

and I will henceforth leave to Will Fowler, the queen's fantastical secretary, the sole privilege of solving all seeming mysteries, concern they whom they may."

The lady Arabella, unprepared by the previous conversation for this abrupt charge, could not instantly rally herself to reply, while the king, having with his usual circumlocution, arrived at the point, which from the first, was his aim, now pressed it with a directness which, even had she wished it, admitted of no evasion.

"Cousin," he said, "I wish there may be fair and open dealing between us, and I therefore, without further preamble, question you plainly, requiring in return, direct and candid answer, whether there have not of late been some passages of love between young Seymour, the son of Lord Beauchamp, and yourself."

A painful suffusion dyed the cheek and brow of the lady Arabella, at this interrogatory, and her eye drooped beneath the fixed gaze of the king, but her voice, though scarcely audible, trembled not as she replied :

"There have been, your majesty, I seek not to deny it, and we waited only for the termination of the Christmas festivities, to declare our attachment to your highness, and entreat your gracious permission for our union. It would have been sought ere this, but a dread of your royal displeasure, caused us to delay."

"And has your ladyship lost all dread of it now, that you dare thus boldly to avow the extent of your folly?" said the king, in a tone of stern inquiry.

"Wherefore should it be termed folly, your majesty, worthily to bestow the affections which God has implanted in my heart—to accept the offered love of one, whom the noblest need not scorn, and who will shield me from the persecutions that have followed me through life—persecutions of the ambitious and designing, of which my very soul is weary."

"And, doubtless no ambition prompts this daring wooer, to aspire to the hand of one, who, in case of failure in my immediate heirs, (which God forefend,) may at some future day wield the sceptre of this realm!" and as the king gave angry utterance to these words, he rose and paced hastily up and down the apartment, muttering in an under tone; "be-shrew me, but this young gallant deserves to eat the bread of penitence in the state apartments of the tower, instead of which, but we are ever too lenient, we have but banished him from our court for his boldness."

The watchful ear of Arabella caught the half audible sentence, and with a pallid check she breathlessly inquired :

"And has your majesty then exercised such severity against one whose only crime, is loving her, who is forbidden to love any—thus paying the hard

penalty of her descent from kings. Far happier were she, might she trace her lineage back, through successive generations of peasants or of slaves!"

"Utter not the degrading thought," said the king, turning sternly towards her, "nor repine that some trivial sacrifices are required of you, to preserve free from taint, the blood of your high descent. I have said, that for his folly in presuming to love a lady of the royal house, young Seymour has been banished from our court. When he has learned discretion enough to choose more wisely, from among his equals, we will welcome him back—till then, let him congratulate himself that no heavier punishment has befallen him."

"And when, may I ask your majesty, was this sentence passed?" inquired the Lady Arabella with forced calmness.

"After the company dispersed last eve, we summoned young Seymour before us, and in presence of some members of our privy council, charged him with his guilt; he freely confessed it, and moreover boldly plead his suit, and with unblushing hardihood, entreated our royal sanction to this misalliance. We gave him his answer briefly, and on pain of our displeasure, forbade his appearing again before us, till he had found a cure for his silly passion, and saw with open eyes, the distance between himself and its object."

"Your majesty will pardon me," said the Lady Arabella with unwonted haughtiness of tone, and a deep flushing of the fair and delicate cheek, "if I declare, that I esteem this threadbare pica a mere pretence to prevent my ever entering into an alliance with any one, as not only in this instance, but in every other where my hand has been sought, it has been urged. Lord Esme Stuart was my equal in birth and station, yet queen Elizabeth positively forbade our union, and your majesty has uniformly rejected with similar marks of disapprobation, every overture of the kind that has since been made. Since my first girlish disappointment, I have cared little for this—I loved my maiden state, I wished not to exchange it, and feared only that the time might arrive when your majesty would see fit to bestow my hand on some one, to whom I could not yield my heart. But now—and I blush not to make the avowal—my views, my feelings have undergone a change which renders any interference in the wishes of my heart, a matter of serious consequence to my happiness. I therefore humbly entreat your majesty to put no restraint upon my affections, to permit me their free indulgence, and to think of me only as a private and undistinguished individual—as such I would live and die—happy in my obscurity, and unambitious of the lot of princes."

"If it please you, speak only for yourself in this matter, gentle cousin, since you cannot know how far ambition urges Seymour in his wooing, nor what daring schemes may be hereafter set on