

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE LAST OF THE
BARONS – VOLUME
04**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
The Last of the
Barons — Volume 04

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The Last of the Barons — Volume 04

BOOK IV.

INTRIGUES OF THE COURT OF EDWARD IV

CHAPTER I.

MARGARET OF ANJOU

The day after the events recorded in the last section of this narrative, and about the hour of noon, Robert Hilyard (still in the reverend disguise in which he had accosted Hastings) bent his way through the labyrinth of alleys that wound in dingy confusion from the Chepe towards the river.

The purlieus of the Thames, in that day of ineffective police, sheltered many who either lived upon plunder, or sought abodes that proffered, at alarm, the facility of flight. Here, sauntering in twos or threes, or lazily reclined by the threshold of plaster

huts, might be seen that refuse population which is the unholy offspring of civil war,—disbanded soldiers of either Rose, too inured to violence and strife for peaceful employment, and ready for any enterprise by which keen steel wins bright gold. At length our friend stopped before the gate of a small house, on the very marge of the river, which belonged to one of the many religious orders then existing; but from its site and aspect denoted the poverty seldom their characteristic. Here he knocked; the door was opened by a lay-brother; a sign and a smile were interchanged, and the visitor was ushered into a room belonging to the superior, but given up for the last few days to a foreign priest, to whom the whole community appeared to consider the reverence of a saint was due. And yet this priest, who, seated alone, by a casement which commanded a partial view of the distant Tower of London, received the conspirator, was clad in the humblest serge. His face was smooth and delicate; and the animation of the aspect, the vehement impatience of the gesture, evinced little of the holy calm that should belong to those who have relinquished the affairs of earth for meditation on the things of heaven. To this personage the sturdy Hilyard bowed his manly knees; and casting himself at the priest's feet, his eyes, his countenance, changed from their customary hardihood and recklessness into an expression at once of reverence and of pity.

"Well, man—well, friend—good friend, tried and leal friend, speak! speak!" exclaimed the priest, in an accent that plainly revealed a foreign birth.

"Oh, gracious lady! all hope is over; I come but to bid you fly. Adam Warner was brought before the usurper; he escaped, indeed, the torture, and was faithful to the trust. But the papers—the secret of the rising—are in the hands of Hastings."

"How long, O Lord," said Margaret of Anjou, for she it was, under that reverend disguise, "how long wilt Thou delay the hour of triumph and revenge?"

The princess as she spoke had suffered her hood to fall back, and her pale, commanding countenance, so well fitted to express fiery and terrible emotion, wore that aspect in which many a sentenced man had read his doom,—an aspect the more fearful, inasmuch as the passion that pervaded it did not distort the features, but left them locked, rigid, and marble-like in beauty, as the head of the Medusa.

"The day will dawn at last," said Hilyard; "but the judgments of Heaven are slow. We are favoured, at the least, that our secret is confined to a man more merciful than his tribe." He then related to Margaret his interview with Hastings at the house of the Lady Lougueville, and continued: "This morning, not an hour since, I sought him (for last evening he did not leave Edward, a council met at the Tower), and learned that he had detected the documents in the recesses of Warner's engine. Knowing from your Highness and your spies that he had been open to the gifts of Charolois, I spoke to him plainly of the guerdon that should await his silence. 'Friar,' he answered, 'if in this court and this world I have found it were a fool's virtue to be more pure than

others, and if I know that I should but provoke the wrath of those who profit by Burgundian gold, were I alone to disdain its glitter, I have still eno' of my younger conscience left me not to make barter of human flesh. Did I give these papers to King Edward, the heads of fifty gallant men, whose error is but loyalty to their ancient sovereign, would glut the doomsman; but,' he continued, 'I am yet true to my king and his cause; I shall know how to advise Edward to the frustrating all your schemes. The districts where you hoped a rising will be guarded, the men ye count upon will be watched: the Duke of Gloucester, whose vigilance never sleeps, has learned that the Lady Margaret is in England, disguised as a priest. To-morrow all the religious houses will be searched; if thou knowest where she lies concealed, bid her lose not an hour to fly.'"

"I Will NOT fly!" exclaimed Margaret; "let Edward, if he dare, proclaim to my people that their queen is in her city of London. Let him send his hirelings to seize her. Not in this dress shall she be found. In robes of state, the sceptre in her hand, shall they drag the consort of their king to the prison-house of her palace."

"On my knees, great queen, I implore you to be calm; with the loss of your liberty ends indeed all hope of victory, all chance even of struggle. Think not Edward's fears would leave to Margaret the life that his disdain has spared to your royal spouse. Between your prison and your grave, but one secret and bloody step! Be ruled; no time to lose! My trusty Hugh even now waits

with his boat below. Relays of horses are ready, night and day, to bear you to the coast; while seeking your restoration, I have never neglected the facilities for flight. Pause not, O gracious lady; let not your son say, 'My mother's passion has lost me the hope of my grandsire's crown.'"

"My boy; my princely boy, my Edward!" exclaimed Margaret, bursting into tears, all the warrior-queen merged in the remembrance of the fond mother. "Ah, faithful friend! he is so gallant and so beautiful! Oh, he shall reward thee well hereafter!"

"May he live to crush these barons, and raise this people!" said the demagogue of Redesdale. "But now, save thyself!"

"But what! is it not possible yet to strike the blow? Rather let us spur to the north; rather let us hasten the hour of action, and raise the Red Rose through the length and breadth of England!"

"Ah, lady, if without warrant from your lord; if without foreign subsidies; if without having yet ripened the time; if without gold, without arms, and without one great baron on our side, we forestall a rising, all that we have gained is lost; and instead of war, you can scarcely provoke a riot. But for this accursed alliance of Edward's daughter with the brother of icy-hearted Louis, our triumph had been secure. The French king's gold would have manned a camp, bribed the discontented lords, and his support have sustained the hopes of the more leal Lancastrians. But it is in vain to deny, that if Lord Warwick win Louis—"

"He will not! he shall not!—Louis, mine own kinsman!"

exclaimed Margaret, in a voice in which the anguish pierced through the louder tone of resentment and disdain.

"Let us hope that he will not," replied Hilyard, soothingly; some chance may yet break off these nuptials, and once more give us France as our firm ally. But now we must be patient. Already Edward is fast wearing away the gloss of his crown; already the great lords desert his court; already, in the rural provinces, peasant and franklin complain of the exactions of his minions; already the mighty House of Nevile frowns sullen on the throne it built. Another year, and who knows but the Earl of Warwick,—the beloved and the fearless, whose statesman-art alone hath severed from you the arms and aid of France, at whose lifted finger all England would bristle with armed men—may ride by the side of Margaret through the gates of London?"

"Evil-omened consoler, never!" exclaimed the princess, starting to her feet, with eyes that literally shot fire. "Thinkest thou that the spirit of a queen lies in me so low and crushed, that I, the descendant of Charlemagne, could forgive the wrongs endured from Warwick and his father? But thou, though wise and loyal, art of the Commons; thou knowest not how they feel through whose veins rolls the blood of kings!"

A dark and cold shade fell over the bold face of Robin of Redesdale at these words.

"Ah, lady," he said, with bitterness, "if no misfortune can curb thy pride, in vain would we rebuild thy throne. It is these Commons, Margaret of Anjou—these English Commons—this

Saxon People, that can alone secure to thee the holding of the realm which the right arm wins. And, beshrew me, much as I love thy cause, much as thou hast with thy sorrows and thy princely beauty glamoured and spelled my heart and my hand,—ay, so that I, the son of a Lollard, forget the wrongs the Lollards sustained from the House of Lancaster; so that I, who have seen the glorious fruitage of a Republic, yet labour for thee, to overshadow the land with the throne of ONE—yet—yet, lady—yet, if I thought thou wert to be the same Margaret as of old, looking back to thy dead kings, and contemptuous of thy living people, I would not bid one mother's son lift lance or bill on thy behalf."

So resolutely did Robin of Redesdale utter these words, that the queen's haughty eye fell abashed as he spoke; and her craft, or her intellect, which was keen and prompt where her passions did not deafen and blind her judgment, instantly returned to her. Few women equalled this once idol of knight and minstrel, in the subduing fascination that she could exert in her happier moments. Her affability was as gracious as her wrath was savage; and with a dignified and winning frankness, she extended her hand to her ally, as she answered, in a sweet, humble, womanly, and almost penitent voice,—

"O bravest and lealest of friends, forgive thy wretched queen. Her troubles distract her brain,—chide her not if they sour her speech. Saints above! will ye not pardon Margaret if at times her nature be turned from the mother's milk into streams of gall

and bloody purpose, when ye see, from your homes serene, in what a world of strife and falsehood her very womanhood hath grown unsexed?" She paused a moment, and her uplifted eyes shed tears fast and large. Then, with a sigh, she turned to Hilyard, and resumed more calmly, "Yes, thou art right, —adversity hath taught me much. And though adversity will too often but feed and not starve our pride, yet thou—thou hast made me know that there is more of true nobility in the blunt Children of the People than in many a breast over which flows the kingly robe. Forgive me, and the daughter of Charlemagne shall yet be a mother to the Commons, who claim thee as their brother!"

Thoroughly melted, Robin of Redesdale bowed over the hand held to his lips, and his rough voice trembled as he answered, though that answer took but the shape of prayer.

"And now," said the princess, smiling, "to make peace lasting between us, I conquer myself, I yield to thy counsels. Once more the fugitive, I abandon the city that contains Henry's unheeded prison. See, I am ready. Who will know Margaret in this attire? Lead on!"

Rejoiced to seize advantage of this altered and submissive mood, Robin instantly took the way through a narrow passage, to a small door communicating with the river. There Hugh was waiting in a small boat, moored to the damp and discoloured stairs.

Robin, by a gesture, checked the man's impulse to throw himself at the feet of the pretended priest, and bade him put

forth his best speed. The princess seated herself by the helm, and the little boat cut rapidly through the noble stream. Galleys, gay and gilded, with armorial streamers, and filled with nobles and gallants, passed them, noisy with mirth or music, on their way. These the fallen sovereign heeded not; but, with all her faults, the woman's heart beating in her bosom—she who in prosperity had so often wrought ruin, and shame, and woe to her gentle lord; she who had been reckless of her trust as queen; and incurred grave—but, let us charitably hope, unjust—suspicion of her faith as wife, still fixed her eyes on the gloomy tower that contained her captive husband, and felt that she could have forgotten a while even the loss of power if but permitted to fall on that plighted heart, and weep over the past with the woe-worn bridegroom of her youth.

CHAPTER II.
IN WHICH ARE LAID OPEN TO
THE READER THE CHARACTER
OF EDWARD THE FOURTH
AND THAT OF HIS COURT,
WITH THE MACHINATIONS OF
THE WOODVILLES AGAINST
THE EARL OF WARWICK

Scarcely need it be said to those who have looked with some philosophy upon human life, that the young existence of Master Marmaduke Nevile, once fairly merged in the great common sea, will rarely reappear before us individualized and distinct. The type of the provincial cadet of the day hastening courtwards to seek his fortune, he becomes lost amidst the gigantic characters and fervid passions that alone stand forth in history. And as, in reading biography, we first take interest in the individual who narrates, but if his career shall pass into that broader and more stirring life, in which he mingles with men who have left a more dazzling memory than his own, we find the interest change from the narrator to those by whom he is surrounded and eclipsed,—so, in this record of a time, we scarce follow our young

adventurer into the court of the brilliant Edward ere the scene itself allures and separates us from our guide; his mission is, as it were, well-nigh done. We leave, then, for a while this bold, frank nature-fresh from the health of the rural life—gradually to improve, or deprave itself, in the companionship it finds. The example of the Lords Hastings, Scales, and Worcester, and the accomplishments of the two younger Princes of York, especially the Duke of Gloucester, had diffused among the younger and gayer part of the court that growing taste for letters which had somewhat slept during the dynasty of the House of Lancaster; and Marmaduke's mind became aware that learning was no longer the peculiar distinction of the Church, and that Warwick was behind his age when he boasted "that the sword was more familiar to him than the pen." He had the sagacity to perceive that the alliance with the great earl did not conduce to his popularity at court; and even in the king's presence, the courtiers permitted themselves many taunts and jests at the fiery Warwick, which they would have bitten out their tongues ere they would have vented before the earl himself. But though the Nevile sufficiently controlled his native candour not to incur unprofitable quarrel by ill-mannered and unseasonable defence of the hero-baron when sneered at or assailed, he had enough of the soldier and the man in him not to be tainted by the envy of the time and place,—not to lose his gratitude to his patron, nor his respect for the bulwark of the country. Rather, it may be said, that Warwick gained in his estimation whenever compared with the gay and silken

personages who avenged themselves by words for his superiority in deeds. Not only as a soldier, but as a statesman, the great and peculiar merits of the earl were visible in all those measures which emanated solely from himself. Though so indifferently educated, his busy, practical career, his affable mixing with all classes, and his hearty, national sympathies made him so well acquainted with the interests of his country and the habits of his countrymen, that he was far more fitted to rule than the scientific Worcester or the learned Scales. The Young Duke of Gloucester presented a marked contrast to the general levity of the court, in speaking of this powerful nobleman. He never named him but with respect, and was pointedly courteous to even the humblest member of the earl's family. In this he appeared to advantage by the side of Clarence, whose weakness of disposition made him take the tone of the society in which he was thrown, and who, while really loving Warwick, often smiled at the jests against him,—not, indeed, if uttered by the queen or her family, of whom he ill concealed his jealousy and hatred.

The whole court was animated and pregnant with a spirit of intrigue, which the artful cunning of the queen, the astute policy of Jacquetta, and the animosity of the different factions had fomented to a degree quite unknown under former reigns. It was a place in which the wit of young men grew old rapidly; amidst stratagem, and plot, and ambitious design, and stealthy overreaching, the boyhood of Richard III. passed to its relentless manhood: such is the inevitable fruit of that era in civilization

when a martial aristocracy first begins to merge into a voluptuous court.

Through this moving and shifting web of ambition and intrigue the royal Edward moved with a careless grace: simple himself, because his object was won, and pleasure had supplanted ambition. His indolent, joyous temper served to deaden his powerful intellect; or, rather, his intellect was now lost in the sensual stream through which it flowed. Ever in pursuit of some new face, his schemes and counterschemes were limited to cheat a husband or deceive a wife; and dexterous and successful no doubt they were. But a vice always more destructive than the love of women began also to reign over him,—namely, the intemperance of the table. The fastidious and graceful epicurism of the early Normans, inclined to dainties but abhorring excess, and regarding with astonished disdain the heavy meals and deep draughts of the Saxon, had long ceased to characterize the offspring of that noblest of all noble races. Warwick, whose stately manliness was disgusted with whatever savoured of effeminacy or debauch, used to declare that he would rather fight fifty battles for Edward IV. than once sup with him! Feasts were prolonged for hours, and the banquets of this king of the Middle Ages almost resembled those of the later Roman emperors. The Lord Montagu did not share the abstemiousness of his brother of Warwick. He was, next to Hastings, the king's chosen and most favourite companion. He ate almost as much as the king, and drank very little less. Of few courtiers could

the same be said! Over the lavish profligacy and excess of the court, however, a veil dazzling to the young and high-spirited was thrown. Edward was thoroughly the cavalier, deeply imbued with the romance of chivalry, and, while making the absolute woman his plaything, always treated the ideal woman as a goddess. A refined gallantry, a deferential courtesy to dame and demoiselle, united the language of an Amadis with the licentiousness of a Gaolor; and a far more alluring contrast than the court of Charles II. presented to the grim Commonwealth seduced the vulgar in that of this most brave and most beautiful prince, when compared with the mournful and lugubrious circles in which Henry VI. had reigned and prayed. Edward himself, too, it was so impossible to judge with severe justice, that his extraordinary popularity in London, where he was daily seen, was never diminished by his faults; he was so bold in the field, yet so mild in the chamber; when his passions slept, he was so thoroughly good-natured and social, so kind to all about his person, so hearty and gladsome in his talk and in his vices, so magnificent and so generous withal; and, despite his indolence, his capacities for business were marvellous,—and these last commanded the reverence of the good Londoners; he often administered justice himself, like the caliphs of the East, and with great acuteness and address. Like most extravagant men, he had a wholesome touch of avarice. That contempt for commerce which characterizes a modern aristocracy was little felt by the nobles of that day, with the exception of such blunt patricians as Lord Warwick

or Raoul de Fulke. The great House of De la Pole (Duke of Suffolk), the heir of which married Edward's sister Elizabeth, had been founded by a merchant of Hull. Earls and archbishops scrupled not to derive revenues from what we should now esteem the literal resources of trade. [The Abbot of St. Alban's (temp. Henry III.) was a vendor of Yarmouth bloaters. The Cistercian Monks were wool-merchants; and Macpherson tells us of a couple of Iceland bishops who got a license from Henry VI. for smuggling. (Matthew Paris. Macpherson's "Annals of Commerce," 10.) As the Whig historians generally have thought fit to consider the Lancastrian cause the more "liberal" of the two, because Henry IV. was the popular choice, and, in fact, an elected, not an hereditary king, so it cannot be too emphatically repeated, that the accession of Edward IV. was the success of two new and two highly—popular principles,—the one that of church reform, the other that of commercial calculation. All that immense section, almost a majority of the people, who had been persecuted by the Lancastrian kings as Lollards, revenged on Henry the aggrieved rights of religious toleration. On the other hand, though Henry IV., who was immeasurably superior to his warlike son in intellect and statesmanship, had favoured the growing commercial spirit, it had received nothing but injury under Henry V., and little better than contempt under Henry VI. The accession of the Yorkists was, then, on two grounds a great popular movement; and it was followed by a third advantage to the popular cause,—namely, in the determined desire both

of Edward and Richard III. to destroy the dangerous influence of the old feudal aristocracy. To this end Edward laboured in the creation of a court noblesse; and Richard, with the more dogged resolution that belonged to him, went at once to the root of the feudal power, in forbidding the nobles to give badges and liveries (this also was forbidden, it is true, by the edict of Edward IV. as well as by his predecessors from the reign of Richard II.; but no king seems to have had the courage to enforce the prohibition before Richard III.),—in other words, to appropriate armies under the name of retainers. Henry VII., in short, did not originate the policy for which he has monopolized the credit; he did but steadily follow out the theory of raising the middle class and humbling the baronial, which the House of York first put into practice.] shown itself on this point more liberal in its policy, more free from feudal prejudices, than that of the Plantagenets. Even Edward II. was tenacious of the commerce with Genoa, and an intercourse with the merchant princes of that republic probably served to associate the pursuits of commerce with the notion of rank and power. Edward III. is still called the Father of English Commerce; but Edward IV. carried the theories of his ancestors into far more extensive practice, for his own personal profit. This king, so indolent in the palace, was literally the most active merchant in the mart. He traded largely in ships of his own, freighted with his own goods; and though, according to sound modern economics, this was anything but an aid to commerce, seeing that no private merchant could compete with a royal trader

who went out and came in duty-free, yet certainly the mere companionship and association in risk and gain, and the common conversation that it made between the affable monarch and the homeliest trader, served to increase his popularity, and to couple it with respect for practical sense. Edward IV. was in all this pre-eminently THE MAN OF HIS AGE,—not an inch behind it or before! And, in addition to this happy position, he was one of those darlings of Nature, so affluent and blest in gifts of person, mind, and outward show, that it is only at the distance of posterity we ask why men of his own age admired the false, the licentious, and the cruel, where those contemporaries, over-dazzled, saw but the heroic and the joyous, the young, the beautiful,—the affable to friend, and the terrible to foe!

It was necessary to say thus much on the commercial tendencies of Edward, because, at this epoch, they operated greatly, besides other motives shortly to be made clear, in favour of the plot laid by the enemies of the Earl of Warwick, to dishonour that powerful minister and drive him from the councils of the king.

One morning Hastings received a summons to attend Edward, and on entering the royal chamber, he found already assembled Lord Rivers, the queen's father, Anthony Woodville, and the Earl of Worcester.

The king seemed thoughtful; he beckoned Hastings to approach, and placed in his hand a letter, dated from Rouen. "Read and judge, Hastings," said Edward.

The letter was from a gentleman in Warwick's train. It gave a glowing account of the honours accorded to the earl by Louis XI., greater than those ever before manifested to a subject, and proceeded thus:—

"But it is just I should apprise you that there be strange rumours as to the marvellous love that King Louis shows my lord the earl. He lodgeth in the next house to him, and hath even had an opening made in the partition-wall between his own chamber and the earl's. Men do say that the king visits him nightly, and there be those who think that so much stealthy intercourse between an English ambassador and the kinsman of Margaret of Anjou bodeth small profit to our grace the king."

"I observe," said Hastings, glancing to the superscription, "that this letter is addressed to my Lord Rivers. Can he avouch the fidelity of his correspondent?"

"Surely, yes," answered Rivers; "it is a gentleman of my own blood."

"Were he not so accredited," returned Hastings, "I should question the truth of a man who can thus consent to play the spy upon his lord and superior."

"The public weal justifies all things," said the Earl of Worcester (who, though by marriage nearly connected to Warwick, eyed his power with the jealous scorn which the man of book-lore often feels for one whose talent lies in action),—"so held our masters in all state-craft, the Greek and Roman."

"Certes," said Sir Anthony Woodville, "it grieveth the pride

of an English knight that we should be beholden for courtesies to the born foe of England, which I take the Frenchman naturally to be."

"Ah," said Edward, smiling sternly, "I would rather be myself, with banner and trump, before the walls of Paris, than sending my cousin the earl to beg the French king's brother to accept my sister as a bride. And what is to become of my good merchantships if Burgundy take umbrage and close its ports?"

"Beau sire," said Hastings, "thou knowest how little cause I have to love the Earl of Warwick. We all here, save your gracious self, bear the memory of some affront rendered to us by his pride and heat of mood! but in this council I must cease to be William de Hastings, and be all and wholly the king's servant. I say first, then, with reference to these noble peers, that Warwick's faith to the House of York is too well proven to become suspected because of the courtesies of King Louis,—an artful craft, as it clearly seems to me, of the wily Frenchman, to weaken your throne, by provoking your distrust of its great supporter. Fall we not into such a snare! Moreover, we may be sure that Warwick cannot be false, if he achieve the object of his embassy,—namely, detach Louis from the side of Margaret and Lancaster by close alliance with Edward and York. Secondly, sire, with regard to that alliance, which it seems you would repent,—I hold now, as I have held ever, that it is a master-stroke in policy, and the earl in this proves his sharp brain worthy his strong arm; for as his highness the Duke of Gloucester hath now clearly discovered

that Margaret of Anjou has been of late in London, and that reasonable designs were meditated, though now frustrated, so we may ask why the friends of Lancaster really stood aloof; why all conspiracy was, and is, in vain?—Because, sire, of this very alliance with France; because the gold and subsidies of Louis are not forthcoming; because the Lancastrians see that if once Lord Warwick win France from the Red Rose, nothing short of such a miracle as their gaining Warwick instead can give a hope to their treason. Your Highness fears the anger of Burgundy, and the suspension of your trade with the Flemings; but— forgive me—this is not reasonable. Burgundy dare not offend England, matched, as its arms are, with France; the Flemings gain more by you than you gain by the Flemings, and those interested burghers will not suffer any prince's quarrel to damage their commerce. Charolois may bluster and threat, but the storm will pass, and Burgundy will be contented, if England remain neutral in the feud with France. All these reasons, sire, urge me to support my private foe, the Lord Warwick, and to pray you to give no ear to the discrediting his Honour and his embassy."

The profound sagacity of these remarks, the repute of the speaker, and the well-known grudge between him and Warwick, for reasons hereafter to be explained, produced a strong effect upon the intellect of Edward, always vigorous, save when clouded with passion. But Rivers, whose malice to the earl was indomitable, coldly recommenced,—

"With submission to the Lord Hastings, sire, whom we know

that love sometimes blinds, and whose allegiance to the earl's fair sister, the Lady of Bonville, perchance somewhat moves him to forget the day when Lord Warwick—"

"Cease, my lord," said Hastings, white with suppressed anger; "these references beseem not the councils of grave men."

"Tut, Hastings," said Edward, laughing merrily, "women mix themselves up in all things: board or council, bed or battle,—wherever there is mischief astir, there, be sure, peeps a woman's sly face from her wimple. Go on, Rivers."

"Your pardon, my Lord Hastings," said Rivers, "I knew not my thrust went so home; there is another letter I have not yet laid before the king." He drew forth a scroll from his bosom, and read as follows:—

"Yesterday the earl feasted the king, and as, in discharge of mine office, I carved for my lord, I heard King Louis say, 'Pasque Dieu, my Lord Warwick, our couriers bring us word that Count Charolois declares he shall yet wed the Lady Margaret, and that he laughs at your ambassage. What if our brother, King Edward, fall back from the treaty?' 'He durst not!' said the earl."

"Durst not I" exclaimed Edward, starting to his feet, and striking the table with his clenched hand, "durst not! Hastings, hear you that?"

Hastings bowed his head in assent. "Is that all, Lord Rivers?"

"All! and methinks enough."

"Enough, by my halidame!" said Edward, laughing bitterly; "he shall see what a king dares, when a subject threatens. Admit

the worshipful the deputies from our city of London,—lord chamberlain, it is thine office,—they await in the anteroom."

Hastings gravely obeyed, and in crimson gowns, with purple hoods and gold chains, marshalled into the king's presence a goodly deputation from the various corporate companies of London.

These personages advanced within a few paces of the dais, and there halted and knelt, while their spokesman read, on his knees, a long petition, praying the king to take into his gracious consideration the state of the trade with the Flemings; and though not absolutely venturing to name or to deprecate the meditated alliance with France, beseeching his grace to satisfy them as to certain rumours, already very prejudicial to their commerce, of the possibility of a breach with the Duke of Burgundy. The merchant-king listened with great attention and affability to this petition; and replied shortly, that he thanked the deputation for their zeal for the public weal,—that a king would have enough to do if he contravened every gossip's tale; but that it was his firm purpose to protect, in all ways, the London traders, and to maintain the most amicable understanding with the Duke of Burgundy.

The supplicators then withdrew from the royal presence.

"Note you how gracious the king was to me?" whispered Master Heyford to one of his brethren; "he looked at me while he answered."

"Coxcomb!" muttered the confidant, "as if I did not catch

his eye when he said, 'Ye are the pillars of the public weal!' But because Master Heyford has a handsome wife he thinks he tosseth all London on his own horns!"

As the citizens were quitting the palace, Lord Rivers joined them. "You will thank me for suggesting this deputation, worthy sirs," said he, smiling significantly; "you have timed it well!"—and passing by them, without further comment, he took the way to the queen's chamber.

Elizabeth was playing with her infant daughter, tossing the child in the air, and laughing at its riotous laughter. The stern old Duchess of Bedford, leaning over the back of the state-chair, looked on with all a grandmother's pride, and half chanted a nursery rhyme. It was a sight fair to see! Elizabeth never seemed more lovely: her artificial, dissimulating smile changed into hearty, maternal glee, her smooth cheek flushed with exercise, a stray ringlet escaping from the stiff coif!—And, alas, the moment the two ladies caught sight of Rivers, all the charm was dissolved; the child was hastily put on the floor; the queen, half ashamed of being natural, even before her father, smoothed back the rebel lock, and the duchess, breaking off in the midst of her grandam song, exclaimed,—

"Well, well! how thrives our policy?"

"The king," answered Rivers, "is in the very mood we could desire. At the words, 'He durst not!' the Plantagenet sprung up in his breast; and now, lest he ask to see the rest of the letter, thus I destroy it; "and flinging the scroll in the blazing hearth, he

watched it consume.

"Why this, sir?" said the queen.

"Because, my Elizabeth, the bold words glided off into a decent gloss,—'He durst not,' said Warwick, 'because what a noble heart dares least is to belie the plighted word, and what the kind heart shuns most is to wrong the confiding friend.'"

"It was fortunate," said the duchess, "that Edward took heat at the first words, nor stopped, it seems, for the rest!"

"I was prepared, Jacquetta; had he asked to see the rest, I should have dropped the scroll into the brazier, as containing what I would not presume to read. Courage! Edward has seen the merchants; he has flouted Hastings,—who would gainsay us. For the rest, Elizabeth, be it yours to speak of affronts paid by the earl to your highness; be it yours, Jacquetta, to rouse Edward's pride by dwelling on Warwick's overweening power; be it mine to enlist his interest on behalf of his merchandise; be it Margaret's to move his heart by soft tears for the bold Charolois; and ere a month be told, Warwick shall find his embassy a thriftless laughing-stock, and no shade pass between the House of Woodville and the sun of England."

"I am scarce queen while Warwick is minister," said Elizabeth, vindictively. "How he taunted me in the garden, when we met last!"

"But hark you, daughter and lady liege, hark you! Edward is not prepared for the decisive stroke. I have arranged with Anthony, whose chivalrous follies fit him not for full

comprehension of our objects, how upon fair excuse the heir of Burgundy's brother—the Count de la Roche—shall visit London; and the count once here, all is ours! Hush! take up the little one, —Edward comes!"

CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN MASTER NICHOLAS ALWYN VISITS THE COURT, AND THERE LEARNS MATTER OF WHICH THE ACUTE READER WILL JUDGE FOR HIMSELF

It was a morning towards the end of May (some little time after Edward's gracious reception of the London deputies), when Nicholas Alwyn, accompanied by two servitors armed to the teeth,—for they carried with them goods of much value, and even in the broad daylight and amidst the most frequented parts of the city, men still confided little in the security of the law,—arrived at the Tower, and was conducted to the presence of the queen.

Elizabeth and her mother were engaged in animated but whispered conversation when the goldsmith entered; and there was an unusual gayety in the queen's countenance as she turned to Alwyn and bade him show her his newest gauds.

While with a curiosity and eagerness that seemed almost childlike Elizabeth turned over rings, chains, and brooches, scarcely listening to Alwyn's comments on the lustre of the gems or the quaintness of the fashion, the duchess disappeared for a

moment, and returned with the Princess Margaret.

This young princess had much of the majestic beauty of her royal brother; but, instead of the frank, careless expression so fascinating in Edward, there was, in her full and curved lip and bright large eye, something at once of haughtiness and passion, which spoke a decision and vivacity of character beyond her years.

"Choose for thyself, sweetheart and daughter mine," said the duchess, affectionately placing her hand on Margaret's luxuriant hair, "and let the noble visitor we await confess that our rose of England outblossoms the world."

The princess coloured with complaisant vanity at these words, and, drawing near the queen, looked silently at a collar of pearls, which Elizabeth held.

"If I may adventure so to say," observed Alwyn, "pearls will mightily beseem her highness's youthful bloom; and lo! here be some adornments for the bodice or partelet, to sort with the collar; not," added the goldsmith, bowing low, and looking down,—"not perchance displeasing to her highness, in that they are wrought in the guise of the fleur de lis—"

An impatient gesture in the queen, and a sudden cloud over the fair brow of Margaret, instantly betokened to the shrewd trader that he had committed some most unwelcome error in this last allusion to the alliance with King Louis of France, which, according to rumour, the Earl of Warwick had well-nigh brought to a successful negotiation; and to convince him yet more of his

mistake, the duchess said haughtily, "Good fellow, be contented to display thy goods, and spare us thy comments. As for thy hideous fleur de lis, an' thy master had no better device, he would not long rest the king's jeweller."

"I have no heart for the pearls," said Margaret, abruptly; "they are at best pale and sicklied. What hast thou of bolder ornament and more dazzling lustrousness?"

"These emeralds, it is said, were once among the jewels of the great House of Burgundy," observed Nicholas, slowly, and fixing his keen, sagacious look on the royal purchasers.

"Of Burgundy!" exclaimed the queen.

"It is true," said the Duchess of Bedford, looking at the ornament with care, and slightly colouring,—for in fact the jewels had been a present from Philip the Good to the Duke of Bedford, and the exigencies of the civil wars had led, some time since, first to their mortgage, or rather pawn, and then to their sale.

The princess passed her arm affectionately round Jacquetta's neck, and said, "If you leave me my choice, I will have none but these emeralds."

The two elder ladies exchanged looks and smiles. "Hast thou travelled, young man?" asked the duchess.

"Not in foreign parts, gracious lady, but I have lived much with those who have been great wanderers."

"Ah, and what say they of the ancient friends of mine House, the princes of Burgundy?"

"Lady, all men agree that a nobler prince and a juster than Duke Philip never reigned over brave men; and those who have seen the wisdom of his rule, grieve sorely to think so excellent and mighty a lord should have trouble brought to his old age by the turbulence of his son, the Count of Charolois."

Again Margaret's fair brow lowered, and the duchess hastened to answer, "The disputes between princes, young man, can never be rightly understood by such as thou and thy friends. The Count of Charolois is a noble gentleman; and fire in youth will break out. Richard the Lion Hearted of England was not less puissant a king for the troubles he occasioned to his sire when prince."

Alwyn bit his lip, to restrain a reply that might not have been well received; and the queen, putting aside the emeralds and a few other trinkets, said, smilingly, to the duchess, "Shall the king pay for these, or have thy learned men yet discovered the great secret?"

"Nay, wicked child," said the duchess, "thou lovest to banter me; and truth to say, more gold has been melted in the crucible than as yet promises ever to come out of it; but my new alchemist, Master Warner, seems to have gone nearer to the result than any I have yet known. Meanwhile, the king's treasurer must, perforce, supply the gear to the king's sister."

The queen wrote an order on the officer thus referred to, who was no other than her own father, Lord Rivers; and Alwyn, putting up his goods, was about to withdraw, when the duchess said carelessly, "Good youth, the dealings of our merchants are

more with Flanders than with France, is it not so?"

"Surely," said Alwyn; "the Flemings are good traders and honest folk."

"It is well known, I trust, in the city of London, that this new alliance with France is the work of their favourite, the Lord Warwick," said the duchess, scornfully; "but whatever the earl does is right with ye of the hood and cap, even though he were to leave yon river without one merchant-mast."

"Whatever be our thoughts, puissant lady," said Alwyn, cautiously, "we give them not vent to the meddling with state affairs."

"Ay," persisted Jacquetta, "thine answer is loyal and discreet. But an' the Lord Warwick had sought alliance with the Count of Charolois, would there have been brighter bonfires than ye will see in Smithfield, when ye hear that business with the Flemings is surrendered for fine words from King Louis the Cunning?"

"We trust too much to our king's love for the citizens of London to fear that surrender, please your Highness," answered Alwyn; "our king himself is the first of our merchants, and he hath given a gracious answer to the deputation from our city."

"You speak wisely, sir," said the queen; "and your king will yet defend you from the plots of your enemies. You may retire."

Alwyn, glad to be released from questionings but little to his taste, hastened to depart. At the gate of the royal lodge, he gave his caskets to the servitors who attended him, and passing slowly along the courtyard, thus soliloquized:

"Our neighbours the Scotch say, 'It is good fishing in muddy waters;' but he who fishes into the secrets of courts must bait with his head. What mischief doth that crafty queen, the proud duchess, devise? Um! They are thinking still to match the young princess with the hot Count of Charolois. Better for trade, it is true, to be hand in hand with the Flemings; but there are two sides to a loaf. If they play such a trick on the stout earl, he is not a man to sit down and do nothing. More food for the ravens, I fear,—more brown bills and bright lances in the green fields of poor England!—and King Louis is an awful carle to sow flax in his neighbour's house, when the torches are burning. Um! Where is fair Marmaduke. He looks brave in his gay super-tunic. Well, sir and foster-brother, how fare you at court?"

"My dear Nicholas, a merry welcome and hearty to your sharp, thoughtful face. Ah, man! we shall have a gay time for you venders of gewgaws. There are to be revels and jousts, revels in the Tower and jousts in Smithfield. We gentles are already hard at practice in the tilt-yard."

"Sham battles are better than real ones, Master Nevile! But what is in the wind?"

"A sail, Nicholas! a sail bound to England! Know that the Count of Charolois has permitted Sir Anthony Count de la Roche, his bastard brother, to come over to London, to cross lances with our own Sir Anthony Lord Scales. It is an old challenge, and right royally will the encounter be held."

"Um!" muttered Alwyn, "this bastard, then, is the carrier

pigeon.— And," said he, aloud, "is it only to exchange hard blows that Sir Anthony of Burgundy comes over to confer with Sir Anthony of England? Is there no court rumour of other matters between them?"

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