

keeps Sir Francis here; what should we do without him?"

"It is true, dear Katherine;" again Reginald took her hand, and she forgot to take it away. "I was selfish for a moment. My father's place is here; his wisdom is great if his strength is not what it was—and, indeed, the first is a quality we sadly want in this realm."

"Aye, and here as much as anywhere," the girl exclaimed. "Janet tells me there is talk even among the servants of the Manor about a rising." Katherine sank her voice. "She has seen the ribbon."

"Ribbon! What ribbon, dear cousin? You talk in enigmas."

"It is red, with a black stripe on either side, Janet says. She tells me that Lawyer Startin is giving a streamer to whomsoever will take them, but each is bound over by solemn promise not to show it yet."

"Master Startin is a dangerous man; he has the old fanatic creed in him which will out. I never see him but I seem to read it in his narrow face and heavy jaws."

"Yes, he will do mischief with these poor people, and I hear that a certain Pastor Mulgrove has been at Watchet, and the people have crowded to hear him. He preached on that text, 'Is the Lord's hand shortened that He cannot save, or His ear heavy that it cannot hear?' He spoke of a deliverance at hand, and that all would soon, like Joshua, have to choose whom they would serve."

"Who told you all this?"

"Janet, as she waited on me only this morning."

"Does my father know of it?"

"No. I have not told him yet. I suppose I must, and yet I hate to grieve him. Besides, what can he do? Lawyer Startin has more power and influence with these people than Sir Francis, even though he be Lord of the Manor, and has ever been kind to all those beneath him in rank."

"Don't you know why, cousin? It is because this fellow Startin jumps with their mood. He tells them what they would hear; while Sir Francis ever preaches patience and loyalty, which they would not hear. Yet am I almost a rebel myself." Reginald flushed at the word under his bronze. It had come to have such a significance in England, as to make men who had suffered for their fidelity to the Stuarts wince at the breathing of it.

Katherine answered with heightened color and rising bosom: "I cannot bear to think of England under the sway of the Pope, and of great and good men turned out of office under the Crown because they are not of the king's religion, and others put in their place who are more subservient, or perhaps truly of the Papist persuasion. I cannot bear to think that the very judges are threatened with dismissal if they administer the law. If the king's faith is not that of the people, I am not of those who would interfere with him, as they say the Scots treated their Queen Mary, who died miserably on the scaffold at Fotheringay afterwards. But I would have him remember that in the matter of faith 'tis for his own conscience. We have won our freedom at a great cost, and this inheritance no man or king has a right to take from us. We, too, have our consciences."

Katherine had released her hands from his grasp, and as she spoke she clenched them together. Reginald had never seen her so strangely stirred, and withal never had she seemed so beautiful, flushed and animated. If the girl had just regarded her cousin in a new light, so now he saw depths in her nature never even suspected before. But little at Wintern, and when there much occupied with hunting after the red deer on the far-famed moor, or bass-fishing from their own boat in the Channel, the young man had heard less than his cousin of what the whole countryside was thinking and doing. Katherine, on the contrary, through her old tire-woman, Janet Oldhern, was kept well informed of all that was going on.

"I am with you, dear cousin, in all you say; and so is my father, I know full well. The heart of England is true to the faith for which Cranmer and Ridley perished at the stake, and what men have dared and suffered men will not be afraid to dare and suffer again. But the cure for the king's distemper is not to be found in civil war—at least, so I judge. England has been drained of enough of her best blood already. Besides, I believe not in this Monmouth. My friend and captain knows the duke well. As to his religion, it is put on with the dress he thinks best befits him, and will be to the liking of those who can further his schemes. He can be brave enough on occasion in the field, as he showed at the Storm of Maestricht; but his moods are ever changing. Now he thinks the world at his feet, and anon all things are the color of the sky when the storm clouds lower. At a crisis he may mount his horse—I have seen him; he is a fine figure on horseback—and lead men like a hero, sword in hand; or he may take to his bed and refuse even to issue an order or give an instruction. Is it for such a man, who is never twice alike, or for long master of himself, that we in England are to fling our fortunes to the four winds and ourselves perish on the scaffold? No; I love not James and I am not of his faith, but at any rate I believe him of the blood royal and no usurper, as the people's duke, as they call him, would be of a certainty."

"Then you believe not what people are saying—that his grace is the lawful heir?"

"Not a jot or tittle. His claims will not bear investigation. Had Charles regarded him as his lawful son, Monmouth would have been proclaimed heir to the throne long ago; it is no secret that his late Majesty loved him before his brother. But though Charles held not to many things, he would have died on the scaffold, like his sire, for the divine birthright of kings. That he knew Monmouth did not have, and Charles did not hesitate to proclaim the fact

to those of his ministers in whom he confided. The cause of the duke, cousin, can never prosper. It is founded on a lie. In addition, to capture England one must be a man, at least, of courage and determination, slow to strike; but, when the blow is made, resolute to see it through. Monmouth is no such hero, and those who put their trust in him will rue the day of their confidence."

No houses were to be seen from that terrace outlook—nothing but trees and water and the distant coastline beyond the Channel. But the young girl knew that in township and hamlet, in shepherd's hut and fisherman's cottage, brave hearts were beating in unison, filled with one hope, knit by one faith. Yet as Katherine listened to Reginald, and felt the truth of his words, spoken, as she knew, by one who had reason to be certain of what he said, a chill of fear crept to her heart, not for herself, but for the people. If their idol were indeed of clay, then the fall of it would be terrible, and how many would be crushed under its weight?

"May God keep us all from such a calamity!" cried Katherine fervently.

"Amen to that with all my heart!" Then he slipped his arm into hers, and led her towards a bower which bounded the terrace at one end. Katherine yielded herself to the influence of his gentle compulsion. She was in a whirl of feeling, hardly knowing what she did, full of thoughts presented by the conversation they had just had, conscious of the young man whose personality had assumed for her a guise to which she had by no means accustomed her mind, doubtful of her own heart most of all. So she went with heightened color, the rose still in her right hand.

Reginald led his cousin to a seat, then he bent over her and looked into her eye. She met his glance for a second, then her gaze dropped, and the peach bloom on her cheeks deepened and spread to her ears. In these latter there was a strange buzzing, as though she had been flung into deep water which had closed about her head.

Reginald sank on one knee and took possession of the rose's prison.

"Katherine, do you know what you are to me? Something so high above me, so pure and sweet, that I cannot attain to its heights; yet I would dare to do as I have seen you do to-day: stretch out my hand to the rose cluster almost out of my reach. I want you to think of me when I am away from you—"

He stopped.

"I should always do that," she faltered. "Your father and I talk of you daily."

But she was not to be let off so easily. This young man had fought with the Moors and had learned a certain firmness in the process.

"I want you to think of me, dear—in one way—not as you have thought of me before."

"How can I?" she faltered. "I do not know how."

"You must go to school and learn," he said, and he ventured to stroke her hand.

"Where is the school?" she asked. "I do not know the way to it." Her voice was very soft and low, and if he had not been very close to her lips assuredly he would not have caught the words.

"It is a school of which the door is shut and barred when others are by. It is only open for you to enter when you are alone—in your chamber, on the solitary moor, by the sea-shore."

"I have never seen it, then," she persisted.

"No; it cannot be seen: only felt, for it lies hidden in the most secret avenue of your own heart. Katherine," he pleaded, "I want you to learn to love me." He bent still further and kissed her hand. The fragrance of the half-drooping rose which the girl held rose up to his nostrils; never, as long as Reginald Harbin lived, did he fail to associate the rose scent with that scene in the bower at Wintern, that first declaration of his great love for Katherine Allardyce.

She shook herself free, not forcibly, yet firmly enough, and stood up. Reginald stood up likewise. His heart was beating with a strange fear that he had ruined his chance by asking her so much too soon. This girl was not like some others he had met in the great world. She had been brought up in such absolute seclusion, his father and her tire-woman her only familiar companions, with occasional visits from the Rector of Wintern, Dr. Theophilus Mordaunt. Mature she was in many things, even beyond her years, but of the language of love she knew not the alphabet, had never heard one single sentence.

"I will think of you, cousin Reginald, I will even try and think of you as you wish me to think, but I cannot promise anything—even to do that. It is all so strange to me what you seek. I cannot give what I do not even know that I possess."

"Is it not your heritage?" he asked, a half smile playing about his mouth, almost in spite of himself.

"Heritage?" she said, with a puzzled look. "What heritage?"

She had pictured broad acres, farms, and homesteads, but although in a vague way she knew she possessed them, they represented nothing to her.

"Yes," he replied; "the heritage of your womanhood—the heritage of love."

She, too, smiled as she caught at his simile.

"I do not think I have come into that heritage—yet."

"It is not like any other."

"Why?"

"Because it cannot be yours until it is another's too, and I want—ah! how deeply, truly—to be that other."

"I will remember," she promised. "I will try and think of it, of you, Reginald. Forgive me if I seem

unready; indeed, it is all so strange—so passing strange to me."

"I must be content with that?" he asked, yet he knew his answer.

"I can only give you that," she declared, with a sweet firmness which became her well; at least, he thought so, although the judgment of the court was not in his favor.

"May I not have one thing more?" he pleaded.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The rose you plucked," and he stretched out his hand. "It is an emblem of you."

She did not say yea or nay, yet when Reginald Harbin rode out from the gates of Wintern Manor that afternoon, there was a white rose in his hat, which resembled the one Katherine had plucked from the wall above the terrace.

CHAPTER II

THE KING'S INQUISITOR

LEUTENANT HARBIN and his man-servant, David Colbert, rode on their way towards London by rapid stages. Both were well mounted, and the high roads, at any rate, were in moderately fair condition. There had been but little rain for more than a month past. Colbert had been a trooper in Lieutenant Harbin's company. The latter had taken a fancy to the man, who had a frank, open face, and was of tried courage. Reginald had made him his body servant in Tangier, when the one he had taken out fell ill of fever and died. After the troop was disbanded, Colbert had asked to be retained in the lieutenant's service, and as Reginald had taken a liking to him, and had found him always ready in resource and good-tempered, he was nothing loth to accede to the request.

The route chosen was by Taunton, Yeovil, Sherborne, and so to Salisbury. As they rode side by side—for the lieutenant had encouraged Colbert to keep pace instead of maintaining his place in the rear—they marked the characteristics of the country through which they had passed and the people they encountered.

"Not much being done hereabouts," the man-servant remarked as they crossed a stone bridge over a stream, which marked the boundary line between Somerset and Dorset. "Seems as if the hay was not valued much in this country. That field has been ripe this week or more past, and not a scythe put into it."

"The men are all on the roads," Reginald answered.

"There is more stirring than husbandry." As he spoke they rode up to a forge. The twilight was coming on. Work might well have been suspended for the night under all ordinary circumstances. Not so on this occasion. Three furnaces were in full blast, one of which seemed to have been improvised somewhat hastily to meet an unusual demand. Half-a-dozen smiths were working at the forges with bare arms and set faces, on which the sweat stood out in great drops. Quite a number of men worked outside or ranged themselves against the walls of the smithy. The firelight, as it rose and fell with the plunging of steel into red-hot embers, or the beat of hammer on anvil, lighted up the faces of the waiting bystanders. They were set and sullen; not a word was spoken, not a rough jest exchanged. It seemed that the business they had in hand did not admit of the relaxation of a muscle or the offering of the civilities of life. Laborers they were, most of them, with here and there a small farmer, together with a few grizzled soldiers, evidently of the old Cromwell breed. These latter seemed to take a kind of general supervision of what was going on. The smiths were turning pruning hooks and hedge bills, even here and there long handled scythes, into weapons of war, which might prove formidable enough in a rough-and-tumble contest in strong hands, and with leaders capable of using such undrilled material to the best advantage.

Not a hand was raised in salute or a voice cried greeting as the lieutenant and his servant emerged into the brilliance of the thrice illuminated forge from the comparative obscurity of the road beyond. Such courtesies would have been offered in all ordinary times and on more usual occasions. Now it was conspicuously wanting. However, they were not to pass without some notice being taken of them. A heavily-bearded man in a leathern surtout and stout helmet, much discolored by weather, who had been sitting on a rough wooden seat opposite the forge, sprang to his feet, and, coming towards them, laid his hand on the bridle of the lieutenant's horse. Although the touch was not heavy, it caused the high-spirited animal to snort and curvet. Reginald turned upon the man.

"How now, sirrah! What do you mean by touching my horse? You must know little of horses if you think they take kindly to the touch of a strange hand."

The man replied in a deep, reverberant voice: "I knew about horses before you were weaned, young sir. It is you who are to answer questions. I want to know whither you ride, and on what errand?"

Reginald flushed at the stranger's dictatorial tone. By this time others had gathered by the latter's side, a sturdy company, and several of them with formidable bill-hooks in their hands. The lieutenant's sword was in its sheath, and his pistols in the holsters. To take either weapon would mean speedy dispatch at the hands of these desperate men. Reginald drew himself up, and looked haughtily into the strong face of his interrogator.

"You have the advantage of us in numbers, or I would not parley with you for an instant. Why am I to be stopped, riding on a peaceful errand upon the King's highway?"

(Continued on page 35)