

upon so delicate a subject, even had decorum authorized it, and knowing it was not her intention to quit his court till the period of her mourning had expired, he approached the table at which she sat, with her head resting on her hand, and said in a voice, which, in spite of his efforts, was less calm and steady than he wished.

"I yield my pleasure wholly to your majesty's, and, painful as is the sacrifice which I am compelled to make, shall no longer oppose your departure, but on the contrary use every effort to facilitate it, whenever you shall signify your wish to quit my court."

Mary thanked him warmly and gratefully, and their interview ended. After this she seldom saw him alone,—the many claims upon his time demanded by his new dignity, fully engrossed him, and fortunate was it for him that the constant occupation of his mind left him but little opportunity to cherish vain regrets, and muse upon the fascinations of the beautiful Mary.

Weeks and months rolled away—Mary had received the assurance from Henry of a glad welcome back to his court, and the period was near at hand for her departure from France, when a rumour reached her ear, that her brother was again contemplating for her a more ambitious marriage than that of which she had already been the victim—alarmed and agitated, she resolved not to place herself within his power, till assured she was not a second time to be sacrificed to his policy, and without a moment's delay she wrote to inform him of her determination, and to inquire concerning his purpose respecting her; the letters were signed and sealed, and she sat alone in the same apartment where the interview with Francis, which we have just recorded, took place, when he was again announced. He had been absent for a week on a hunting excursion at Chantilly; as he now hastened to greet her his eye beamed with tender pleasure, and his accents trembled on his lip—almost immediately, however, he alluded to the rumour in circulation, expressed his concern at the uneasiness which it had occasioned her, and his disbelief of its authenticity; but lest the ambitious mind of Henry should harbour such a project, either now or at some future day, he suggested the expediency of her remaining in her present safe asylum; and renewed his intercession that she would make his court her permanent abode. Yet when she once more said nay to his request, and made answer, that she must dwell free in England, or bound by religious vows in the cloister, he urged her no further, but with sad, yet gentle earnestness, proffered his aid in her sorrow, and spoke at last, with the frankness of a privileged friend, of the attachment existing between herself and the Duke of Suffolk.

"Not only," he said, "will I exert my intercession with King Henry, in behalf of your unrestrained freedom of person and will, but if it can avail you

ought in a course so delicate,"—he hesitated, but almost instantly resumed—"if, as rumour has whispered, a tie more tender than even those of country and kindred, impel you to forsake us, my influence with my royal brother shall be exerted to accomplish the fulfilment of your wishes."

Mary was touched by the generous interest he manifested for her happiness, and by the delicacy with which he alluded to an affair that involved her peace, but of which she had never spoken, and tears filled her beautiful eyes, as she raised them full of eloquent gratitude to his face—his own sank beneath their melting expression, more dangerous even, than when they sparkled in the full effulgence of their splendour.

"I have not words," she said, "in which to thank your majesty for this unbounded goodness, but the grateful remembrance of it will dwell forever in my heart—nor shall the unreserved confidence to which it justly entitles you, from an excess of female delicacy, be longer withheld; I will not seek to conceal from your majesty, that there does exist a tie, which binds my heart indissolubly to one, worthy its tenderest affection, and it was this that rendered my marriage with the late king more repugnant to me, than were the circumstances of his age, and daily increasing infirmities. Yet, though I have really sacrificed my dearest wishes to what I conceived the call of duty, I cannot a second time consent to have restraint put upon my inclinations. I have my royal brother's promise that it never should be so again, and if he is resolved to break his plighted word—to make me still the victim of his ambitious schemes—I will, I must perforce, rather than thus be sacrificed, pronounce the vows of some religious order, and forsake the world forever."

"Never shall your grace be forced to this alternative," exclaimed Francis with vehemence; "if the King of England violates to you his solemn pledge, and refuses my intercession in your behalf, then shall my power protect you from his designs, and in my realm there shall none dare to thwart your freedom of choice, or say nay to the final consummation of your wishes—and if my brother of England sees fit to resent my interference, he can but cast his gauntlet at me, nor will he find me slow to grasp the gage, and battle for the right in fair and open field."

"It must not come to this," said Mary, "nor do I think it can. Let us at least await an answer to my letters, before we even think of hostile measures—and I trust my brother's love for me and for —"

She stopped, blushing, and confused at having so nearly uttered the name forever in her heart. Francis faintly smiled.

"Your majesty," he said, "may proudly name the gallant victor of the tourney, the boast of England's chivalry, the friend and favourite of his king,