make room for a gayer or a fairer queen, as he did the blameless Joan—how then will the king

of haughty England receive his fallen and degraded sister?"

"Nay you are unjust, fair sister, to speak in such a reproachful tone of this one act, perhaps the only one, which has sullied the lustre of a reign, whose benignity and virtue have won for Louis the proud title of "father of his people." Recollect that Joan was sickly and deformed, that she was married in childhood, and forced upon her unwilling lord, whose love was given to another, and let these considerations offer some atonement for his fault."

"Enough, enough, your grace, and now let us on with speed, since, tomorrow, you have told me, the Duke De Longueville receives my final answer."

"He does," replied the king; "but there is a frightful calmness in your manner that terrifies me; I know the sacrifice which I ask of you, and if by my urgency, I am driving you to adopt any desperate plan of escape, in God's name, say so, and what is done, shall without farther parley be undone."

"I have no plan, no purpose but only to fulfil your majesty's will," said the unhappy princess. "It matters little where I may abide in future, and though my heart still clings to the soil of my country, it is better perhaps that I should droop and pine far from its shores, where no fond breast will bleed to see me wither, and no anxious eyes watch my decline with anguish."

As she spoke thus, in a voice whose thrilling sadness pierced the king's soul, she bent over her saddle bow, and tears, that she could no longer restrain, fell like rain drops from her eyes. Henry was deeply moved.

"This shall not be," he said, "though it were to save my realm, I would not thus consent to seal my sister's wretchedness. I will to London this very night, and give notice to the French duke that the treaty is at an end."

"Never, never, send him word like this," cried Mary, rousing herself from her short trance of grief; "your kingly honour is at stake, my brother, and to retract at this late hour, would be to awaken the resentment of France, and plunge us, probably into a long and ruinous war. I beseech your majesty, think no more of my weakness—it was a tide of womanish feeling, that came over me for an instant, but it has ebbed again," she added, with a faint attempt at gaiety; "there will be at my bridal, such a gorgeous array, such sparkling of jewels, such glancing of embroidered surcoats, ermine and purple, that doubtless I shall be fain to forget that the crown of my royal lord covers a grey head, and a furrowed brow."

But this momentary flash of sportiveness could not deceive the penetrating Henry—he saw plainly that either an earnest desire to comply with his wishes, or some other motive more powerful, but of