

refusing, when the court was at Winchester, to let Eleanor Gwynn lodge in the house which he occupied there as a prebendary. The king had sense enough to respect so many a spirit. Of all the prelates, he liked Ken the best. It was to no purpose, however, that the good bishop now put forth all his eloquence. His solemn and pathetic exhortation availed and melted the by-standers to such a degree that some among them believed him to be filled with the same spirit which, in the olden time, had, by the mouths of Nathan and Elias, called sinful princes to repentance. Charles, however, was unmoved. He made no objection, indeed, when the service for the Visitation of the Sick was read. In reply to the pressing questions of the divines, he said he was sorry for what he had done amiss; and he suffered the absolution to be pronounced over him according to the forms of the Church of England; but when he was urged to declare that he died in the communion of that Church, he seemed not to hear what was said, and nothing could induce him to take the Eucharist from the hands of the bishops. A table with bread and wine was brought to his bedside, but in vain. Sometimes he said that there was no hurry, and sometimes that he was too weak.

Many attributed this apathy to contempt for divine things, and many to the stupor which often precedes death; but there were in the palace a few persons who knew better. Charles had never been a sincere member of the Established Church. His mind had long been oscillated between Hobbism and popery. When his health was good and his spirits high he was a scoffer. In his few serious moments he was a Roman Catholic. The Duke of York was aware of this, but was entirely occupied with the care of his own interests. He had ordered the outposts to be closed. He had posted detachments of the Guards in different parts of the city. He had also procured the feeble signature of the dying king to an instrument by which some duties, granted only till the demise of the crown, were let to farm for a term of three years. These things occupied the attention of James to such a degree that, though on ordinary occasions he was indiscreetly and unreasonably eager to bring over proselytes to his Church, he never

reflected that his brother was in danger of dying without the last sacraments. This neglect was the more extraordinary, because the Duchess of York had, at the request of the queen, suggested, on the morning on which the king was taken ill, the propriety of procuring spiritual assistance. For such assistance Charles was indebted to an agency very different from that of his pious wife and sister-in-law. A life of frivolity and vice had not extinguished in the Duchess of Portsmouth all sentiments of religion, or all that kindness which is the glory of her sex. The French ambassador, Barillon, who had come to the palace to inquire after the king, paid her a visit. He found her in an agony of sorrow. She took him into a secret room, and poured out her whole heart to him. "I have," she said, "a thing of great moment to tell you. If it were known, my head would be in danger. The king is really and truly a Catholic; but he will die without being reconciled to the Church. His bed-chamber is full of Protestant clergymen. I cannot enter it without giving scandal. The duke is thinking only of himself. Speak to him. Remind him that there is a soul at stake. He is master now. Go this instant, or it will be too late."

Barillon hastened to the bed-chamber, took the duke aside and delivered the message of the mistress. The conscience of James smote him. He started as if roused from sleep, and declared that nothing should prevent him from discharging the sacred duty which had been too long delayed. Several schemes were discussed and rejected. At last the duke commanded the crowd to stand aloof, went to the bed, stooped down, and whispered something which none of the spectators could hear, but which they supposed to be some question about affairs of state. Charles answered in an audible voice, "Yes, yes, with all my heart." None of the by-standers except the French ambassador, guessed that the king was declaring his wish to be admitted into the bosom of the Church of Rome.

"Shall I bring a priest?" said the duke. "Do, brother," replied the sick man. "For God's sake do, and lose no time. But no; you will get into trouble." "If it costs me my life," said the duke, "I will fetch a priest."