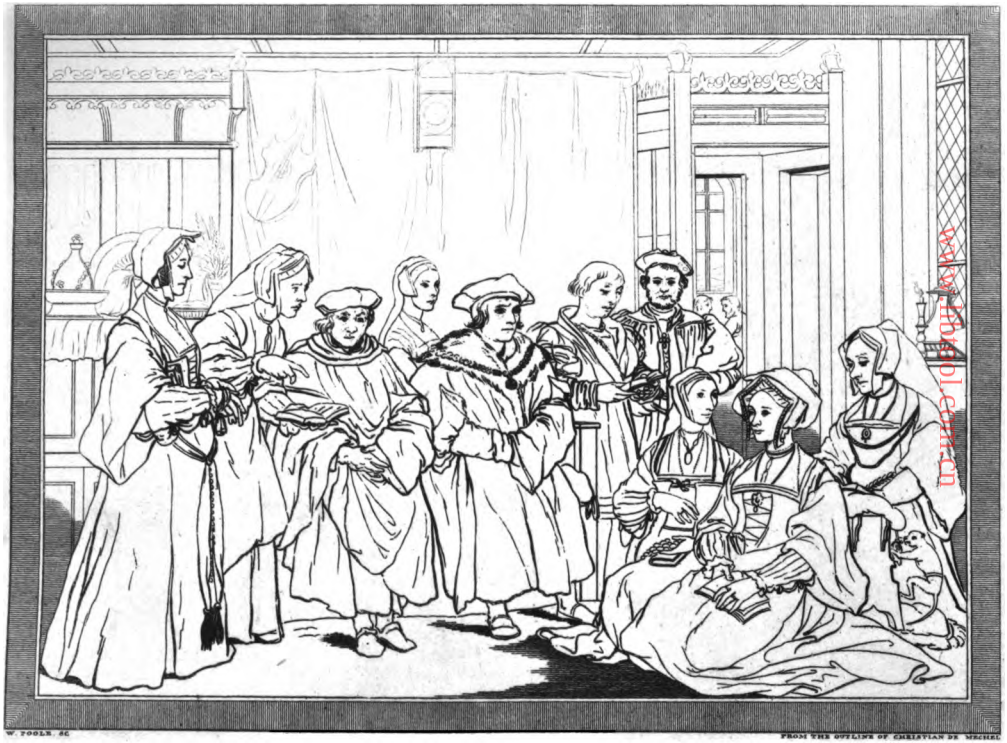
MARGARET ROPER;

OR,

THE CHANCELLOR AND HIS DAUGHTER.



THE FAMILY OF SIR THOMAS MORE

From the Painting of Hans Holbein

MARGARET ROPER;

OR,

The Chancellor and his Daughter.

BY

AGNES STEWART,

Authoress of "Florence O'Neill," "The Foster Sisters," "General Questions," etc., etc.

"And when her dear, dear father passed along,
Would not be held, but bursting through the throng,
Halberd and battle-axe, kissed him o'er and o'er;
Then turned and went, then sought him as before,
Believing she should see his face no more."

—ROGERS' "*Human Life.*"

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A FEW WORDS TO THE READER.

VERY scant have been the records I have been able to glean concerning the celebrated heroine of domestic life, Margaret Roper. Had I been more successful, no portion of the unpretending little volume now presented to the public would have been worked up with fiction. The reader will, however, please to bear in mind that the principal scenes between Sir Thomas More and his admirable daughter are in no way imaginative.

It would be hard to separate the one from the other, so united were they in life. With the filial devotion of Margaret, and the beautiful simplicity which marked the character of her father, all must needs be charmed, and must surely grant to that great man the credit of having laid his head on the block from a firm conviction in the truth of the doctrines of the faith he professed.

But as the most blameless cannot always escape the shafts of calumny, so spotless as was the life of More, there were not wanting some who maligned him after his death, and he has been particularly charged with being a persecutor of those who favoured the teaching of the Reformers.

From his retreat at Chelsea, More beheld the

storm steadily gathering, which at length broke over the English church; and witnessing the signs which foretold the coming tempest, he resolved to leave behind him a testimony of his unwavering faith to his contemporaries and to posterity, and with this view he himself wrote the epitaph which was to be placed on his tomb, by which he declares that in death he was faithful to the creed he had professed during his life.

One word in this epitaph has given rise to doubts as to his charity, for he seems to glorify himself in having been a trouble to heretics.

"*Molestus*"* is the word he uses, and to his adversaries it appears as though he piqued himself on a systematic intolerance which he desired should be paraded even on his tombstone.

Erasmus however, in his Epistles, declares that whilst Sir Thomas was chancellor no person was put to death in England for heresy.

If More hated sects, he did not extend his hatred to their followers. As a minister of state he desired to extirpate heresy; as a Christian he yearned for the pardon of the sectarian.

We must not judge of More's character by the severe acts towards the new religionists with which he has been reproached, according to the ideas of the present day. In the sixteenth century, toleration, far

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* Troublesome.

from being regarded as a Christian virtue, would have been looked upon in the first judge of the kingdom as guilty indifference.*

The law had no more mercy for heresy than for murder, for in the eye of the law *either one or the other* was a crime which blood alone could expiate. And as More never had recourse to the sheriff in order to punish an obstinate heretic, it was because by a glorious exception he personified that future in which the conscience should be respected as a shrine never to be violated.†

It was not till More had retired from office, writes Lord Campbell, and was succeeded by the pliant and inhuman Audley, that heresy was made high treason, and the scaffold flowed with innocent blood.

The law reforms Sir Thomas would have introduced, had he not been three centuries in advance of his life, may be seen from the following extract from his "Utopia."

It abounds with lessons of practical wisdom. He represents his great traveller who visited Utopia, and describes its institutions, saying there happened to be at table an English lawyer who ran on in strong commendation of the severe correction of thieves in his country, where might be seen twenty at a time dang-

*"As touching heretics I hate that vice of theirs and not their persons, and very fain would I that the one were destroyed and the other saved."—*More's English Works*, p. 295.

† Histoire de Henri VIII., par M. Audin.

ling from a gibbet; nevertheless, he observed, it puzzled him to understand, since so few escaped, how there were yet so many thieves left to rob. "On this I said there was no reason to wonder, since this way of punishing thieves was neither just in itself, nor for the public good, for as the severity was too great so the remedy was not effectual. Simple theft was not so great a crime that it ought to cost a man his life, and no punishment would restrain a man from robbing who could find no other way of livelihood. In this, not only you, but a great part of the world besides, imitate ignorant cruel schoolmasters, who are readier to flog their pupils than to teach them. Instead of those dreadful punishments it would be better to make provision for enabling these men to live by their industry, whom you drive to theft and then put them to death for the crime you cause." His most wonderful anticipation may be thought that of Lord Ashley's factory measure by the six hours bill, which regulated labour in Utopia.

With this extract I conclude, hoping that my humble work, "Margaret Roper," will meet with favour at the hands of the reader.

LANCASHIRE,
July, 1874.

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PART I.

EXPLANATION OF ENGRAVING FROM HOLBEIN'S CELEBRATED PICTURE.

(*Copied by autotype, by permission of Trustees of the British Museum.*)

Elizabeth Dancy stands by a cupboard putting on a glove; behind her stands Margaret Clements; beside Elizabeth is Sir John More in his robes, and next to him Sir Thomas in his chancellor's robes; between them stands Anne Cresacre the wife of John, her husband in the background; Margaret is seated on a low stool with a book in her hand, wide open; on one side is Lady More, on the other her sister Cicely.

MARGARET ROPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHANCELLOR'S SECOND WIFE.

SOMEWHERE about the year 1508 there was born into the world a little child, who, when grown up to womanhood, deservedly became known as one of the most celebrated women of her time.

In looking back through the dim vista of more than three centuries and a half we cannot gather as much as we could wish of the famous Margaret Roper, the eldest and best beloved daughter of Sir Thomas More.

It must needs be that, whilst writing our work, of which Margaret will be the heroine, the life of her father must be interwoven with hers; so closely were these two united together that the one cannot be separated from the other.

Now from the various works we have consulted we clearly glean that Margaret was ever by her father, in the

ordeal of persecution and trial unto death which he was doomed to undergo; so we may take it for granted that she above all others was his companion whilst the sun of prosperity beamed on him, and all things were bright and pleasant in the path of the great chancellor.

Left a widower after six brief years of happy wedded life, Sir Thomas was fain for the sake of his motherless children to take a second wife; and within between two and three years after his first wife's death he married a widow lady, by name Alice Middleton. We are told that she was seven years the senior of Sir Thomas, that she was plain of feature, had scant means, an only daughter by her first husband, and that in disposition she was mean, and grasping, and worldly.

Thomas More, however, did not at first woo the lady on his own account, but was doing the business for a friend; but the lady gave him to understand that he would succeed better if he pleaded in his own behalf, and bid him go tell his friend what she had said. And it so happened that More married her himself.

To a pleasant country house at Chelsea which he had built, side by side with a farm, and which stood amidst extensive gardens and meadows, did More bring his second wife a few days after his marriage; this union was wholly dissimilar to the first he had formed, it was one not of sentiment but of convenience.

It was a bright beautiful morning; four little children, three girls and a tiny boy, were amusing themselves on the lawn in front of the house, the garden of which stretched down to the bank of the Thames. The *Chelsey* of 1514 was very unlike the Chelsea of our own time, it was then a pleasant village three miles from London.

The blue waters of the river were not polluted as now by

factories, its shores were smooth and flat, and in the distance might be seen the Surrey hills; close by were pleasant meadows in which the cattle were peacefully grazing, and like a band of silver shimmering in the sunlight the river wound its way, kissed by the delicate water-lily and the overhanging branches of the trees that skirted the garden.

A beautiful child of some seven years of age, with golden brown hair and soft hazel eyes, has just stolen from the little group, and book in hand is diligently conning a task.

Suddenly Elizabeth, the eldest of the three little ones, looked up at one of the open windows of the house, and then running to her sister, exclaimed:

"Look up, Meg, our new mother hath come home."

Meg started, and then tears trembled in her eyes, a flush overspread her face, the complexion of which resembled the delicate pearly tint of an Indian shell. She was barely five years old when she lost her mother. A precocious clever child with quick instincts does not soon forget a tender loving parent; and as poor Margaret advanced to the open window at which her father stood with his new wife, she saw little to win her love in the large hard features of the dame whom he had married, but whose kiss she at once returned.

Appearances are deceptive however, for the dame proved a kind and careful step-mother. A sorrowful change, however, had crept over the household; it was henceforth to be governed by a woman who proved herself of a hard and shrewish temper.

Yet More might have put a far worse dame over his little ones: she had not a bad heart, though for the trial of those around her she had a very bad temper.

Mistress More seemed to live but to save, whilst she was wont to say her husband lived only to give and to spend.

So far Mistress More was not wrong; his overwhelming charity kept pace with his success in his profession of the law; and his own family of four was increased at once to six, as not only was the daughter of his second wife brought up with his own children, but also a child named Margaret Giggs, whom he adopted.

But, as I have said, a great change settled down on More's household. Mistress Alice fumed by day and fretted by night at the too lavish expenditure in all household arrangements, forgetting that prosperity attended her husband to an extent attained but by few, and that he was gaining already what in those days was deemed a large income. It must be owned too that the sharp sayings and near calculations of the new mistress were ill calculated to improve the peace of the household; and after for some time giving the matter due consideration, he decided that the best way to ensure a greater stock of domestic quietude than had fallen to his lot since his second marriage would be to induce his wife to turn her mind to other things than housekeeping. But it was with a look of incredulity, as if she thought he had lost his senses, she replied to his quiet suggestion that she should henceforth devote some portion of her time to learning to play on some one or more musical instruments.

"I prithee, wife, I am in earnest," said he, "so do not look so incredulous. Why should you not learn the viol and the lute, wherewith to cheer yourself and me?"

"Nay, Mr. More, you do but jest, I am too old."

"Nay, nay, wife; I assure you I never spoke more seriously, and to prove I am in earnest I will send you a master to-morrow to give you lessons; I doubt not but that you will make an apt scholar. It will please me much, good wife, to note your improvement."

Almost to his own surprise the dame gave her consent, and forthwith came the master; and thus, with much of her time taken up, the domestics enjoyed a little less keen supervision, and the lady had less time to scold.

The home of Sir Thomas More was unique in all its bearings: he was a tender master, a loving father, an affectionate and faithful husband, and when he grew high in honour and favour with his prince was not puffed up with pride and arrogance, but of so mild and excellent a temper that he could never be moved to anger, notwithstanding the untoward disposition of Mistress Alice.

As to the young people by whom he was surrounded, the sun of them all was Margaret, who in these her childish days gave rich promise of a bright and glorious womanhood.

Not only had More persuaded his wife to take lessons in music on various instruments, but by his skill and dexterity he induced her not to abandon what she had once attempted; and adults who have given themselves up to acquiring this art will understand that it was no light matter to Mistress More to learn to play on the viol, the lute, the cithara, and some other instruments, every day performing her task thereon till she at last became a very fair musician.

I have said that, even as Margaret is the heroine of this work, the great Sir Thomas will be my hero; for when were father and daughter more united in tastes, in virtue, in congeniality of sentiment? Thus as many of my readers, especially the younger portion, may not have chanced to peruse a life of the holy chancellor, it is right to describe what manner of man he was, how he ruled his household, how wisely and discreetly, and yet how tenderly, this model head of a family governed his own. He was always wont to hear an entire mass every day before he undertook

any worldly business, also to say the Matins of the Blessed Virgin, the seven psalms and litanies; at his meals he partook of but one dish, which was commonly grated beef, (though his table was ever plentifully spread,) and it was his custom always to mix water with his wine.

He had small care as to the clothing he wore, insomuch that his secretary one day telling him that his shoes were broken out, he bade him tell his man to buy him new ones, this man buying all his garments at his discretion, Sir Thomas never busying his head about such matters; oftentimes, even when lord chancellor of England, he wore a hair shirt next his skin,* adding also to this austerity a discipline every Friday and on fasting days.

Whatever hardness he treated himself with secretly, still to outward appearance he was singularly cheerful, merry in company and full of jests, above all things avoiding singularity, and careful to hide the religious exercises he practised.

In the thirty-sixth year of his age he wrote his famous "Utopia," which was speedily translated, from the original Latin in which it was written, into French, Italian, Dutch, and English.

More was in advance of the age in which he lived, and his "Utopia" was neither more nor less than an ideal romance in which an imaginary commonwealth is described; and in the sentiments he puts forward he shadows forth the more liberal and humane policy of our own times.

In the court of Henry VIII., for the first twenty years

* "Which my grandmother, on a time in the heat of summer, espying, laughed at, not being much sensible of such kind of spiritual exercises, being carried away in her youth with the bravery of the world, and not knowing *quæ sunt spiritus* wherein the true wisdom of a Christian man consisteth."—*Life of Sir Thomas More, by his great-grandson, Thomas More.*

of his reign, the learned Erasmus testified that rare virtues flourished; and after the king had made use of More in many embassies, and had created him one of his privy councillors, observing his fidelity and wisdom, he made him knight and then treasurer of the exchequer, and for the space of twenty years bestowed upon him every mark of affectionate trust.

Poor human heart, so easily to turn from virtue to vice! Who could have imagined that the then courtly, affable, and generous prince would ever develop into the sanguinary and brutal monster of after years? Cruel and rapacious as he afterward became, he gave no evidence of these evil passions at this time, and it was his custom oftentimes to summon Sir Thomas to his side to converse with him of astronomy and divinity, and when the moon rode high in the heavens, and the sky was bespangled with myriads of stars, to summon More to walk with him on the leads of his palace, and converse with and question him on the courses and diversities of the stars and planets, whilst the heart of the former was yearning after the companionship of his wife and children. Or again it might be that Sir Thomas was honoured by an invitation to sup with the king and queen, who loved to listen to the pleasant jests at which he was never wont to smile himself; and when Sir Thomas found that scarce once in a month he got leave to visit his own home, and that he could not be absent a brief two days without being sent for, this restraint on his liberty he took so much to heart as to resolve to restrain his mirth and adopt a serious demeanour, breaking out into none of his accustomed witty sayings, so that little by little the love for his company decreased, and he was allowed more freedom in the length of his sojourn in his own home.

CHAPTER II.

MARGARET AND HER SISTERS.

AMONGST her own sisters and the adopted daughters of Sir Thomas, Margaret shone the brightest, and excelled them all in beauty, wit, and wisdom; the girl students in the "school of Sir Thomas More," as it was familiarly termed, may be said to have pioneered the way for the learned ladies skilled in Greek and Latin who succeeded them in after years. There are many, even in our own later times, who deny to woman the intelligence of the sterner sex: granting the truth of the assertion, Sir Thomas saw in it only a reason for increased diligence on the part of women, witness the following letter written to their preceptor, one William Gunnell.*

I have received, my dear Gunnell, your letters such as they are wont to be, most elegant and full of affection. Your love towards my children I gather by your letters, their diligence by their own, for every one of their epistles pleaseth me much, yet most especially I take joy to hear that my daughter Elizabeth hath showed as great prudence in her mother's absence as if she had been present; let her know that that liked me better than all the epistles besides, for as I esteem learning which is joined with virtue more than all the treasures of kings, to what doth the fame of being a great scholar bring us, if it be severed from virtue, other than a notorious and famous infamy, especially in a woman, whom men will be the more ready to assail for their learning because it is a rare matter, and argueth a reproach to the sluggishness of a man, who will not stick to lay the fault of their natural malice upon the quality of learning; but if a woman, on the other hand, shall join many virtues of the mind with skill in learning, as I hope all mine will do, I shall account it a more happy

* Life of Sir Thomas More, by his great-grandson.

thing than if they had all the riches of Crœsus united to the beauty of the fair Helen, not because they were to get fame thereby, though it inseparably follows virtue as the shadow doth the body, but because they will obtain the true rewards of wisdom, which can never be taken away as wealth may, nor will it fade as beauty doth, because it dependeth on truth and justice, and not on the words of men's mouths, than which nothing is more foolish; for as it is the duty of a good man to eschew infamy, so is it the property of a proud man to frame his actions only for praise, for that man's mind must be full of anxiety that always wavers, for fear of other men's judgments, between joy and sadness. Amongst the benefits which learning hath bestowed on men I account it the most profitable that we look not for praise to be accounted learned, but only to use it on all occasions; which the best of all learned men, I mean the philosophers, have delivered to us, though some of them have abused their science, aiming only to be accounted excellent men by the people. Thus have I spoken, my Gunnell, somewhat more of not coveting vain glory in respect of those words in your letter, wherein you say that the high spirit of my daughter Margaret's wit is not to be dejected; I am of the same opinion, but I think that he dejects his wit who admires vain objects, esteeming the shadow of good things, for want of discretion to judge true from apparent good rather than the truth itself; and I have not only requested you, dear Gunnell, who of yourself I believe would have done it, neither have I desired my wife alone, but also other friends I have entreated many times, to persuade my children to avoid the gulfs of pride, to walk through the pleasant meadows of modesty; not to be enamoured of the glitter of gold and silver, nor lament the want of it; to think none the better of themselves for all their costly trimmings, nor more meanly for the lack of them; not to lessen their beauty bestowed on them by nature by neglecting it, nor to add to it by artificial means; to esteem virtue their chief happiness, learning and good qualities the next, of which above all are piety towards God, charity to all men, modesty and Christian humility in themselves, by which they will reap from God the reward of an innocent life, so that they shall not need to fear death, and meanwhile will not be puffed up with the vain praises of men, nor cast down by slanders and disgrace. These are the solid fruits of learning, which as I confess belong not to all, but those may yet attain them who study with this intent. It matters not at harvest time whether man or woman sowed the corn, for both are reasonable beings, and therefore I do not see why learning may not equally suit either sex. Reason being thus

cultivated and (as a field) sown with wise precepts, it bringeth forth good fruit; but if the soil of woman's brain be of its own nature bad, and more apt to bear fern than corn, by which saying many terrify women from learning, I am of opinion that woman's wit is the more diligently to be cultivated, to the end that nature's defect may be redressed by industry; of which mind were several wise and holy Fathers, St. Jerome and St. Augustine amongst others, who not only exhorted many noble matrons and honourable virgins to love of study, but, to help them, expounded to them difficult portions of Scripture; and wrote letters to tender maidens, full of so great learning that scarcely our greatest professors of divinity can well read them; which works, you will endeavour, my dear Gunnell, that my daughters may learn, so that they may know the end they ought to have in study, to place the fruits of their labours in God and a pure conscience, that at peace with themselves they be not moved with flattery nor grieved at the scoffs of the unlearned. Though I fancy you may reply that though this be true my precepts are too strong and hard for the tender age of my young wenches to listen to, for what man, be he ever so old and learned, is always so constant as not to be elated with the tickling of vain glory? For myself I consider it so hard to shake from us this plague of pride that we ought the more to endeavour to do it from our very infancy. I think there is no other cause why this mischief doth stick so fast to us, but that it is ingrafted in us even by our nurses as soon as we have crept out of our shells, fostered by our masters, nourished and perfected by our parents, whilst no one proposeth anything good to children, but they at once bid them expect praise as the reward of virtue, whence they are so used to esteem much of praise, that seeking to please the greater number, who are always the worst, they are ashamed to be good with the few. And that this plague may be banished from my children, I desire that you, my dear Gunnell, their mother and all their friends, would still sing them this song, hammer it into their heads on every occasion, that vain glory is to be despised nor anything more excellent than the humble modesty so much praised by Christ, which prudent charity will so guide and direct that it will teach us rather to desire virtue than to upbraid others for their vices, and make them rather love those who correct their faults than hate them for their good counsel, to obtain which nothing is more available than to read them the precepts of the Fathers, whom they know not to be angry with themselves, and with whose authority they must be moved because they are venerable for their sanctity.

If, therefore, you will read the works of such to Margaret and Elizabeth, besides their lessons in Sallust, as they, being the eldest, are of riper age, then John and Cicely, you will make both them and me every day more beholden to you; moreover you will then make my children, dear in the order of nature, more dear for learning, and by their increase in virtue most dear unto me. Farewell.—From the Court, this Whitsun Eve.

By the above letter which I have transcribed it will be seen that Sir Thomas's chief care was to make his children virtuous, as well as learned. The following letters were addressed to themselves.

Thomas More, to his whole School sendeth greeting.

Behold, I have found out a compendious way to salute you all, and make spare of time and paper, which I must needs have wasted in saluting each one of you by name, which would be very superfluous, because you are all so dear to me, some in one way, some in another, that I cannot leave one of you unsaluted. Yet I know not if there be any better motive why I should love you, than that you are scholars, learning seeming to bind me more closely to you than nearness of blood. If I loved you not exceedingly I should envy your great happiness in having many great scholars for your masters. I hear that Mr. Nicolas is with you, that you have learned much astronomy of him, and have proceeded so far in this science that you know not only the pole-star, the dog, and such like common constellations, but also, which argues you as absolute and cunning astronomers, you know the chief planets themselves, and are able to discern the sun from the moon. Go forward therefore in your new and admirable skill, and whilst you daily admire the stars, I admonish you also to think of this holy fast of Lent, and let the pious song of Boethius sound in your ears, so that your minds may ascend to heaven, lest when the body is lifted up on high the soul be driven down to earth with the brute beasts. Farewell.—From the Court, this 29th of March.

And, in answer to the loving replies of his daughters, came the following.

Thomas More, to his best beloved children, and to Margaret Giggs, whom he numbers amongst his own, sendeth greeting. The merchant from Bristol brought me yours the day after he had received

them from you, with the which I was extremely delighted, for there can come nothing, though never so rude nor meanly polished, from your workshop, but it yieldeth me more delight than other men's works, be they ever so eloquent, your writing doth so stir up my affection for you.

Exclusive of this, your letters also please me well for their own worth, as full of fine wit and pure Latin phrase; therefore they all please me exceedingly. Yet, to tell you candidly what I think, my son John's letter pleaseth me most, because it was longer than the others, and also he seems to me to have taken more pains than the rest; he not only pointeth out the matter clearly, and speaketh elegantly, but also playeth pleasantly with me, returning my jests upon me again very wittily, and this not only pleasantly but temperately withal, showing that he is mindful with whom he jesteth, to wit, his father, whom he endeavours so to delight that he is also afraid to offend.

Hereafter I expect every day letters from each one of you, neither will I accept of such excuses as you complain of, that you had no leisure, or that the carrier went away suddenly, or that you have no matter to write. John is not wont to allege any such things, and nothing can hinder you from writing, but many things should exhort you to it. Why should you blame the carrier, seeing you may prevent his coming, and have them ready made up and sealed two days before any offer themselves to carry them? And how can you want matter of writing to me, who am delighted to hear either of your studies or your play, whom you may then please exceedingly, when, having nothing to write of, you write as largely as you can of that nothing, than which nothing is more easy for you to do, especially being women, and therefore prattlers by nature, amongst whom a great story riseth out of nothing. But this I admonish you to do, that, whether you write of serious matters or of trifles, you write with diligent consideration, premeditating it before; neither will it be amiss if you first indite in English, for then it may be more easily translated into Latin, while the mind free from inventing is apt in finding eloquent words.

I leave this to your choice whether you do so or no, but I enjoin you by all means diligently to examine what you have written before you write it over fair again, examining first the whole sentence, then various parts of it, by which you will discover if any solecisms have escaped you; which being corrected, and your letter fairly written out, let it not trouble you to examine it again. By this diligence,

your trifles will secure serious matters, for as nothing is so pleasing but that it may be made unsavoury by garrulity, so nothing is so unpleasant that by industry may not be made graceful and comely. Farewell, my sweetest children.—From the Court, this 5th of September.

I wish I had been able to discover for my reader the copies of Margaret's letters which elicited the following from her good father, who amidst the distractions of a court life, and the exactions the king made upon his time, yet found leisure to compose letters so full of wisdom and fatherly love.

Thy letters, dearest Margaret, were grateful unto me, which certified me of the state of Shaw; yet would they have been more grateful unto me, if they had told me what you and your brother's studies were, what is read amongst you every day, how you converse together, what themes you make, and how you pass the day amongst you; and although nothing is written from you but is most pleasing to me, yet those things are sweets which I can only learn through you or your brother. And in short, I pray thee, Meg, see that I understand by you what your studies are. For rather than I would suffer you, my children, to live idly, I would myself look to you with loss of my temporal estate, bidding all other cares and business farewell, amongst which there is nothing more sweet unto me than thyself, my dearest daughter. Farewell.

The following is addressed to all his daughters.

Thomas More sendeth greeting to his most dear daughters, Margaret, Elizabeth, and Cicely, and to Margaret Giggs, as dear to him as if she were his own. I cannot sufficiently express, my best beloved wenches, how your eloquent letters have pleased me and not the least that I understand by them that you have not in your journeys, though changing places often, omitted any of your customs of exercising yourselves either in declamation, composing poetry, or in your logical exercises; and so I feel convinced that you dearly love me, being thus careful to please me by your diligence, performing in my absence what you know delights me when I am present; my return then shall be profitable to you, and assure yourselves, that amongst my troublesome and business affairs there is

nothing so much delights me as when I read somewhat of your labours, by which I know that to be true which your loving master writes me of you; for unless your own epistles showed me how great was your desire to learn, I should have suspected that he had rather written out of affection than according to truth. But now you make me believe and lead me to imagine those things to be true of your disputations which he boasteth of you almost beyond belief. I am therefore very desirous to come home, that I may set our scholar to dispute with you, who is slow to believe to find you able to answer to your master's praises. But I hope,—knowing how steadfast you are,—that you will shortly overcome your master, if not in disputing, at least in not leaving off your strife. Farewell, dear wenches.

These letters give us a clear insight into the life pursued by Margaret and her sisters in their childhood and youth at the mansion at Chelsea, and present to us a striking contrast to the lighter studies, smattering of modern languages, and frivolous accomplishments of our own times; and, having premised thus much, I will in the following chapter attempt to delineate the domestic life of the chancellor and his daughter, at the time when the glory of the great man was at its height.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHANCELLOR'S HOUSEHOLD.

MARGARET was as yet hovering on the threshold of womanhood. A young maiden she was, very young,* we are told, when, according to the fashion of the times, to marry in extreme youth, she became the bride of one William Roper, who had received a university education, had dwelt some time in the family of Sir Thomas, and was much given to learning.

Margaret had fully realized the bright promise held out by her childhood; she bid fair to become as the valiant woman spoken of in the Scriptures: "She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue. She hath opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hands to the poor." Skilled in the languages of the ancients, surpassingly clever, and thoroughly well informed, she has grown up wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove.

Her father had made her his almoner, and having hired a house for many aged people, whom he relieved daily, also made it her charge to see that they wanted nothing, and he made her the mistress of all his secrets respecting his private charities which were liberal and numerous.

And whilst she distributed his alms she was lavish too of the abundant means he bestowed upon herself for her private use.

Beautiful in person as in mind, yet no spot in Margaret's

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* Roper's Life of More, edited by Singer. Stapleton's Life of More.

heart was tainted with the vanity of her sex; quick and sensitive in disposition, she, when disturbed in temper by the constant fretfulness of her stepmother, possessed that virtue which led her to reply with gentle words to the harsh remark, the rude and bitter speech, and to pour the oil of charity on the troubled waters when perchance the chief discordant element in this, the model of a Christian home, had raised a storm.

Loving and affectionate in her nature, her whole heart devoted to her father and her husband, this girl wife yet remembered she had a higher and an uncreated Love, in and for whom she treasured those He had given her on earth; and destined by God to serve Him in the world as a wife and mother, to train up children in His love and service, she presented earth with the spectacle of a life which the women of our own times may be proud to copy; for in the character of Margaret More, or Roper, was exemplified the virtue of the cloistered virgin, her purity of heart and love of God, combined with the peculiar characteristics of a Christian wife and mother.

As to Roper, whose bride she had become and who lived in her father's house some time before Sir Thomas bestowed the hand of his "pearl," Margaret—the signification of whose name so well befitted her, he owed doubtless much of his future prosperity to the care of his patron Sir Thomas.

He had lived as I have said for some years in More's home, treated by him as a son, by Margaret as a brother, till suddenly he lifted his aspiring eyes to this, More's brightest and best treasure, his sweet Meg, as he was wont to call her.

Almost before she was herself aware of it, an attachment had sprung up within her own heart. The watchful eyes of

her father read her secret; he beheld her absent herself from the society of her sisters and become more pensive and thoughtful, that Roper was never so well pleased as when reading to her or talking with her; and he became aware that full soon he must give William Roper a right over his daughter Meg.

But the household of Sir Thomas was governed by such a master that no separation was requisite, for this marriage of Margaret left her still in her father's house; he, we are told by the learned Erasmus at a later date, having residing with him his wife, his son and daughter-in-law, his three daughters and their husbands, with eleven grandchildren.

It would seem from one of the few letters that have been preserved, addressed by Sir Thomas to Margaret, that she had outstripped the abundant means he placed at her disposal. She had written him to replenish her purse, and he replies as follows:—

You ask for money of your father, dear Meg, with too much shame and fear; and the letter in which you ask it is such that I could find in my heart to recompense it, not as Alexander did by Chœrilus, giving him for every verse a philippine; but if my ability were equal to my will, I would bestow two crowns of pure gold for every syllable thereof. Herein I send you as much as requested, being willing to have sent more but that I am desiring to be asked by my daughters, thee especially, whom virtue and learning hath made most dear unto me. Wherefore the sooner you have spent this money well, as you are wont to do, and the more speedily you ask me for more, the sooner you will do your father a singular pleasure. Farewell, my most beloved daughter.

That Margaret's union with Roper did not diminish her ardent love of study is abundantly proved by the following letters. Whilst her husband was engaged in the duties of his profession, she allotted to the hours of his absence the various duties of her life. She had written two

declamations in English, which she and her father turned into such elegant Latin that it could hardly be said which was the best; and she also made a treatise on the four last things, Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven, which Sir Thomas sincerely protested surpassed his own, which was the cause perhaps why this latter was never finished. Struck with the beauty and delicacy of her Latin style, Reginald, afterwards the famous Cardinal Pole, could with difficulty believe a letter of hers, which her father showed him, to be the production of a woman.

I cannot express in writing how grateful to me are your most eloquent letters, dear daughter Margaret; whilst I was reading them there happened to be with me Reginald Pole, that most noble youth, not so noble by birth as he is singularly virtuous and learned. To him your letter seemed as a miracle; yea, before he understood that you were ill, having nevertheless sent me so long a letter, I could scarce make him believe but that you had some help from your master, until I told him seriously, not only that you had never a master in your house, but also never another man that needed not rather your help in writing than you his.

How true I now find that which once I remember speaking to you in jest, when I pitied your hard hap that men who read your writings would suspect you to have had the help of man therein, which would derogate somewhat from the praises due to your works, seeing that you of all others deserve least such a suspicion, for you never could abide to be decked with the plumes of other birds. But you, sweet Meg, are rather to be praised, that seeing you cannot hope for condign praise of your labours, you go forward with courage to join with your virtue the knowledge of excellent sciences, never hankering after vulgar praises, and for your singular piety and love towards me, you esteem me and your husband a sufficient and ample theatre to content yourself with, who in return for this your affection pray that your family may be increased with a child most like yourself, except only in sex; yet if it be a wench, that it may be such a one as would in time recompense, by imitation of her mother's bearing and virtues, what by the condition of her sex may be wanting; such a wench I should prefer before three boys. Farewell, dearest daughter.

Nor could the loving father refrain from pouring into Margaret's ears the praises of a learned divine, and he begins as follows:—*

Thomas More sendeth hearty greetings to his dearest daughter Margaret.

I must tell you, my dearest daughter, how much your letter delighted me; you may imagine how exceedingly it pleased your father when you understand what emotions its perusal raised in a stranger. This evening I was seated with the Lord Bishop of Exeter, a learned, and in every one's judgment a most truthful man. As we were talking together, and I taking out of my pocket a paper concerning what we were speaking of, I pulled out by chance your letter. The handwriting pleasing him, he took it from me and looked at it; when he perceived it to be a woman's he began to devour the letter, novelty inciting him; but having read it, and understood it to be your writing, which he never would have believed if I had not seriously affirmed it, such a letter,—but I will say no more,—yet why should I not repeat what he said? So pure a style, such good Latin, so full of sweet affection, he was perfectly delighted with it; and when I produced, which he read, and also many of your verses, he was so astonished that his very countenance and manner, free from all flattery and deceit, betrayed that he felt more than he could say, though he said much in your praise. Forthwith he drew from his pocket a present, which you shall receive enclosed herein. I could not possibly avoid taking it, for he desired to send it as a sign of his affection for you, though I strove to return it again; this was the cause why I showed him none of your sister's works, fearing lest he should think I showed them on purpose that he should bestow the same courtesy on them also, for it troubled me sorely to take of so worthy a man; but it is a happiness to please him. Write carefully to him, and as eloquently as you are able, in order to return him thanks. Farewell.—From the Court, this 11th of September, almost at midnight.

Margaret made an oration to answer Quintilian, defending the rich man whom he accused of having poisoned a poor man's bees with venomous plants in his garden; and so eloquent and witty was this oration that

* Stapleton's Life of More, p. 267.

it deserved a place beside his own. One more letter of the chancellor, containing strictures on his daughter's letters, I shall transcribe. It ran as follows :—

Thomas More sendeth greeting to his dearest daughter Margaret.

There was no reason, my dearest daughter, why you should have deferred writing for fear that your letters being barren should disgust me; for though they had not been most curious, yet on account of thy sex any man might pardon thee, yea even a blemish in the child's face seems often beautiful to a father. But then your letters, Meg, were so eloquently written that they had nothing in them to fear from your indulgent father. Also, I heartily thank Mr. Nicolas (a clever astronomer), and congratulate you for having in the space of one month with but small labour to learn so many wonders of that mighty and eternal work which were not discovered in many ages, but by watching in many cold nights under the open sky with much pain and labour. I am well pleased that you have resolved so diligently to study philosophy. I love you for this, dearest Meg, saying that you will recover by diligence what negligence hath lost you. I have never found you a loiterer, your learning showing how painfully you have proceeded; yet such is your modesty, that you had rather accuse yourself of negligence than vainly boast of diligence, except you mean that in future you will be *so* diligent that your former efforts may be called negligent.

If this be the case nothing can happen more fortunate to me, or more happy to you, my dearest daughter, for as I have earnestly wished that you might spend the rest of your life in studying physic and holy Scriptures, by which help shall never be wanting to you to the end of your life, which is to strive that a sound mind be in a healthy body, of which studies you have already laid a foundation, so I think that some of the first years of your youth still remaining may be well bestowed in human learning and the liberal arts, both because your age may best struggle with difficulty, and also because it is uncertain whether at any other time we shall have so learned and careful a master.

I could wish, dear Meg, that I might talk with you a long time about these matters, but those who bring supper in interrupt me and call me away. My supper cannot be so sweet to me as this my speech with you, were I not to respect others more than myself.

Farewell, dearest daughter; commend me kindly to your husband my loving son, who makes me rejoice that he studies the same things with you; so that, although I am wont to advise you always to give place to your husband, now I give you leave to strive to master him in the knowledge of the spheres. Farewell, again and again; commend me to all your school-fellows, but especially to your master.

This is the last letter in which Sir Thomas chronicles the progress of his daughters in the various branches of study to which they devoted themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

QUEEN KATHARINE.

"METHINKS, Mistress Eleanor, you are counting over much on your own wit and learning. I would counsel you to drop the subject, and not touch upon such matters again. These are evil times; and it behoves us, an we would not lose the faith, to walk humbly and steadfastly, as wise and learned ones have done before us."

She who uttered these words was a lady between forty-five and fifty years of age, with an oval face, regular features, and a sweet but sad and troubled look. Speed and others tell us she was a beauteous woman in her youth and in her prime. Now she has passed her forty-fifth year, and is bowed down and prematurely aged by sickness and by sorrow rather than by time; her auburn hair, so unusual in a Spanish lady, is striped with grey, her eyes dim with weeping.*

The queen's companion was one of her ladies, whose occupation it had been to read aloud from a devotional work, for a richly illuminated volume lay open before her. This maid of honour was one Eleanor Thornhill, the only daughter of a wealthy knight. She was as stately as her royal mistress; of dark complexion, with large, brilliant, black eyes, and hair of the same hue; her features were regular and handsome; and, apart from the fact that her mouth was somewhat too large for the correct standard of female beauty, yet, taken as a whole, one would be better

* *Vide* Agnes Strickland's Life of Katharine of Arragon.

pleased with a plainer face. The fault lay in the expression of the countenance, in which there was nothing sweet or engaging, womanly or tender.

She was no favourite with the unfortunate Katharine; to please the king alone, who had known her father intimately, and who had been his boon companion in his youth, had the queen admitted her amongst her ladies.

The men of the new learning, as it was called, were broaching those tenets which gave rise to the so-called Reformation; and here and there women were to be found whose wits ran wild about matters they could ill understand. Eleanor had let the book in which she had been reading fall from her hands; and, perfectly abstracted, forgetting she had been reading aloud to the queen, unconscious even of her presence, her mind was running riot on a question which was disturbing the thoughts of some of the most learned men of the time. Nay, she was even asking herself if the royal lady, her mistress, might not be rightfully divorced.

"What is the matter, Mistress Eleanor? Your countenance is troubled. Why have you laid aside the book?" asked the queen, regarding her with much astonishment.

"A passing thought, if it please your grace," replied Eleanor, with some hesitation, a deep flush mantling her clear dark skin; "a doubt as to whether those who are against us are altogether wrong."

Then the queen made the observation with which I have commenced my chapter. The damsel took up the book and read on till the queen bade her stop; then said she:

"Do you know one Mistress Maud Clavering? Have you met her at Sir Thomas More's house at Chelsea?"

"Yes, your grace;" and again the dark olive of her complexion became painfully flushed.

"Are you aware that she is betrothed to Sir Arthur Sedley? I name it to you, on account of certain things you have told me of concerning yourself."

"Sir Arthur, your grace, will nevertheless not ally himself in marriage to a crafty, designing woman."

"Do you remember, Mistress Thornhill, that this damsel is the intimate friend of the virtuous daughters of Sir Thomas More? Reflect then, ere you speak of her so harshly."

"She hath sought, an it please your grace, to throw the glamour of her fair face over a worthy gentleman. Her father liveth only by the benevolence of Sir Thomas. It is right well known, this much vaunted history of hers, how that she hath a blind and aged parent. Truly he waxed idle in his younger days, and thus in the decline of life hangeth grievously on the bounty of those who will befriend him. Mayhap the fair daughters of the knight are not keen enough to discern the flaws in the damsel's character. I know of many."

"And *I* know, Mistress Eleanor, that in this world the most virtuous are full often classed amongst the wicked. That the maiden enjoyeth the friendship of Margaret Roper is of itself an introduction to my favour."

Then the queen dismissed her attendant, and Eleanor withdrew to the privacy of her own apartment.

"The queen's day is over," says she to herself. "Her star has long been on the wane; and why should *I* follow her ruined fortunes? *He* too, though it is not publicly known, hath become one of those who follow the teachers of the new learning. I will do the same; and as to this girl, I will put her aside as easily as I would brush away a fly. I will at once ask permission to visit London for a month."

Without a spark of true religious feeling in her dis-

position, Mistress Thornhill was peculiarly adapted by character and disposition to adopt the tenets of the new religionists; and many a barrier which had kept her in check, and her passions under control, would be swept away. The family of Sir Thomas More she held in supreme contempt; and if on her part Margaret Roper encouraged the visits of this worldly and heartless woman, it was mainly because her sympathies were so warmly enlisted on behalf of the ill-used queen, and that by means of Eleanor she could become privy to much connected with her of which she would otherwise have been ignorant.

When first Eleanor Thornhill had become one of the maids of honour, the fortunes of the queen were at their best. Anne Boleyn had not then enslaved the heart of the tyrant king; and the court was a scene of gaiety and pleasure, in which the damsel Eleanor well loved to move. The case was altered now; the queen was bowed down by sorrow, often in tears, a prey to the keenest anguish by reason of the efforts of the king to procure a divorce; and by her forced separation from the Princess Mary her life was now passed in strict retirement, and in that seclusion all who lived with her had to bear a part.

The next day, when alone with Katharine, Eleanor resolved to prefer her request; and she petitioned for a month's absence from her duties.

Gentle and unsuspecting of evil as she really was, the queen nevertheless attributed the request to its right cause, —a wish to mix in a more lively scene, and rightly conjectured her maid of honour would be in small hurry to return to Ampthill. She however granted the required permission; and a few days later Mistress Thornhill was again in the metropolis.

But very lately the unfortunate queen had been sum-

moned before a court held in the great hall of the palace of Blackfriars, and in her own broken English had pathetically pleaded her cause on her knees before her tyrant husband, beseeching him not to repudiate her; and had then left the court, refusing to reappear. A second time she had been summoned, without effect; when the king dispatched to her the two legates, Wolsey and Campeggio, to try and bring her to comply with the divorce; but in vain. The ill-used queen nobly and bravely maintained her own; she could and did suffer, but she would not yield.

Those who have chronicled the royal lady's life tell us that her virtues were bright, numerous, and practical; they extol also her asceticism. We are told that she was wont to rise in the night to pray; that she dressed herself for the whole day at five in the morning, and that beneath the robes of a queen she wore the habit of the third order of St. Francis; that she fasted on Fridays and Saturdays, and received the holy Eucharist every week.*

* Miss Strickland's "Queens of England."

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUSE AT CHELSEA.

IT is the afternoon of the 26th of October, 1529; the air is yet soft and warm for the time of year; and in the grounds of the pleasant mansion Sir Thomas More had erected for himself and his family, several persons had assembled, and were gazing anxiously down the river in the direction of Westminster.

In the summer months the red brick walls of this dwelling were clustered over with jasmine and honeysuckle; these were fading away, but the smooth greensward which stretched down to the river side, the neatly kept gravel walks, and a profusion of flowers of rich autumnal tints, with the unquestionable elegance of all around, showed that persons of refined taste and culture presided over the place and its surroundings.

The mellowed rays of the autumn sunset still lingered on the clear waters of the river, for, as we have before said, in these far-off days of which we write no refuse of a densely populous city polluted the Thames; and on the opposite side the eye rested on beautiful meadow land and verdant pasturage, with here and there a little farmhouse or a few cottages marking the site of the small hamlets of Battersey and Wandlesworth, the Battersea and Wandsworth of to-day.

Standing rather apart from the group, her hand resting on the head of her first-born son, a boy of some five years old, is our old acquaintance Margaret, a melancholy look in the wistful gaze of her soft brown eyes, as she leans

against a stone parapet skirting the river's edge; it is fitting the most loving of her children should be the first to greet her father on this the day of exaltation, but not of his ambitious hopes, for this was the day on which he was made lord chancellor.

Standing very near to Margaret were two other persons: one a young girl, fair and delicate, an anxious expression on her face; she has passed her arm round Margaret's waist, and is like unto a frail tendril clinging to the sturdy oak. The other is a woman far advanced in years; her features, never comely in her youth, are sharpened by age; she grows angry at the delay of the husband she has been so long expecting, and words of angry impatience fall from her lips.

Others too there were lingering here and there: the lively Elizabeth and her children; Cicely; and More's adopted daughter, sedate Margaret Giggs. Elizabeth and Cicely are strikingly like Margaret in form and feature, though in the point of beauty she bears away the palm.

At last the sound of music bursts upon the ear; and borne lightly on the waters, a barge gaily decorated, its colours streaming in the breeze, appears in sight, and the little party in the garden are aware that he whom they have anxiously expected has arrived.

Now the vessel has reached the steps leading down to the water's edge; and what a proud moment was that for that loving daughter, whose bright eyes were suffused in tears of joy, as, regardless of the conventionalities of society, she rushed forward to greet the newly made chancellor of England, and looked wistfully up into the calm grave face with almost a fear at her heart lest his exalted position had robbed him of somewhat of his happiness.

Just for one instant Sir Thomas paused, his eyes rested lovingly on his child, and turning to his companions he said:

"Forgive my poor Meg, my lords, she did not know that my return home would be graced with such courtly company."

Margaret blushed as she returned the salutation of the Duke of Norfolk, whom she had not observed in her joy at her father's return; he was also accompanied by his intimate friend, the venerable Bishop Fisher, the learned Erasmus, one Sir Arthur Sedley, a young friend of the duke's, and his son and sons-in-law.

The sun had fairly set before the party entered the house, within which great preparations for a festive gathering had been made, in honour of the elevation of Sir Thomas to the chancellorship.

On the morning of this festive day the great seal had been presented to him, in presence of several of the king's council; and he had been led triumphantly between the dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk, through Westminster Hall, and duly installed in his high office.

The Duke of Norfolk then by the king's command spoke of the merits which had led the king to raise Sir Thomas to the dignity of chancellor, and ended a speech full of enthusiastic eulogy by bidding the people receive him with joyful acclamations, at whose hands they might expect content and happiness.

Overcoming his own feelings at the praises lavished upon him, Sir Thomas replied that he had neither sought nor solicited the great charge confided to him; adding that when he remembered who *he* was who had lately filled that seat, and how he had fallen grievously, he was terribly reminded that the honour should not please him too much,

and that he should remember that it would be full of glory to him, if with fidelity and wisdom he fulfilled his duty; and that he should persuade himself that the enjoyment of it might chance to be short and uncertain, which his predecessor's example might easily teach him.

The feeling with which More had uttered these prophetic words had pursued him through the day, and even pressed upon his heart when returning to his home; and the festive gathering of his friends failed to drive out the anxiety which possessed his mind; it was as a presage of the downfall which in the end was the result of his present exaltation.

Did he see the headsman's axe looming in the distance? did he in his heart of hearts feel that Henry had a deep motive in so exalting one neither a noble nor a prelate, in order the better to mould him to his own purposes?

His friends saw nothing unusual in him; his unruffled temper casting sunshine around, all save one were deceived, and they fancied that with the generality of mankind More was elated with his good fortune. Margaret, however, could not be mistaken; she observed every change in his expressive countenance; she saw that his witty sallies, and the pleasantries with which he made himself the life and soul of the society in which he entered, were forced, and that ever and again, momentarily retiring within himself, he was communing with a disturbed and harassed mind.

Another too there was who divided her attention with her father. This was the damsel, Maud Clavering, whom I have twice alluded to.

Margaret had observed her countenance light up when Sir Arthur Sedley followed the Duke of Norfolk from the barge, and she felt both glad and sorry for Maud: glad,

because Maud's father was a poor broken-down gentleman, who could scarce support his daughter, and Sir Arthur was a young knight, in favour with the king; and sorry because she fancied there were blemishes in his character which unfitted him to be the mate of the tender and gentle Maud.

It was not until a late hour of the night that the company broke up, when Sir Thomas gathered together, as was invariably his custom, the members of his large household for prayers before retiring to rest.

There doubtless was a bond of sympathy between the chancellor and his eldest daughter, such as did not exist between himself and any other member of his family; and which occasioned the distress of Margaret's mind on the night following his installation into an office, which from its exalted position was equally honourable and lucrative.

Humanly speaking Sir Thomas had nothing more to desire; the patronage of his prince had placed him in his present position, he stood forth to his fellow-men as the king's trusted friend and counsellor, and yet he would gladly have bartered all for the quiet and retired tenor of his former life.

The clock of the old church had struck four; but still Margaret could not sleep; her heart had throbbed with pride and happiness the previous day, when she had been the first to welcome home her beloved father, but the sorrowful expression she had occasionally noticed on his countenance haunted her still. To sleep was impossible, and ere the first dawn of the autumnal morning had fairly broke, she rose, lighted a small wax taper, and stole noiselessly from her room, and resolved to read as it was in vain to try to sleep. She wended her way to the library her father had fitted up, not alone with books, but also with astro-

nomical and musical instruments, and a collection of natural curiosities. In England as well as Germany, little else was thought of at that epoch, for the generality of women, than that they should know how to sew and spin and cook and read and write; for the great learning of the two princesses, Elizabeth and Mary, the ladies of the middle class did not aspire to; and their skill in works of the needle, over which they spent interminable hours, utterly prevented the exercise of mental culture.

Sir Thomas More, however, had higher aims for his daughters than wishing to see them for ever bending over embroidery frames, and rightly considered that those women whose minds were cultivated, at the same time that an extra charm would be imparted to the companionship of a virtuous and amiable wife, would also have an additional influence over the happiness of the domestic hearth; and argued that if God had placed them in an elevated position, that music, drawing, painting, natural science, the dead languages, and even law itself, might enter into the plan of woman's studies.

The room to which Margaret had bent her steps had been the scene of many of her labours: here she had, as Erasmus writes, whilst yet a child amused herself on her father's knees with learning three languages; here too she had composed in English two declamations which she and her father translated into Latin, when a contest took place between them as to the beauty of the old style, and the most refined critics found it hard to judge which was the best.

But, to return from my digression, William Roper, though very fond of his father-in-law, had not seen with his wife's eyes on the previous night; and the excitement of the scenes through which he had passed, closed in by the

festive gathering, and the absence of anything to induce mental irritation, had combined to plunge him into a profound and dreamless sleep, so that he was not awaked by Margaret leaving the room.

When she entered the library the first faint streak of dawn was on the sky, stealing faintly through the partially closed blinds; she drew them aside, and for a moment gazed out on the grey autumn morning, on the quiet river, and the meadow land beyond, a curtain of thin blue mist rising in many a fantastic wreath.

All nature was still buried in perfect repose, save that in the hamlet of Battersea, on the opposite bank of the river, from the chimney of a thatched farmhouse of the smaller class, the thin blue smoke was curling upwards, and a solitary herdsman was leading a flock of cattle to pasture.

She turned from the window, and her hand was already laid on a volume of a favourite author, when a faint sigh struck upon her ear.

Somewhat alarmed she glanced fearfully around the room, and beheld at the farther extremity of the long apartment her father, reclining in a large chair, clad in a loose dressing-gown. He had evidently left his room, like herself, and Margaret was impressed with the conviction that his mind was disturbed.

The noise of her step aroused him.

"Why, dearest Meg, what has brought you from your bed so early?" said he, and taking her by the hand he drew her to him and tenderly kissed her.

"I will reply in the same fashion, by putting the same question to you, dear father; your hands are quite cold," and as Margaret spoke she pressed them between her own, adding, "what is the matter? I could not speak to you last night; but I saw you were not happy. Ah, I see clearly

you like not the post to which the king's grace hath raised you, for if it bringeth honours with it it also bringeth cares."

"Ah, Meg, you have divined the cause of my trouble rightly. Do what I will, I cannot drive from my mind the sadness which hath possessed me ever since the king placed this burden of the chancellorship upon my shoulders. Beshrew me if I could sleep, even after the fatigue and excitement of the last two days: a painful prescience seems to have taken possession of my mind that evil will come of this matter, though how or why I cannot tell, save and except that the favour of princes is not to be depended on; it is very like a weathercock, and about as variable. But now, Meg, answer me truly, what brought you hither so early? your eyes, my poor child, look heavy, and you are unnaturally pale. I opine you have not slept much any more than myself; but, will I nill I, this oppression must be shaken off," and Sir Thomas rose from his seat as he spoke. "Positively I have been sleeping in this chair till I am both numbed and cold; this comes of wandering to the library o' nights instead of keeping in one's bed."

"We have both been wrong I think, father; anxiety for your dear self drove all the sleep from my eyes; I came here to pass, in reading, the hours usually given to rest."

"I will set you the example, Meg, and wear a more cheerful aspect for the time to come," said More, "but we must have no more broken rest." Then again kissing her, he retired to his own apartment.

Two hours later the father and daughter again met: it is needless to say they had neither of them slept, but by a sort of freemasonry between them it seemed to be understood that, unless to her husband, Margaret should not speak concerning anything that distressed her regarding her father.

One great peculiarity in the chancellor's *menage*, as we have said, consisted in that his children lived with him under the same roof after their marriage; and as all his three daughters were now married, also his son, it may well be supposed that, including his grandchildren and servants, his family was a very large one.

There was still one particularly discordant element however in the otherwise peaceful circle, and this was the shrewish dame Alice; husband, daughters, sons-in-law, and servants alike feared the outbursts of her temper.

One of the leading traits in the character of Sir Thomas was an unbounded generosity and benevolence of disposition; but whilst he bestowed profusely upon others out of his abundance, his wife's main delight consisted in a species of parsimonious saving, so that he was wont not unfrequently to tell her that she was penny wise and pound foolish.

There was one person at the hospitable board of the chancellor that morning on whom the dame looked with no favourable eye; this was none other than the fair Maud Clavering.

Whilst his wife saved pennies, More was as I have just implied lavish of pounds to the church and the poor, and gave of his worldly goods to her great discontent. Margaret was his almoner; therefore, apart from the fact that between characters so strikingly dissimilar as hers and her stepmother's there could be nothing in common, the bare knowledge that she had the privilege of giving away her father's money oftentimes raised a hurricane in the temper of Mistress Alice.

She knew perfectly well that Maud's father was a gentleman of ruined fortunes, blind and poor, one of those who was "sitting making goslings in the ashes," to

use an elegant phrase of her own (which she had often applied to her husband when twitting him with not making his way in the world, before he was made chancellor); and aware that Ralph Clavering and his daughter were more than half maintained by her husband's benevolence, it often raised her spleen against the former, especially when the damsel was a honoured guest at his table.

A remark Sir Thomas had made called forth the dame's ire.

"Good wife," he said, "you are hard to learn that economy may be practised with too tight a hand. The table was less bountifully spread last night than I liked to see on such an occasion. Good lack, dame! let us not stint the use of what Providence has bestowed upon us."

"Tilly vally!" was the reply, "all England will partake of your cheer before long, and though now you *are* my lord and high chancellor, maybe we 'll come to want yet; I trow you give too much away to needy folk who have made their own troubles." And as Dame Alice spoke thus, she darted an angry glance at Maud, adding: "Open house is there here at all times, for all sorts of people. If I was not a thrifty housewife we would all have been on short comings long since, what with giving to this one and lending to t'other."

"Hold your peace, wife. I never yet knew the man who was the worse for giving to God's church or His poor. Does not the Scripture say that he who casts his bread on running waters after many days shall find it again? So, open house shall there be, Mistress Alice, and a good table spread for friends, and help for those in need, as long as God giveth me the means to help them."

"Aye, aye, for others as foolish as yourself. For well

I wot you did not look after your present good-hap, so have fellow-feeling for poor scholars with empty purses, like some I know, who can neither keep their children nor themselves. But like ever likes like, and so you anger not at seeing them sit with their hands crossed, doing nothing, but looking for others to do for them."

"Good wife, that is ill said," replied the good-tempered chancellor. "How shall *you* know that others have to thank themselves for their poverty? Alack! in this world the great ones of to-day may be the poor ones of to-morrow, and those now beneath us may be far above our heads erewhile. Think of that, good Mistress Alice; *our* time may come yet."

"I wot your last words may surely come true, if you will still love to spend more than I can save," said Mistress Alice; she was one of those persons who always liked to have the last word.

Sir Thomas had felt pained at his wife's remarks, on account of Maud. His keen eye had noticed a slight flush mantle her cheek; and, to make amends for the coarseness of the shrewish dame, he said, on bidding her farewell:

"My daughter Meg tells me you return to Aldgate to-day. Mayhap I shall look in next week, and have a chat with my good old friend, your father."

If the truth must be owned, Dame Alice had some little reason for complaints against her husband on the score of his liberality to others, seeing that out of a professional income equal to £5,000 of our money, besides that accruing from other offices held by him after he had entered the service of the king, on resigning the great seal three years later he was in a state of downright poverty.

It was, in fact, his delight to sympathise with those who suffered. Thus his house was open to all who were in want

of work, to artists unable to live by their pencil or brush, to the proscribed who fled from their ungrateful country, to unfortunate debtors pursued by pitiless creditors; they were sure of there finding bread, fire, and a bed; and when his house was found too small to receive the unhappy people who craved his hospitality, he built a hospital in which widows, aged men, orphans, and travellers were sure of finding shelter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLIND SCHOLAR.

LITTLE more than a week had passed; and Maud Clavering, seated by a window, towards the close of an afternoon in the first days of November, looked down into the narrow dirty street beneath, in the neighbourhood of Aldgate. A very murky afternoon it was, contrasting with that pleasant day only two weeks since which she had spent at Chelsea. The chancellor's house was indeed a species of fairy land to her, though it may be doubted if she did not regard Dame Alice as a grim fairy; she was, in fact, a sort of *bête noire* in her eyes.

The day was not cold, but it had rained ever since the morning, and, though not heavily, it was that persistent downpour which is far worse than a heavy storm for the time, for generally night sets in on such days as these, and the rain still pours down.

That narrow dark street looks more miserable than usual, and the oil lamps flicker faintly through the fog that now begins to rise.

Nor was the scene within the room much more cheery, though a bright gleam of fire-light occasionally lighted up its gloom and its dark oaken wainscot. The chamber was large and very scantily furnished. Only a portion of the floor was covered with matting. A large table stood in the centre; beneath one of the windows was a smaller one, on which stood sundry little matters appertaining to woman's work; an embroidery frame also was there; a few chairs and an ample and well stored bookcase completed the fur-

niture of the room, except an old settee, on which reclined a man who numbered some seventy years of age.

The father and daughter, for such these two persons were, had not spoken for some time. At length the former asked, in a querulous tone of voice, if the rain had ceased.

"No; it falls in one continuous stream. I fear me they will not come to-night. Indeed, it is more than one has any right to expect; but I have hoped as it were against hope," said Maud, still keeping her dreary watch.

"Light the lamp then, and read to me, child," said the old man: "where's the use of gazing down into the streets any longer, when you may rob time of a little of its dreariness?"

"Nay, have I not read the best part of this long day? Between working for a bare pittance and reading aloud, many hours have passed; father, do not deny me a *little* rest."

"I wish you had the talent of Margaret Roper. What a treasure would it then be to me! if thou couldest read me the classics in their native tongue I should not deem the loss of sight half so terrible. Oh that thou couldest lend me as it were thy eyes, to read my favourite authors an hour or two each day."

"Margaret is a gifted woman, and I am not," sighed the girl; "even the knowledge I *do* possess I owe to her. But remember, father, the chancellor hath ever been careful about the education of his children."

"Aye, very true; my friend hath had more means than Providence hath given me, albeit natural talent may always be increased if there be perseverance; and granting this, my daughter, and thou mightest have been as accomplished as the chancellor's, it misliketh me, Maud, to hear you throw the fault on me, whose poverty hath stood in the way."

If Ralph Clavering had had the use of his eyes, he would have observed the look of indignation with which his daughter regarded him as she replied: "There was no poverty, father, when I was younger; but you suffered me to grow up neglected and uncared for. So long as I was away from harm by my fingers being ever busy at that everlasting stupid needlework, it mattered little what became of me. Used you not, when you had your sight, to shut yourself up whole hours together, and forbid me to disturb you, and leave me with old Deborah, a serving maid, for my companion? Pardon me if I seem to speak angrily; but you my father no more resemble the chancellor in his careful education of his children than I do my dear friend Margaret in natural talent."

As she ceased speaking she regarded him with a look of bitter defiance. He replied:

"Well, well, alack a day, children are very ungrateful to the parents who have given up so much for them."

A bitter smile crossed her lips as he spoke; for a few moments there was silence, the tears were falling down her face; then the old man resumed: "I am left much alone here, and God knoweth solitude is hard to bear when one's sight hath gone."

"I do not often leave you. Consider, I pray you, my youth and health. Am I *never* to leave, even for a day, these wretched rooms?"

"*I* am left for many days. Youth, nonsense! then have you time to look forward to. As to health, then what of mine? I have to bear the confinement. Did you not spend the best part of two days and a night at Chelsea last week? and you will go again before long, I know you will. I have been reckoning up how you were away from me last week, alack, alack!" And here the old man raised his

sightless orbs as if in deprecation of what he considered the selfishness of his child. "*Eleven* times this year have you been to Chelsea, and on nearly every occasion you have slept out at night; by my troth, is it not enough for you to see Mistress Roper when she is kind enough to come here, without forsaking your blind father in this fashion?"

"Is not Deborah here to take care of you? Surely you would not forbid my going once a month to Chelsea. You know well, my father, it is the only pleasure I enjoy."

"Beshrew me, if it did not enter my poor mind that it was a thing resolved upon, to be in fact a monthly matter. I cannot bear it, Maud; I thought better things of thee than that thou shouldest leave me time after time alone like this, and—"

At that moment the selfish tirade of the blind man was stopped by an exclamation on the part of his daughter. She had heard the sound of coach wheels, and, clapping her hands together in an ecstasy of delight, she exclaimed:

"They are come, they are come; our Lady be thanked."

Then taking a small hand-lamp from the table, she hastily lighted it, and tripping down the old creaking staircase, she gave admission to her only and her true friends, the chancellor and Bishop Fisher.

"In tears! in tears!" murmured the latter as he kindly greeted her. "Nay, I fear me you are not conning the lesson I gave you; it seemeth to me that never had maiden a finer opportunity of reaping a rich reward than Providence hath bestowed. But how fares it with *him?*" he added, as returning the fatherly salute of the good chancellor, Maud led the way.

"He is but poorly, and has scolded me heartily but now for the happy days at Chelsea last week; he would have me always with him, you know, my lord."

"And he will not be always with *you*, my child; so bear the cross with patience. Mine old friend, Ralph Clavering," said the bishop, pausing to take breath as he reached the top of the staircase and addressed himself to the chancellor, "numbereth as many years as mine. He is turned of seventy or thereabouts; what wonder that bowed down with age, and the outer world long since darkened by his loss of sight, what wonder that he covets the presence of the only thing on earth he has to love and cling to, his only child? I bid her be patient; the sands of life are running out. I know all she has to suffer, and I say when he has gone the sweetest moments of her life will be those in which she remembers the past, if she be dutiful now."

Then opening the door of the room, Maud ushered in the two friends. The blind man had risen from his seat, and groping forward he tried to kneel for the blessing of Fisher, then warmly thanked them both for coming to his poor home, and congratulated Sir Thomas on his accession to the chancellorship.

"An honour, doubtless, my friend; but one that will bring its own cares with it," was the reply. "I trow I shall miss the loss of many a quiet hour with my books and my family."

"You have a blessing of which I have been long deprived. Only but now have I reproached Maud with her want of diligence in the learning of languages; alack, how much lighter would my affliction appear to me were she, like Mistress Roper, able to read aloud to me those glorious emanations of the poets of Greece and Rome in their native tongues. How much of comfort in my pitiable condition do I lose by reason of my poor child's limited stock of knowledge!"

"Nay, but, Clavering," interposed the bishop during

Maud's absence from the room, "Mistress Roper hath talent granted but to few; moreover, gifted as she is, she hath had advantages far beyond those of the good daughter Heaven hath seen fit to give thee; and it seemeth not meet that Maud be disparaged. She is a dutiful child, and will not forsake thee."

"At present mayhap not; but Deborah tells me this Sir Arthur Sedley, whom she hath met at Chelsea, hath stolen her from me in some wise. She describes him as a gaudy popinjay of a fellow, who will not be likely to make her a good mate. It is my opinion, my lord bishop, that the young eftsoon forget the gratitude and duty they owe their parents, and are in too great haste to hurry from the nest which hath sheltered them."

Whilst the old man was speaking, the chancellor's keen grey eyes wandered over the desolate apartment, and the heart which was always full to overflowing with love for his children had little sympathy with that querulous sufferer but rather with the unfortunate young damsel who owned him for her father; for Sir Thomas and the bishop were both aware that in the early part of his life he had neglected fine opportunities of making his fortune in the world, and that Dame Alice's quaint phrase of "making goslings in the ashes" might with great truth be applied to him.

Disgust at his callous selfish character would indeed long since have terminated their friendship, and turned against him the heart of the good chancellor as well as the bishop, but for his helpless state and the friendless condition of his daughter.

As it was they did the best they could, and his little establishment was almost entirely kept together by Sir Thomas More's benevolence, and occasional gifts from the bishop,

which Clavering was nothing loath to accept, for every trace of gentlemanly and delicate feeling had long since parted company with the broken-down scholar.

They strove to correct too the asperities of his temper, whilst at the same time they encouraged the daughter by representing to her that suffering rather than selfishness was the real cause of his querulous and fretful disposition. In a few moments Maud again appeared, followed by an old woman bearing a small tray covered with a white cloth, on which were a few confections of her own making, some hot spiced wine, and white bread.

Maud esteemed their visits as a high honour, but nevertheless there was a drawback to the happiness they would otherwise have afforded her; for her cheek would mantle with shame for him whom she would fain have honoured above every human being, as he would make the most to the only friends he had on earth of any little hardship which notwithstanding their benevolence he might still have to suffer.

"This spiced wine is very good, bought with your own money, my lord chancellor. How much is there left of it, Maud? We have used it carefully, my lords; I get cold o' nights, and rest better after I have had my evening draught."

Then Sir Thomas would place a parting gift in his hand, while both he and the bishop would pity the daughter whose countenance would betray what she felt, knowing as she did that, could he but have patience, the bounteous gift would be bestowed without any such coarse reminders.

Then when the moment of departure came, for the visit was a short one, Sir Thomas said: "Touching that matter of the wine, Clavering, I have some at Chelsea better than Maud can procure, and my Meg shall send you a small

hamper full. Farewell, and keep up your spirits. Providence has darkened all around you, it is true; perhaps you may become more interiorly enlightened in proportion; any way," he whispered, "you have a good daughter whose days are in a manner darkened to enlighten yours."

The blind scholar made a grimace as if he little relished the rebuke these words implied; and Sir Thomas followed the bishop and Maud down the staircase, she making her adieus at the door. Then she paused for a few moments, saying to herself:

"How pitiable is his state! how delicacy and self-respect and every proper feeling seem to have abandoned him! I marvel if it be one of the properties of poverty to render people base and contemptible."

Then she returned to the sitting-room. Her father had spread out the money on the table; he had counted the pieces, one by one, as he laid them in a row.

"Maud," he said, "are these pieces gold or silver? they are gold, I opine."

"Yes, father, you have made a true guess," said the girl, with a something of contempt. Had Ralph Clavering been able to see, quarrels would often have occurred.

"Well then, the lord chancellor hath bestowed upon us ten golden pieces; how long think you that is to last?"

"I cannot tell you, father," and Maud's eyes were now full of tears; "he is very good, and so is Mistress Roper; we shall have nothing to expend in wine out of this generous gift."

"I shall give you enough for a new kirtle, Maud; and in return it will be your bounden duty to read to me more than usual."

"I want no new kirtle, I am only too sore distraught how to make so kind a gift to last the longest. It shames

me that we should so often trespass on the bounty of the bishop and the chancellor."

"Then beshrew me, thou silly wench, if it shameth *me*. I wot Sir Thomas is a good friend and true. He hath known me long years past. He hath a *mind* to give, God hath so disposed his heart; and, alack, he can find none whose deserts are greater than mine own. He and the bishop know it full well; they can find none more visited with calamity; and as the chancellor is a right pious gentleman, he knows that God, who hath given to him abundantly, and hath now raised him to so high a post, will assuredly reward him; so why I should shame to accept his bounty is to me a marvel."

Maud made no reply; all sense of proper feeling and of delicacy was deadened in her father's heart. No words of hers could make him view things in the light in which she regarded them.

CHAPTER VII.

HANS HOLBEIN.

THE winter had set in with unusual severity, the bosom of Father Thames was frozen over, hoar frost sparkled like glittering diamonds on the branches of the trees, a sharp easterly wind swept around the house, and as the chancellor's family gathered around the spacious wood fire they congratulated themselves that none of the household were exposed to the fury of this keen wind beneath which the doors and window frames creaked and rattled.

There was only one person present beyond the chancellor's immediate family, and that was Mistress Eleanor Thornhill.

Not a subject broached that evening had seemed to square with the opinions of their guest; the manner in which she spoke of her royal mistress had been cold and disrespectful; she was also on the eve of joining the men of the new learning, but of this her friends at Chelsea were ignorant.

It was drawing towards the hour at which the family prepared to retire for the night, when suddenly footsteps were heard on the crisp snow without, and the sound of the house bell announced a visitor, and a servant entering the room told Sir Thomas that a stranger requested to speak with him.

The chancellor made his way across the hall to a private room to which strangers were admitted, and there beheld a man whose appearance betokened extreme poverty. He was pinched, nay almost frozen, with cold, emaciated by

want, and tottering forwards; as Sir Thomas drew near he extended to him a letter of introduction from his friend Erasmus, who relied on the generosity of Sir Thomas to shield this man from misery and despair.

And he who stood before the chancellor in the extreme of want was none other than that gifted artist, Hans Holbein. More read the letter attentively, and extended his hand, saying:

"My good friend, to-night you shall make one of my numerous family. I will order a room to be prepared for you at once."

The poor painter overwhelmed him with thanks, which the good chancellor disclaimed. Food, warmth, and a good bed were at once prepared, and early on the morrow Sir Thomas begged him to accept both board and lodging in a house where, if his meals were frugal, they would at least be abundant, and in which he who boarded would incur no expense.

The artist asked no more; nothing would have been wanting to ensure his happiness if, from the window of his bedroom at Chelsea, he could have beheld, as at Basle, the blue mountains of the Jura and the clear waters of the Rhine.

But, to make amends for his loss, he found in the little village of Chelsea heads fit for angels, which proved a fortune to some of his pieces. The young girls of the family of his host, who were constantly before his eyes, bore no resemblance to the peasant maids with heavy and expressionless countenances, whom hitherto he had considered as types of female beauty.

As may well be supposed, acts of benevolence such as these did not fail to bring upon More a lecture from his wife.

"What next, Sir Thomas?" said she as soon as their

stranger guest had left the room on the previous evening. "Are we come to such a pass as this, that even strolling vagrants are to find board and lodging in your own house? I trow we shall be turned adrift ourselves one of these days, because through giving so much to others, as I have so often told you, there will be nothing left for your own household."

"Tut, tut, dame!" was the mild answer, "that poor man will soon be able to work for himself; grudge him not a little meat and drink, the lodging in the garret will cost us nought, you know."

"Twittle, twattle, my good man!" she replied, "I see no use in brushes and paints and easels, and in all that useless gear. The man has starved in his own country, and starve he would here, were you not befooled into keeping him. Scholars and authors and painters, and such like, are always a useless set of people. Look at your friend, Ralph Clavering, there's another of your respectable beggars for you, with his hand always in your pocket, and his daughter ruffling it here at your table as if her father had enough and to spare; it was only a few weeks gone by that you sent them wine forsooth, and when like a good housewife I went but yesterday to count over my linen, I found Mistress Margaret had been making acquaintance with the linen press. It is beyond my patience to bear it. No less than two good sound pairs of sheets had she sent to that lazy broken-down fellow, that scholar as you call him."

"Good wife," said Sir Thomas, "you would not have had Margaret give away old sheets, would you? Methinks, she has done you a service, for if the sheets had been old you would not have used them, but being good you will have to supply their place with new ones."

"You will never change till you end by making beggars

of us all; 'tis ever the same with you, give, give, give, till you'll bring us to poverty. I watched you yesterday, Sir Thomas, though you little thought it; I watched you as you turned down Maiden Lane, just opposite those small cottages. I guessed then why you had asked me for small money; there you were, giving away, right and left, never discerning discreetly as you ought to do whom you help; and I said then what I say now, you'll bring us into sore mishaps before there is an end on't."

As Dame Alice spoke thus, she hurried from the room; her anger and indignation she was unable to control.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VISIT TO ALDGATE.

"DEAR Mistress Roper," said Eleanor one morning as they sat at breakfast, "I much wish to help that unfortunate Maud, out of the abundance it hath pleased Heaven to give me. Suffer me to have a share in your good works; and so that I may begin at once, tell me where she liveth. I will see her after I leave you this morning."

"I cannot furnish you with her direction," said Margaret; "but doubtless my father can. I could find my way thither, but could not direct you. I am so glad, Eleanor, to find you desirous of aiding that unfortunate girl, and her poor blind father."

"Her *poor* father indeed!" chimed in Dame Alice; "rather say, her improvident father, making ducks and geese of his money as he has done, making goslings out of ashes, as I always say of such fools. Keep your money in your pocket, Mistress Thornhill; let him have none of it."

"But, mother, he is blind and helpless," chimed in a bevy of young women in the same breath; "and remember how industrious Maud is."

"And that she cannot help her father's follies," said More's adopted daughter, formerly Margaret Giggs, now Mistress Clement.

"Fie, dame; alack, alack!" said the chancellor. "Shall I never succeed in giving thee a gentler and more tender heart? What the wenches all say is true: he is blind and helpless; and a sore calamity it is to lose one's precious

sight. So turn a deaf ear to my wife, Mistress Thornhill; she rates away, and knoweth not nor careth what scandal she gives. Give as much as thou canst spare of thy worldly wealth, and God's blessing will light upon thy head. Thou wilt find poor Ralph Clavering and his fair daughter in a large old house to the left of Swan Street, in Aldgate, the last house but one. Write it down on a slip of paper, dearest Meg, lest perchance thy friend forget it."

Innocent Meg and her gentle sisters, with their honest-hearted father, little dreamed the purpose for which Mistress Thornhill wanted the address of Ralph Clavering.

With not one of the daughters of More was the haughty Eleanor a favourite; but Margaret, quick and discerning as she certainly was, had an impression that her intentions were at variance with her words. Thus when a few hours later she bade her hospitable entertainers farewell, they, with this exception, all united in concurring that there was much good at bottom of a character which they had hitherto considered utterly worldly and selfish.

"Remain with us till the afternoon, when I will myself accompany you," Elizabeth had said ere she bade her adieu; "or defer your journey till to-morrow, when Margaret will be at liberty. You are almost a stranger to Maud, as well as to the spot where she dwelleth."

But no; their endeavours were fruitless. Eleanor's heart seemed suddenly to have opened to a strong impulse of charity; and she had gaily whispered, as she lightly pressed her lips on those of each of More's brave daughters:—

"No, I will do mine errand alone; and it had best be done quickly."

And so about mid-day, as Maud bent over the embroidery frame, having first read aloud to her blind father, thinking

how dreary and monotonous was her life, how uncheered save for those monthly visits to Chelsea, of which he would fain deprive her, she heard the house-bell ring, and a few moments later Deborah entered the room, telling her that a lady wished to see her.

It was a very unusual thing for any one to call at the desolate old house in Aldgate. She could think of no lady who would honour her with a visit save dear Margaret Roper or one of her gentle sisters; but Deborah was very positive in her assertion that the lady in question was quite a stranger, and had never called at the house before.

"Some one recommended by darling Margaret," thought Maud, as her eye fell on the embroidery frame, quite unable to assign any other reason why a fine dame such as Deborah had described should call upon *her*, and she bade the old woman show the visitor into the room at once.

At the first glance when Mistress Thornhill entered the room Maud did not recognise her, for she had met her but once at Chelsea. The appearance of the visitor arrayed in costly garments, her kirtle of violet satin richly furred, and her fine French hood, accorded ill with the meanness of the room, its untapestried walls, its sordid furniture.

"Methinks you do not remember me, Maud Clavering," were the first words Eleanor spoke; "we have met however at the house of the lord chancellor, to whom I am beholden for your address. I have a great wish to know you better."

Eleanor accompanied these words with one of her most winning smiles, and Maud murmured her grateful acknowledgments; still there was a nameless something about her visitor, an aspic-like glitter in the bold black eye, that impressed the girl with an uncontrollable fear.

"Your father, I opine?" said Eleanor, glancing at the blind man; "I have heard how heavily he is afflicted, and how loving and tender a daughter Mistress Maud maketh him."

Even as she uttered these words Maud fancied the expression of her countenance had something repulsive in it,—it was so hard, so at variance with her otherwise gentle words.

"Indeed," she continued after a pause, "he doth possess a jewel in the child who labours for him by such work as this; for work of women's hands, as all the world doth know, is ever poorly paid. And so you really did not remember me?" said she, taking up and closely examining the scarf, its flowers wrought with gold and gaily coloured silks, over which Maud had bent for many a weary day. "Why, answer me, maiden; hast thou never heard thy father speak of Sir John Thornhill or his daughter?"

Scarcely conscious what he did,—for he was sleeping when Eleanor arrived, and his sleep was only broken as she had crossed the room,—the old man had risen hastily as the lady drew near the table, against which the settee was placed on which he reclined.

"Sir John Thornhill! who speaks of him?" he exclaimed. "Can the grave yield up its dead? Maud, Maud, whom hast thou here?"

As Clavering spoke, a look of intense anguish passed over his features; with one hand he grasped the table, the other he pressed heavily on the shoulder of his child.

Maud shrunk back appalled, struck with surprise and terror at his piteous look of entreaty and horror, and the expression of hatred which disfigured the beautiful face of Mistress Thornhill, as, throwing the scarf aside with a gesture of contempt, the blandness of her manner was sud-

denly changed to unqualified disdain and rage as she exclaimed:

"Yes; it is I, the daughter of Sir John Thornhill, who did pronounce his name. Mayhap there is reason why you should dread to hear it. Shall I awaken your memory? Shall—"

Clavering turned his sightless orbs upon her.

"I knew once a Sir John Thornhill; but it cannot be, no it cannot be he."

"Listen, old man," exclaimed Eleanor; and her voice rang loudly through the desolate chamber. "My father was a friend of the king's grace; he was desperately wounded by a cowardly assassin."

"But, lady, he whom I once knew cannot be the same. A wicked man he was, a poor man too; and thy father is rich, as I have heard; and then he died, let me see, many years ago this Candlemas;" and as he spoke, he groped his way back to his seat, his face deadly pale. He sat him down; a low groan escaped him; he fell forwards; and when Maud raised him, she found him insensible. Seizing a small bell, she rang quickly for Deborah; and yet supporting her father, exclaimed, in tones of piteous entreaty:

"Good Mistress Thornhill, I pray thee tell me, hast thou or thine ever known my father? He has suffered much; but, alas! I have never seen him in so sad a plight before;" and her tears fell fast on the white upraised face which she covered with her kisses.

"Sweet Mistress Maud, thy father is but in a swoon; be not so afflicted. I will leave thee ere he recovereth; meanwhile I pledge you my word you shall hear from me again full soon; of that you may both be certain."

Maud could not mistake the contemptuous tone of voice

or the baleful glitter in the eye, or be other than certain that this woman had a secret in her keeping in which one most dear to her was involved.

"Mistress Thornhill," said she; "why seek to intrude on the sorrows of my unfortunate father and myself? Thy pity was but feigned, thy pretended sympathy with me a trick, a snare, a deceit, whereby thou hast deceived dear Margaret and the lord chancellor. I bid thee leave me without delay."

"Fair-faced minion, I might almost feel disposed to grant thee the pity rejected so disdainfully; but no, thou art *his* child, and hast presumed to think of espousing Sedley, whose bride you shall never be. But remember, Mistress Maud, when we next meet you shall crave the sympathy you now so scornfully reject."

As Eleanor spoke these words she hastened from the room, at the moment Deborah entered, whom Maud despatched for restoratives. At length Clavering was restored to consciousness; his first words were of Eleanor.

"Am I distraught, child, or was one Mistress Thornhill here?"

"Yes, father dear; but what knowest thou of her? She is a stranger to us; it could not be her coming that made you ill," continued Maud, wishful to extort the secret, if one there really were.

"Alack, alack, it was her coming that hath sorely shocked me. Long years have passed since a wrong was wrought, but the wrong was punished with as dire a revenge. God knoweth remorse hath not been wanting, but though mine eyes are sightless my sense of hearing is acute. The tones of the human voice do show forth or manifest the temper of the mind; and thus when the woman pitied thee, my child, the voice itself seemed

pitiless, and cold, and hard, and I fear scant mercy shall we meet from her."

"But, father, you have done no man harm; what cause have we for fear?"

"My child, the blood and temper ofttimes are hot, and we commit crimes which we bewail in after years; but not all the tears that were ever shed, nor all the penances man can undergo, can bring back one whom we have slain."

"But, father, you have never taken life in any roystering brawl; you, a man of letters, your best companions your most treasured books. No man liveth whose life can have been more blamelessly spent, there can be no passage in it like that thou hast described. The name of Thornhill is not uncommon; she may have some grievance and have mistaken the wrong doer. As for myself, I opine I know the cause of her otherwise unmeaning fury. Sir Arthur Sedley hath asked my hand in marriage; her last words were a fierce and foolish threat that that should never be."

"Alack, sweet Maud; a direful chance hath brought her here," was the reply; and still whatever she could urge he answered with a prognostic of evil, so that she became fully alive to the conviction that some woful secret of his early life, in which this woman or her father had a fatal share, lay locked within his breast.

"A grief disclosed is more than half assuaged; I pray thee tell me, father, what that grief may be:" and Maud looked down as lovingly in his face as if his sightless eyes could read in her troubled countenance the grief she felt for him.

"Not now, not now, my child. Alack, alack, why should I still more sadden thy life? hast thou not enough to suffer?"

"I ask but to share thy grief, my father; perchance I may find a remedy."

"Well, well, another time, not now; or—well, it shall be as you wish. But leave me awhile to collect my thoughts; to-night, Maud, I will tell you the story of my life."

CHAPTER IX.

IN FAVOUR WITH THE KING.

HANS HOLBEIN had been very long a resident at Chelsea before he ingratiated himself into the good-will of *one* of the chancellor's family; but at last Dame Alice softened towards him, especially after he had portrayed her features, so faithfully, as she was wont to aver.

The crafty Hans, however, wishful to please a hostess who had it in her power to render his life very uncomfortable, had carefully softened down the sharper lines in her countenance, which it was commonly declared resulted from her shrewish temper. This was in fact the chancellor's own opinion; indulging in a hearty laugh when he beheld it for the first time, he vowed if it was the likeness of Dame Alice it was a very flattering one, to say the least, and that his guest could not have hit upon a surer method of obtaining a large stock of kindness from Lady More than by an appeal to her vanity.

It was not until some time after Sir Thomas More's elevation that he ceased to bask in the monarch's favour, and it not unfrequently happened that the monarch himself honoured the philosopher's house at Chelsea with a visit, charmed with his conversation, and perhaps still more fascinated by the beauty of his daughters with whom he occasionally passed several hours.

But neither the smiles of royalty, the cares of his office, or the number of noble friends who flocked around him, could in any way alter the even tenour of his life.

An advocate, judge, and chancellor, yet he never for one

day failed to hear mass, and was accustomed to serve the priest at the altar, whereat, say his chroniclers, some of his noble friends were not a little astonished.

One morning the Duke of Norfolk, by the king's desire, dropped in at the parish church, when on his way to his friend's house. To his great surprise he beheld him occupying a stall in the choir, singing before an anthem-book, clad in a surplice. Mass ended, the duke awaited the coming of the chancellor without the church, and taking him by the arm exclaimed:

"'Sdeath, my lord chancellor. What a parish clerk! what a parish clerk! You dishonour the king and his office."

On this occasion, when the chancellor returned home in company with the duke, he found the king already there, with his daughters around him; he had come down privately in his barge, bidding his grace, should he meet Sir Thomas at the church, keep him in ignorance of his visit, so that he might have the satisfaction of taking him by surprise.

Henry was still in the prime of manly beauty; he was extremely fair complexioned; as yet his form, afterwards so corpulent, was well proportioned, and his beard and hair were of a golden tint.

The affability of his manners caused the chancellor's fair daughters to feel quite at their ease with him when he honoured Chelsea with a visit, and they had been amusing him intensely by their account of the Swiss painter whom their father had long provided with board and lodging till such times as he should be able to support himself.

During dinner the king's eyes were fixed on a picture which Holbein had just finished, and hung on the wall of the dining room; it represented a landscape of extreme beauty, and Henry expressed his astonishment at the genius

manifested by the artist, exclaiming to More: "In such a piece we behold the work of a master; by my faith I'll see the fellow, and help him in some fashion."

Fortunate Hans! he was so overcome with joy on being told that he was bidden to the presence of the king that he was almost beside himself, and having taken some time to array himself in a portion of the wardrobe given to him by John More, the chancellor's son, he appeared before the mighty monarch, overcome with awe, and bearing with him sundry small portraits which he had taken of several members of Sir Thomas More's family, and which faithfully delineated the features of the younger ladies, who, amiable as they were lovely, had offered no incentive to the cunning artist to touch them up with a little flattery, as had been the case when he was portraying the hard features of Dame Alice.

"'Sdeath, fellow, you know well how to handle a brush," said the king; "I engage you, Hans, to paint me a picture: let me see you at the palace this evening."

"In my most humble wise I thank you, sire, for your goodness to the most devoted of your servants," said Hans; "it was owing to my lord chancellor that I was snatched from the lowest depths of human misery when he took me in; and you, sire, have raised me far above the summit of my earthly hopes, by giving me work."

That very evening then the painter presented himself before the king and received an order; he indeed owed much to his host, as in the end he was nominated painter to the king.

On the day on which More took possession of the chancellor's seat, he swore, according to the usual formula, to render unto all men good and speedy justice without exception of persons. He never considered the rank or

circumstances of individuals. Whoever presented himself to lodge a complaint was welcome, and as the throng of those who considered themselves oppressed increased from day to day, he established the hearing of causes in the evening, when, come who would, More descending from his seat would listen to them whilst he walked about, and reconcile them without waiting the day on which the case might be called. The poorer and meaner the suppliant, the more attentively did he listen to his cause, and try and despatch his case with the greatest speed; in fact, even the members of his own family scarcely liked his manner of executing justice.

"I shall expostulate with him on the subject," said his son-in-law Dancy to a friend; and he did it in this fashion.

"When Cardinal Wolsey was chancellor, Sir Thomas, not only those who were of the inner chamber, but even his doorkeepers, had large gains added to their incomes through him. Surely, since I have married one of your daughters, I have reason to look for something extra; but really you are so ready to work for every poor man, and leave no avenue open, that I can get no gain at all, I feel quite discouraged."

"Why, son Dancy, I do you no wrong in this."

"There are many, Sir Thomas, who for kindred's sake, or for profit, or for friendship, would be glad if I could introduce them to you; but if I were to take anything from them I should be doing them a great wrong, as by the way you act they may freely lay their cases before you of themselves. It may be very praiseworthy in you, sir, but it is mighty unprofitable to me."

"I am glad to find your conscience so scrupulous, son; but remember there are many other ways by which I may aid you or your friend. I will give him a few words, or may help by letters; and if a cause depends before me, and

you speak to me on the subject, I will hear him before some other person; or if some particular cause happen to be none of the best, I will try and see if I can get it arranged by arbitration. But of one thing rest assured, that if the party before me call for justice, then though my father whom I love dearly were on the one side and the devil whom I hate intensely were on the other, and his cause were just, the devil himself should have justice done to him by me."

The announcement was not pleasing to Dancy, who had hoped to be favoured in consequence of his relationship to More.

When the king bestowed the great seal on Sir Thomas More, he had hoped by so doing to bring him over to espouse the cause of his divorce, and on this day (some time after More had entered into office) on which he had jested and conversed with his youthful daughters with the affability of an intimate friend, and tempted their father with honeyed and flattering words, leaning familiarly on his arm as together they walked beneath the shade of the trees on the banks of the river, or again in friendly converse at the dinner table and over the cup of wine, he hoped gradually to wean away the repugnance of More to his desire to put away the queen. But More still pleaded his insufficient knowledge of theology as an excuse for withholding his opinion as to whether the king's marriage was or was not invalid.

"Beshrew me, More," angrily replied the king, pushing his empty cup aside and starting from the table, "your over-scrupulous objections annoy and chafe me; I find you hard to manage on this point. My conscience is a vexed one; it tells me this marriage with my brother's widow must sooner or later be dissolved."

Sir Thomas made no further reply, but in company with the Duke of Norfolk, who was in attendance on the king together with the gay knight, Sir Arthur Sedley, he escorted the irate monarch to the water's edge, where his barge was in waiting.

There was no mistaking the angry light in the king's blue eye as he bade farewell to the chancellor, who walked sadly away, not towards the house, or into the garden whence the merry voices of his children fell upon his ears, but beneath the overhanging branches of the trees which screened him from their sight he wandered on, wrapped in his own sad reveries, seeing perchance with the spirit of prophecy by which he often appeared to be moved the awful future which was before him, when suddenly the sound of a footstep fell on his ear, and William Roper, the most attached of his sons-in-law, was the next moment at his side.

Not noticing the gloom on the countenance of the chancellor, the young man exclaimed:

"I cannot tell you how rejoiced I am, or how happy I feel, in beholding the evident attachment and affection of the king for you. I have never seen him walk arm in arm with any man, except Cardinal Wolsey, as I saw him do with you for nearly an hour to-day."

"Son William, I thank God," was the reply, "that I find his grace my very good lord indeed, and I believe he doth as singularly favour me as any other subject in the realm; nevertheless, I tell thee, son Roper, I have no cause to be proud of it, for if my head would win him a castle in France it would not fail to go."

Sir Thomas knew fast enough that the king's show of friendship was to answer his own turn, and that to be in constant favour with the king it was requisite to yield to his caprice.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF RALPH CLAVERING.

"NOW, my dear father, I claim the fulfilment of your promise." And Maud laid aside the book from which she had been reading, trimmed the lamp, and resumed her seat.

Child, you know not how sad a task you have imposed on me, but I have promised to tell you of my past life, and it seemeth good to me that my tale should fall from my own lips.

The only son of a wealthy merchant, I was heir to a handsome competency. At the same time my father chose that I should adopt a profession, so that I might have some legitimate calling as long as he lived. From early youth I had been an ardent lover of study; I embraced the legal profession, disliking it less than any other, resolved at his death to abandon it and live on my private means.

Year after year passed on, between the practice of my calling and the pleasures I derived from study, when I became enamoured of your mother, a young girl as good and virtuous as she was fair. An orphan from her infancy, she led a retired life with an aged aunt who had adopted her. I had a friend, who was in the habit of passing a portion of his time with me; I scarce know why, for his life and manner of conversation were much unlike my own. I allude to Sir John Thornhill.

I had obtained a lucrative post under the late minister, Wolsey; and my discharge of my new duties led me frequently into the presence of the king.

To Thornhill I eulogised the virtue and beauty of my intended bride. After the church had united us in the holy bonds of wedlock, I found that he had introduced himself to her aunt, had boasted of his superior rank and wealth, and had made her an offer of his hand. A year of wedded happiness passed swiftly away, and at the expiration of that time I engaged in the village of Greenwich a pleasant summer residence; it was then a place of much resort on account of the king's palace, the Honour of Greenwich being situated there.

I had seen little of Sir John after my union with your mother; we instinctively shrank from each other, the old bond of friendship which had formerly united us was broken.

The cottage which I rented was very near to the banks of the river; it was surrounded by a pleasant garden, the gate of which opened into the high road.

I mind me well the last month of my darling's life. The evening was drawing in, the close of a bright but intensely hot summer day; suddenly a light breeze sprang up, the heavens became darkened, a loud peal of thunder followed a vivid flash of lightning, heavy raindrops began to fall, and I perceived two gallants at the garden gate who requested shelter from the storm.

I at once went forward to admit the strangers, but as I approached I recognised in one of them none other than the king's grace, in the other mine erst old friend, Sir John Thornhill.

"The storm has burst before I could reach the palace, Clavering; I will gladly rest in this sylvan habitation till it has passed over," said the prince, hastening forwards, followed by Sir John, for the rain now fell thick and fast, and a tremendous peal of thunder rattled over our heads.

"Thou hast got a very Arcadia of a dwelling," said Sir

John, screened from the pitiless fury of the storm beneath the porch garlanded with roses and honeysuckle; and I fancied there was a cynical expression in his face as he added, "and I assure your majesty he has a veritable goddess for the mistress of his home."

"We must see this goddess, that I vow on my kingly honour," said the king, following me into the cottage.

I had hoped that Marion might have retired to her own room, and that the king's thoughts might take another turn, a presentiment of impending evil hovering over me. But no, my sweet Marion, bright in her innocence and beauty, had thrown herself on a couch to recover breath from the haste with which we had hurried home when overtaken by the storm. Alack, alack! as in the beginning, a serpent had again entered a garden of paradise, though the Eve he sought turned a deaf ear to her tempter.

She had heard footsteps, but was not aware that I was bringing others into the room. She arose, blushing and confused, bowed to Thornhill, whom she at once recognised, and gracefully knelt before the king, who instantly raised her, exclaiming: "By 'r Lady, Ralph Clavering, thou art a lucky dog, and hast possession of a peerless pearl wherewith to grace thy Arcadia. Why, this fair dame should be at the court in attendance on the queen, instead of being buried from the eyes of all save her selfish husband, in rustic simplicity."

"I pray thee, sire, believe me truly thankful," said your mother; "but I am all unskilled in courtly ways, I am unfit for aught save the humble simple life I lead."

"We will talk over the matter anon, fair mistress," replied the king; then turning to me he said: "Truly you are a lucky dog, Ralph, to have so well-favoured a woman for your wife; and," he continued in a lower tone, "Thornhill

has told me how you stole from him one whom he would fain have made his wife; now I have seen Mistress Clavering, I wonder not, sir, he owes you a grudge."

It cost me a wondrous effort, my child, to answer the king's grace with a show of outward calmness.

Meanwhile, the storm raged on with unabated fury, so that for upwards of four hours there was a just pretext for the stay of my visitors. Under other circumstances I should have deemed it a high honour for my poor house to be so favoured; as the case stood I had cause for grave fear, misliking the expression of Thornhill's countenance. But there was no help in the present hap of things, so I bid Marion desire the servant to spread the table with such refreshment as our humble home would furnish, although not meet for the king's use.

The king, my child, was then in the full zenith of manly beauty; his form was full of majesty, but was somewhat slender and well proportioned, and handsome enough did he look to win the heart of any woman who was not pure as my Marion. I can call his stately presence before me, Maud, as in doublet of dark blue velvet, with short cloak of the same, and his jewelled cap with its dainty ostrich feather, he stood at the garden gate, bidding us farewell after the storm had abated.

The bright rays of the sun had again shone forth, lighting up the distant towers of the palace, and the raindrops like clusters of diamonds gleamed on every shrub and flower; but it seemed to me as if the stately palace frowned down upon the quiet peacefulness of the humble cottage, and I felt instinctively that out of my great love jealousy might spring, even if it were not already at work; and my uneasiness was heightened by the peculiar expression of the king's handsome face, as with a kind of

mock courtesy he lingered, saying: "Thanks, Clavering, for thy hospitality, and the insight you have given me of the Arcadian simplicity of your home."

There was nothing in the words themselves, Maud, but the manner of their delivery, and the expression on his countenance unpleasant, yet undefinable, and I stood at the gate moodily watching the retreating forms of my visitors, till an angle in the road shut them from my sight; and I was about to return to the house, forgetful that my better angel in the presence of Marion stood beside me, until I felt the pressure of her warm hand upon my own, and looking in her upturned face I met her gaze fixed on mine, with a half-reproachful expression on her features. Together we returned to the house, but neither of us spoke a word.

We sat down as usual, in the recess of a bay window; the sun had set, and after a time the blue vault of heaven became studded with a galaxy of stars; everything spoke of peace, the late storm had cooled the air, and a light breeze swept through the open casement, bringing with it a sweet perfume from the flowering shrubs without.

It was one of those moments in which nature speaks to the heart of man. I had become strongly disquieted; but how could that loving one help what had happened? had she not, as far as she could, with respect and decency to the king's grace, shown a positive aversion to the acceptance of his offer? was *I* not acting a churlish part towards her?

At that moment she raised her face to mine, and I saw she was in tears. "Methinks this were but child's play," quoth she, "that having shrunk from the overtures of Sir John Thornhill in my maiden days, thou shouldst think he now has power to inspire me with one wayward

thought, or that, loving as thou knowest I do our peaceful, lowly life, I could ever wish to be a lady of the queen in yonder palace. Dark thoughts have come over you, my husband; but by the sweet purity of our dear Lady and her love for Joseph her spouse, I bid you drive away the temptation, forget the visit of the king's grace, and strong in our mutual love and faith let our hours glide by as before this meeting."

What could I say? my lips were sealed, save to vow that there never was a better wife than mine, that I had in truth harboured a fear lest now she should learn to look down upon her humble lot, and wish to break up the quiet peacefulness of our home in order to become a maid of honour to the queen; for, my child, I kept back the fear that paralysed me most, the unwelcome thought I harboured that between Sir John and the king some plan would be devised, which in some way, I knew not how, would mar our almost more than earthly happiness.

"Ah, foolish, foolish!" she said, "little trust methinks thou hast in me, if thou canst think the gauds and glitter of life would win me from my home."

"Marion, my wife, most pure and matchless, thou wert too good for me, too good for earth!" Here Clavering paused, and burying his face in his hands, Maud beheld that saddest of all sights, tears wrung from the eyes of old age.

"Father, dear father," she exclaimed, throwing her arms around his neck, "I blame myself much that I have awakened within thee this storm of sorrow. Cease I pray thee, I will hear no more. Alas, it is more than enough for me to know that some great sorrow robbed thee thus early of one whose love I never knew."

"It seemeth to me, Maud," continued Clavering, "a kind of fatality that one bearing the name of Thornhill should cross my path again; it seemeth as if some new tragedy would be worked out in retribution of an old wrong. Is it ever thus, my God, when man becometh the avenger of his own sufferings?" he added, as if to himself. Then he exclaimed: "I was sore against losing thee, Maud, for this gallant Sedley. Age and sorrow, aye and love too, have made me selfish. I have liked to think my Marion's spirit hovered near me in the person of the babe she left as a precious deposit entrusted to my care, and have feared much to lose thee; but that woman's threat recurs to me ever and again, and I have asked myself if the daughters did cross each other as their fathers did, what would be the fate of Maud?"

The golden hair of Maud swept her father's brow, her tears fell on his cheek; he could not see the sadness on the face of his child, but he heard the broken voice trying to stifle its emotion, as she said: "I would crush my love beneath my feet were it doomed to be unrequited; I would tend thee still, my father, and when thy eyes were closed I would seek a holy peace in the shelter of the cloister, and untrammelled by the fetters of an earthly love, my soul should aspire only to that which is eternal."

There was a pause for a few moments; the father was gathering strength to proceed; the daughter, aware some dire calamity was about to be disclosed, trembled with apprehension, whilst she inwardly prayed for fortitude should she be destined to be the victim of perfidy and deceit. The warning of Margaret Roper, a woman wise and discreet, seemed to recur to her as it had never done before.

"Turn a deaf ear to his protestations," she had said; "I mistake much if Sedley is worthy of the heart he has won."

Clavering thus resumed his story.

For some days I was a prey to the liveliest apprehensions, dreading I knew not what; but an innate consciousness had taken possession of my mind that between the admiration of the king on the one hand, and the ill-disguised malice of Sir John on the other, my hitherto happy abode near the Honour was no longer a fit resting-place for my beloved wife. I should not, however, have ventured to tell her that my mind was dwelling night and day on a removal, had she not herself suggested it.

One day I came home somewhat later than usual, and found her trembling and in tears. Sir John she said had called with a message from the king, again offering her a post near the queen's person; he had spoken lightly of myself, had provoked her by his affected pity that she, so beautiful, should have thrown herself away upon a mean citizen; and she concluded by begging me, as I valued our mutual happiness, to remove her at once to the metropolis.

We resolved then on vacating our hitherto happy home on the next day but one; the following day was to be spent by me in the city, making preparations for her return, and I hurried home at an earlier hour than usual, having left her alone with one female servant.

A painful foreboding of evil had possessed my mind during the whole day; it increased in intensity as I drew nearer to my home. I was astonished to see Deborah at the garden gate, her eyes swollen as if she had been weeping; she hastened to inform me that soon after my departure Sir John had again presented himself before my wife, entrusted he said

with the commands of the king that she should at once repair to the Honour. Fearing she knew not what, continued Deborah, she remained at hand, and a shriek from her mistress as she beheld a carriage draw up to the house led her unbidden to enter the room. "The hand of Sir John grasped the shoulder of my mistress," said she, "and she fell back in a heavy swoon. From that deathlike swoon," continued the woman, "she indeed recovered, but only to be seized with a strong convulsion, during which Sir John Thornhill sprang into the carriage and drove quickly off."

The worst was yet to come; the wail of a new-born babe fell upon my ear, and Martha bid me follow her within the cottage, in which was no fond and happy wife and mother, but my dead Marion and her living child.

The last rays of the sun were fading away, as with an aching heart, torn also by the baleful passions of hatred and revenge, I stood beside the couch of my beloved.

Beautiful even in death, her features had settled down into that calm repose seen oftentimes after dissolution; no evidence of the hard struggle which had attended her dying moments rested now upon her lovely face.

And there I took my station, having first pressed a sorrowful kiss on the brow of the infant whose life she had purchased by her death.

Fear had acted powerfully on her tender frame, life without her was to me a cheerless void, and in a few short weeks my happiness was wrecked.

I laid the remains of my wife in the churchyard, and having committed you to the care of Deborah, who it was arranged between us should return to her parents' home, I made my way back to London, resolved to avenge my own cause on the author of my misery, rather than bring the

case to public trial on the matter of the proposed removal of my wife, assuming that if one more powerful than Sir John was concerned I should not obtain justice.

The gratification of my revenge was in my power sooner than I expected. I had caused nearly all my effects at the scene of my former happiness to be removed to London, and though fraught with sadness I could not resist the desire I felt once more to roam through the rooms in which she had lived, to breathe the air she had breathed.

Accordingly, late one evening I made my way to Greenwich; the evening was like unto that other evening a few weeks since; but ah, how changed the scene! rank weeds were already growing up amidst the flowers of the once neatly kept garden, the windows were closed, almost every chamber in the house was dismantled and desolate.

I opened the door and went in, I stood again within my dead wife's favourite sitting-room, and memory called back the fatal night on which the king and Sir John had visited our happy home, and brought with them misery and death.

I went through the house, even to the sleeping apartments, and whilst standing at one of the casements musing over bygone happiness, mingled with an insatiable thirst for vengeance, my attention was attracted by seeing two persons halt at the garden gate, confer together, and then look up attentively at the house.

I could almost hear the pulsations of my heart, my knees shook beneath me, for I knew that my hour had come; and instinctively I drew a little aside from the casement, hoping I had not attracted observation, the thick foliage of the eglantine and wild rose serving as a friendly screen.

After a few moments' pause they entered the garden; I distinctly recognised Thornhill; he was followed closely by

his friend, who suddenly turned back as they approached the porch. And oh, Maud, Maud, unless mine eyes wofully deceived me, that muffled form, closely enveloped in a short black cloak, and the cap drawn over the upper part of the face, was none other than that of one whom I well knew, but even at this long distance of time would dread to name.

Here Clavering paused, and Maud whispered a word in his ear, looking around her as if half in fear, while tears streamed down her pallid face.

Her father bowed assent, and then continued thus:—

Thornhill still lingered beneath the porch, his evil fortune bade him enter, I heard the slow tread of his foot again within the threshold of my house, I heard him cross the little hall, enter the parlour, and pause. Like a wolf aroused from its lair, or a bloodhound eager for its prey, I stole stealthily from the room, having first pulled off my shoes. I listened, he lingered still. I heard the voice of my false friend exclaim, "The house is dismantled then, everything clean gone, *he* will be sorely vexed." My tongue clove to the roof of my hot parched mouth, my brain seemed on fire, I thought but of one thing, revenge. "Vengeance is Mine and I will repay," even then seemed whispered in mine ear; I heeded not the inspiration of my better angel, but crept down the stairs.

Ah, it was *my* hour then, one moment. Listen, Maud; this tale hath been locked up within my breast full many a year, Bishop Fisher alone knew the ghastly truth, and the chancellor only a portion of it. I was now within the chamber; *he* was standing at the window, looking out into the garden, on the same spot on which he

had stood that fatal night, his black heart careless of the misery he had wrought. He was singing snatches of a song which *she* had ofttimes carolled to myself.

Like a tiger springing on its prey I caught him by the throat, with the other hand I clutched my sword. He would have shrieked, but my tight grasp allowed him to give utterance only to a stifled cry. Then came a close grapple, a hand to hand struggle. He knew me then. Ah, it was my turn. A cry for mercy broke forth from his craven lips: I laughed aloud. Vainly he sought to grasp his sword; when at last one hand was free in that ghastly struggle, he inflicted but slight flesh-wounds in return for my blind thrusts in the dark. At last I pinned him to the wall, my sword broke at the hilt, I had wounded him in the side, he sunk bleeding and senseless on the ground, the agony as of death in his upturned face. He was handsome once, where was his beauty now? Had I not struck the last fearful blow, how hideous would he be, for the fast deepening twilight showed me a deep gash across his face!

I feel you draw from me with a shudder, Maud, and well you may; but until now I thought myself a murderer, and no honourable duel was that, but an act of butchery and carnage within the four walls of a small room, with the odds sorely against my victim.

Alack, alack! I sicken as I tell the tale; no moan, no sigh, betokened life, and as the pale moonbeams rose and shone upon the ghastly face, I spurned my senseless enemy with my foot, and then hurried from the chamber, hastily changing my garments for others which I found in a closet in a room not yet dismantled; and I then departed, intending to return to London immediately.

I had closed the door of the now terrible cottage; and as I stood beneath the porch I became aware that persons

were advancing to the house. I crept stealthily away, and concealed myself behind a clump of trees, forming part of a shrubbery to the left of the cottage.

"The king requireth Sir John's presence immediately," said one of these persons, as they walked together up the pathway. "He came hither to look at this house, which is unoccupied, thinking of hiring it for his own use. Knock loudly, for the door has been shut."

"Dead men tell no tales," said I to myself; but I heard them approach the window, I saw them look through the casement. They would be sure to see the white moonlight lighting up the still whiter face, I knew that full well.

"What ho! the knight hath been foully murdered," I heard one of them say; "let us not enter, but go and call the watch."

They hurried away, and I waited only till they were out of sight; then I stole from the garden down a narrow lane, and was soon far on my way to London.

Should I linger till the sleuthhounds of the law were on my track, and would have life for life? No! he had been the aggressor. So that night I took no rest, but packed up the few valuables I possessed, left all necessary instructions as to the care of my child, and early the next morning set sail for France.

Once clear of England, a grim feeling of satisfaction possessed my soul. I had taken a deadly revenge, and hurled from my path my old enemy.

Through my aged father, who alone was entrusted with my secret, I kept myself informed as to your welfare, and often marvelled as to the share a certain exalted personage might have had in the ultimate death of my wife and my present misery, on account of the conviction I had that he it was who had come to the cottage with Thornhill having

become absolute certainty, on my overhearing the remark of those who had been sent to the cottage in quest of the knight, that he was expected at the Honour on that fatal night.

Thus many years passed away, and I felt no sorrow, my child, for the deadly revenge I had taken, until a great trial fell upon me. My aged father had died a few years after I had left London. For my sake, during the lingering illness which preceded his death, he had converted his property into money, which he had remitted to myself, and in the expenditure of which I was very extravagant.

At length I resolved not to be any longer a banished man, but decided on returning to England, and living quietly with you, my daughter, on means I still had in hand.

Now thou knowest, Maud, I draw near to the time wherein my life hath been well known to thee; how a sore affliction fell upon me, I being by a flash of lightning bereft of sight and otherwise sorely afflicted, so that partly through extravagance, chiefly when in France, and then by expenses of bodily illness, my money hath dwindled away, the priceless treasure of yourself, my child, being alone left to me. And yet, Maud, I have been but a selfish man, wishful to condemn thy bright young life to a cheerless solitude in order to light up the darkness of my own.

"My poor father, what a tale is this!" said Maud. "But we must needs thank God Thornhill still lives; but terror seizes me when I think of the visit of his daughter. Could he injure you now that twenty years have passed away?"

"Length of years matters not, should he be revengeful, Maud. My hand hath been imbrued in his blood. The law moreover would most surely say, I had intent to kill. Let us nerve ourselves up for endurance, child. I have

deemed my blindness a punishment from Heaven because I took vengeance upon myself. Nay, I never felt remorse till that I ceased to see; perchance I may have to suffer more."

"Shall we quit this place? I will accompany thee, father, wheresoe'er thou pleasest," said Maud.

"Twenty years since I had money, Maud; nay more, I had my sight, I had my health, and energy, and strength, neither of which I now possess. No, child, it cannot be; we can but wait and watch. To what avail was my revenge? It would not bring back to life my Marion. That dread attribute of God, His vengeance, I that night usurped, and now, in age and blindness and poverty, mine hour perchance hath come."

The fear which evidently filled the heart of Clavering came home with redoubled force to the most unhappy Maud. At last a gleam of hope shot across her mind.

"The chancellor! he does not know the past of thy life, my father?"

"But vaguely, child. He knows indeed that I fled from England, and also why, but not the aggravating circumstances I have named to thee. He thinks that I wounded a man in fair and honourable duel; not that I cut him down in the dark like a midnight assassin. He too is so inexorably just; were I his father, More would give a decision against me in his most pitiless tribunal of exactest justice."

Maud sighed; she knew her father's words were true. "Methinks you said the wise and saintly bishop knew the worst"; and she shuddered as she recalled what that worst had been.

"Yes, but only under the seal of the confessional. Since the day on which I made that sorrowful shrift of guilt I have never touched upon the past."

"Let me go to Margaret Roper on the morrow; she is a wise and tender woman, moreover she is discreet."

"I know not why," said Clavering, "but I tremble when I think of thy leaving me, even for a few hours. But be it so; to-morrow morn thou shalt go to Chelsea."

Then she assisted him to bed, and watched by him whilst he slept, noting that his slumber was not as that of old, but disturbed by frightful visions; and well she knew that in his sleeping moments the terrors of the past were present to his mind.

CHAPTER XI.

HOLMESWOOD GRANGE.

IN a large old red brick mansion, in the village of Croydon, there lived a widower whose household was composed of only three domestics, a faithful man servant and two women.

It was very rarely that any living being from the outer world crossed the threshold of Holmeswood Grange, but perhaps twice or at most thrice in the year a gaily attired fashionable lady from the court of Queen Katharine, arrayed in partlet of delicate material wrought with gold, and kirtle and gown of rich brocade, would pass a few weeks with its master.

And he of whom I speak was a man somewhat advanced in life, once the handsome Sir John Thornhill, but for more than twenty years his countenance has been almost repulsive in its ugliness.

It is early morning; a large wood fire blazes on the ample hearth, and a substantial breakfast is on the table, consisting of a venison pasty, a roast capon, with divers other comestibles, and a flagon of nut-brown ale.

On a settee beside the stove reclined the master of the house; he bore on the left temple the scar of a deep wound which had ultimately deprived him not only of the sight of the left eye, but also of the eye itself; the sword of the antagonist, glancing off, had injured the lower jaw, which became drawn on one side.

He could not walk without assistance, by reason of the all but mortal thrust he had received in the side. The blind and fearful revenge of Clavering had indeed made him

repulsive in appearance, partially lame, and in weakened health for the rest of his days.

Nevertheless there was one being who loved him truly and tenderly; this was Eleanor, his only child.

On the day after her visit to the desolate house in Aldgate she entered her father's chamber after the breakfast had been removed, kissed him affectionately, drew a small stool beside the settee, on which she seated herself and thus commenced:

"You were too ill, dear father, for me to talk to you on my arrival home last night; but I have glorious news, the revenge you have so long panted for is within our grasp, I have seen the monster Clavering."

Sir John started as if stung by an adder.

"Are you not deceived? Clavering tarried not in England after he maltreated me. I have never heard of him since, in spite of the efforts I have made."

"But I say to you, my beloved father, now is the hour of your triumph. Not only does Clavering live, but he is blind, and dependeth for his daily bread on his daughter's earnings."

"Blind and in poverty! enough, God hath punished him. And alack I too was guilty, and had played an evil part, consenting to do the bidding of another, eager through him to work my own revenge."

Eleanor looked in his face incredulously as if she had not heard aright. Then said she:

"But you have always told me that you thirsted for the day on which you could avenge that dire injury, for life to you is but a living death. The laws of England will redress your wrongs, you need not strike *him* in the dark. In a day or less you may, if so you please, place him in strict confinement, and later a heavy punishment will be decreed him."

"Trouble me not, my Eleanor; to God I leave the man. I was not sinless in the matter; let the past with all its horrors be forgotten."

"Nay, nay, I blush to see thee so unlike thine old self, my dearest father. Scarce seven summers had passed over my head when a sight met my eyes which I can ne'er forget: wanton at play as is a merry child, twining a wreath of flowers for my mother's hair, a thing of horror passed before my eyes, a pallid bleeding form; the white and ghastly face I could not recognize, and even after many weary months of tender care and skill combined had won you back to life, how you were changed! Alas, alas, all comeliness had vanished as you know. Lame, half blind, and sickly, the villain Clavering had rendered thee by his dreadful carnage. It broke my mother's heart, and I who love you have suffered much, to see *you* suffer. And now, *now* that we have him in our power, send him to prison straight, let his punishment commence this very day."

"Let your mind be as mine, my child; we'll cheat the law this once, and let him go."

As Sir John spoke he strove to raise himself, but the effort was useless, and only tended to excite his daughter's ire.

"Lame and disfigured, and your precious sight half gone, and yet so sanctified have you become, that you seek not to avenge your wrongs?"

"Nay, Eleanor, I pray thee trouble me no more, nor let the time pass by in vain contention, which was so dear to us of old."

But the beautiful woman arose, and angrily flung aside the hand she had caressed.

"Then, will you nill you, he shall *not* escape I say, if I myself devise the means to punish him for the past. *I* will

bring him to justice if you will not. Where is the spirit that fired you not six months since? How often have I heard you wish that but once more he might cross your path! And now when I have found him out, you speak as if you were some puling monk, and make parade of peace and forgiveness forsooth. It makes me sick to hear such speech as this."

"I will contend no longer with you, Eleanor. For long years I wished to taste revenge; then if now I covet it no longer, I forbid you to harass me again."

"You are resolved then, and so—"

What further comment Eleanor meant to make was stopped by the entrance of a servant, who informed her that a gentleman from the court desired to see her.

It was a knight of some thirty years of age who awaited her coming. He was effeminate in his appearance, fair, and tall of stature, handsome, and attired as became a gallant of the time; his doublet and cloak, with loose hanging sleeves, were of the newest cut and of rich material, furred and embroidered to the utmost extent the sumptuary laws allowed to a person holding only the rank of a simple knight; his hose, of gaily embroidered cloth, were fastened to his doublet by points or laces, with tags or aiglets of gold; and he was careful to wear his short furred cloak sashwise over his shoulder, so as not to conceal the fashion and elegance of his other garments. The waistcoat worn beneath his doublet had sleeves, and was made of crimson velvet, quilted with black silk, visible in consequence of his upper garments being slashed to the utmost extent fashion would allow.

A flush of pleasure mantled Eleanor's cheeks as she recognised Sir Arthur Sedley; and, after giving him a hearty welcome, she darted at once to the subject nearest her heart.

"It pleases me much to see you, for I sorely need advice and help."

"It will be deemed a high honour by me, Mistress Thornhill, to receive your commands and give you my poor advice."

"You have doubtless heard," said Eleanor, "that my father lives secluded from the whole world. I will now tell you why. He, once the intimate friend of his prince, felt himself bound to retire from the court, and pass his days, whilst yet in the prime of his life, in utter isolation from the world. Now listen: several years since a quarrel occurred betwixt my father and one much his superior in bodily strength; he was attacked at twilight by this dastard ruffian in a solitary cottage, wounded and maltreated. A little later he was found by an emissary of the king's grace, bleeding and senseless, the chamber like unto a shambles. With much skill and care he recovered after many weary months had passed away; but how? only to lead a living death. None whom he had known before would he behold, after that awful night; his once handsome face disfigured, the sight of one of his eyes for ever gone. A few days since I came to know that he who had been his worse than murderer, and of whom for many years all clue had been lost, was living in London, well content and pleasuring himself, whilst my beloved father, the victim of his foul cruelty, lingereth through a life of misery. My father dreadeth to be seen, from, it seemeth to me, a too great sensitiveness respecting his altered and disfigured countenance; and it seemeth to me this villain may yet escape, unless the king's grace cometh to hear the truth."

"Fair Mistress Thornhill, fear not," said the knight; "eftsoon I will lay the case before his grace. And so,

while Sir John has so long suffered, this varlet has escaped; perchance, betwixt us we may bring him to his just deserts; but his name, lady, his name? I must not go before the king but half informed."

"I will write the king, and you shall be the bearer of my letter, Sir Arthur; yet no," she added, speaking as if to herself, while a curious expression flitted across her features, "'tis as well you should know all; though then you may perchance be wishful to screen this dastard, for if report speak truly you love his daughter, one Maud Clavering."

To do Sir Arthur Sedley justice, he started, and his effeminate countenance betrayed that Eleanor's words had power to raise some emotion within his heart. Though deep-seated his attachment to Maud had never been, as he had some time since ascertained that her intimacy with the chancellor's family proved in no way the length of her father's purse, (inasmuch as Sir Thomas More excluded no one from his friendship merely for his poverty,) still he had renewed his professions of attachment whenever he had met Maud at Chelsea, and sought to obtain an interview with her father, under the impression that probably, through the intervention of Mistress Roper, the ever open-handed chancellor might probably be induced to dower his daughter's portionless friend. Cold and calculating in his nature, Sir Arthur had ingratiated himself with Maud, without caring to count the cost to herself should he break his faith with her; and when he first met her at the house of Sir Thomas he considered it as a warranty that she was not only well born but well circumstanced.

Margaret Roper, with her customary discretion and discernment of character, had read that of this man in its true light; and, in a conversation she had held with her

father when she had first perceived the unfortunate attachment of Maud, had stigmatized him as an insufferable, shallow-pated coxcomb.

The first ten years of Maud's life had been passed almost entirely under the simple guardianship of her nurse, now her household servant, Deborah; and from her care she was removed to that of a community of nuns, with whom she remained till her father's return to England.

Though their intercourse together had been at intervals, and had sometimes been broken off for weeks together, still the powerful mind of Margaret had exercised a vast influence for good over that of her friend, and to her she also owed much of her mental culture. Indeed, but for that influence, and a few feminine contrivances on the part of wary Mistress Roper, who of late manœuvred so as to prevent Sir Arthur meeting Maud at her father's house, the weaker character of the latter might have suffered considerably. As it was, Mistress Roper trusted to her own tact to nip the attachment in its bud, should the lapse of time show that her suspicions concerning the character and intentions of the knight were well founded.

But to return: these suspicions were too well founded; and yet the countenance of Maud seemed to rise reproachfully before him as he replied to Eleanor:

"It is true, *some* sort of an engagement hath subsisted between myself and the maiden; nathless, if it doth not stand with my honour on account of her father's misdeeds, why then—"

Here the coxcomb came to a pause, and the Eve who stood beside him, in the person of Mistress Eleanor, chimed in:

"If you desire to preserve that honour unstained, you will scarce wed with the daughter of Clavering.

Remember too, she is, like the chancellor, of the old faith; she hath not espoused the doctrines of the new learning, as it hath come to mine ears you have done. Moreover, there are surely damsels to be found, graced with as much or more of beauty than this Mistress Claver-ing, with wealth and honour combined, both of which she lacks."

"You speak truly, Mistress Eleanor; it is a matter meet for consideration. Meanwhile, I will fulfil your bidding without delay."

"Be careful then to inform the king's grace that my father, whose suffering state he knows right well, de-murreth about the prosecution of this man. Commend me unto him in all humility; and crave of his grace that he would take the matter in his royal hands. Moreover, Sir Arthur, I beg you will soon come again to Holmeswood; I shall be right glad to welcome you."

Making his adieus to the lady, the brainless fop departed, much elate with his mission, and caring little and thinking less of Maud than ever.

When Eleanor returned to her father's room he greeted her with a smile, and the remembrance of the conversation she had held with him seemed to have vanished from her mind. But she let fall that her visitor was one of the gentlemen ushers to the king, and a strange fear suddenly distressed Sir John.

Times had changed, years had blunted the resentment of the knight, and religion spoke to his heart in this the greatest epoch in his life. For it taught him to practise that most sublime of Christian lessons, the virtue of forgive-ness; and secondly, it gave him grace to remember and humbly to acknowledge the evil of which he had himself been guilty.

He pondered, however, over the violent temper exhibited by Mistress Eleanor before the arrival of Sir Arthur, and could not divest himself of the idea that she was taking steps to carry her threat into execution.

CHAPTER XII.

IN NEWGATE.

ON the day after Maud had listened to her father's story, she hastened to Chelsea, and with much grief, mingled with shame, she poured it into the ear of Mistress Roper.

With her usual discretion good Margaret would advance no opinion of her own, but she promised to confer with her father and her husband, and she bade Maud write to her immediately should she have anything to communicate before hearing from herself.

It is said that sometimes sure-footed justice limps by the way. Be that as it may, on this occasion she strode on her path at a wondrously quick pace; it must be remembered, however, that a powerful influence was to be set at work for the punishment of Ralph Clavering.

For a moment the king had paused, when the knight, who had executed his mission with the utmost diligence, denounced Ralph Clavering. Several years had elapsed since the occurrence, the knight had never again appeared at court, and the atrocity committed on the person of the latter had passed like a shadow from the memory of the king; and it was not until Sir Arthur had refreshed it, by relating one or two circumstances alluded to by Eleanor, particularly naming the cottage in which Sir John had received his wounds as being near the Honour at Greenwich, that he fairly remembered an affair which had caused much excitement at the time of its occurrence.

No breathing being, save Sir John, could tell whether the king had really had any hand in the molestation in-

flicted by the former on Marion Clavering; and although the knight admitted that Sir John declined to prosecute the man, the prince nevertheless flew into a violent passion, and with a tremendous oath swore that Clavering should suffer the heaviest penalty the law could inflict for his brutality, whether Sir John liked it or not.

And thus it happened that a few days later, when Maud and her father were seated together, they were alarmed by hearing a loud knocking at the door, followed by the sound of many voices, and the footsteps of several persons ascending the stairs; and ere they had time to express their thoughts in words, for each knew the fears of the other, the door of the room was opened, and he who seemed the chief in authority of some half-dozen men, approaching, exclaimed, reading from a paper which he held in his hand:

"Ralph Clavering, I arrest you on the king's warrant, for that you did several years since maliciously attack and feloniously assault, maltreat, and wound, with intent to kill or do other grievous bodily injury to, the person of Sir John Thornhill, knight."

As these words were uttered, the features of the blind man grew ghastly in their pallor: he groped about, then laid his hand on that of his daughter, and would have fallen had she not passed her arm around his waist and led him to a chair.

"He is old and blind," she said, "and this is such a shock. I pray you leave us both awhile, he will be better soon."

"Beshrew me if I do," said the elder of the party; "the law hath too long lost sight of the prisoner, for its officers to loose their hold now they have found him."

"To what place will my father be removed, I pray you

tell me, sir. Also, can I be suffered to accompany him? surely it will kill him if you take him hence alone."

"Of that he will have, like others, to run his chance, mistress; my warrant doth empower me to take the body of one Ralph Clavering, but saith not a word anent a daughter of the same, whereby we can but imagine that he must go alone, though we are not prepared to say the daughter of our prisoner may not visit him at times. He will be placed in Newgate."

"Maud, Maud, what is it this man doth say? Leave me not, my child. If I go alone we shall never meet again."

"I have no power to help you," she said, throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him. "All I can do is to think if there be any heart I can touch in this hour of distress; but, my father, to resist is useless, you must go with these men. Take this," she added, placing a purse with a few pieces of silver in it in the hand of the chief officer, "and if you have daughters, for the love of them be kind to him."

And the blind scholar arose, and laid his hand on Maud's head, begging God to bless and protect her, and then said he:

"Lead the way, sirs, I am stone blind and must be led, as you would lead a little child."

"Cheer up, mistress," whispered one of the men, "we 'll do him no harm. I will come to you in the evening, and bring you word when you may see him."

For her father's sake Maud restrained her sobs, and following the prisoner and his captors down the worm-eaten staircase, and along the gloomy stone hall, stood at the entrance with Deborah, who, wiping away her tears with the corner of her apron, exclaimed:

"Truly, the gentleman was not to go to Newgate on

foot, to be gazed at by the passers by." She had gone to fetch a chair for him, when she had found it was to take him away that those men had come.

"Faithful as of old, my good Deborah," said the blind man, lingering for a moment to press the hand of his trusty domestic, and once again to caress the unhappy Maud. Then he was led down the steps, and having seated himself in the chair, the bearers raised their burden and were speedily out of sight.

Meanwhile, Margaret Roper had not been idle; desirous to confer alone with her father and husband, she awaited their return home with much anxiety, and then revealed to them all that Maud had told her in her visit that morning. Margaret, herself the very soul of candour, sought not to veil the truth, but word for word repeated, as well as she could remember, the scene Maud had described of many years ago.

She observed them shudder when she alluded to the blind fury with which Clavering had attacked in the dark a man off his guard, and with small chance of being able to defend himself; Margaret knew how stern was her father's integrity and love of truth, and that her sole chance of inclining him to act as a friend of Clavering was in keeping nothing back.

And when she had told them all, "Bethink you, dear father and husband," said she, "if it would avail aught were I to go to Holmeswood? Perchance Sir John may not refuse to see me. Shall I adventure such a step for sweet charity's sake and for love of this poor child Maud? It may be that I may induce him to let this woful matter drop: it has been revived, I believe, by Eleanor herself, to whom, believing she was about to befriend Maud, we unsuspectingly gave her father's address."

"My sweet Meg, you shall do as you list in this matter. Shall she not, Roper? A woman's wit often wins the day when man would fail to gain his point; but is it not a chance if he will see you, Meg?"

"Aye," said Roper, "for his face is sore disfigured, so that he hath never mixed in public life. But go, Meg, an you will."

Margaret was not a woman to grow tardy over a good work; so the next morning she donned her gown and kirtle of black damask, and went her way to Holmeswood Grange.

It was early in the afternoon when she arrived; and desirous that her visit should be as private as possible, she descended from her coach at the entrance of a stately avenue of oak and chesnut, the branches of which interlacing each other formed a grove. Beyond and on either side stretched a widely extended park, the greensward of the hue of an emerald. The solitude of the place seemed perfect, and her heart beat with agitation, as with rapid steps she made way to the principal entrance of the Grange, and ascending the steps rang the house bell.

Her answer was just such an one as she expected. Sir John (said the porter) never received visitors, nor could exceptions be made to the rule he had for many years adopted."

"But speak me fair to your master," urged Margaret, "and tell him that Mistress Roper, the daughter of the lord chancellor, craveth a short audience of him." And as Margaret spoke she slipped into his willing hand a golden bribe, which in the days of the Tudors as in our own often was known to work wonders.

Then was she shown into a small antechamber opening out of the spacious hall, whilst Roger preferred her request.

She heard the knight refuse to see her, and then the

name of her father fell upon her ear, and after a short demur the man reappeared and signed to her to follow him.

Margaret had presence of mind enough to conceal the shock she felt when she found herself in the presence of Sir John.

"You will pardon my seeming want of courtesy, madam, in not coming forward more quickly to welcome you," he said; "but unhappily I have not the free use of my limbs. It is very rarely I suffer a stranger to visit me; but I could not deny the request of the lord chancellor's daughter; and now, fair Mistress Roper, may I pray you to state wherefore you have sought out one whom the world has almost forgotten? That same world lauds you for your virtue and your learning; thus I feel certain no vain curiosity hath brought you hither."

"You are right, Sir John. I have intruded myself upon you only to crave a favour at your hands, to obtain the grant of which I have earnestly begged to be admitted to your presence."

The knight looked perplexed, and hazarded the question had Mistress Roper wished to see him to beg relief for "any one in want."

She judged it best to come to the point at once, and overcoming the reluctance she felt at regarding the fearfully disfigured face, said Margaret:

"I have come, Sir John, to beg you to forgive an enemy, to show that mercy to a fellow-creature which is the highest attribute of God Himself; in short, to beg you to shield from justice and to pardon the man whose cruel hand wrought you so much suffering!"

"Is it of Clavering you speak, lady?" said Sir John, and an expression of pain passed over his face as he spoke. "Alack, Mistress Roper, on the faith of a Christ-

ian man, and the honour of a gentleman,—I have forgiven him; I too need to be forgiven, seeing I was the aggressor, and that indirectly it was by my means he lost his wife. I can say no more than that which I have already said to my daughter Eleanor, Ralph Clavering has nothing to fear at my hands."

"God will Himself reward you for your mercy, Sir John, and—"

But Margaret paused, for at that moment the door of the apartment was opened and Eleanor came forward. The two looked in amazement on each other, Margaret believing she was at the court, whilst Eleanor marvelled what cause could have led the former to seek her father. He was himself the first to speak.

"Mistress Roper hath desired to see me, Eleanor, concerning that matter we two were speaking of a few days since. She hath imagined I was about to punish Clavering his maltreatment of myself. I have told her I have forgiven him as I hope to be forgiven, he shall incur no harm from me."

Margaret had watched the ominous change in the features of Eleanor as her father spoke; the clear olive of her complexion became livid, the veins in her temple swelled, and her white shapely hand shook as it rested on the table. As soon as he had ceased to speak, she exclaimed in loud and angry tones:

"I pray you, Mistress Roper, interfere not concerning this matter, which affecteth only ourselves; my father may forgive, an it please him, all that he hath endured of savage wrong at the hands of the blind beggar, Clavering, whom my lord chancellor and my lord of Rochester choose to patronize; but *I* do not forgive him, nor does the king's grace. The monster for whom you have vainly

pleaded, Mistress Roper, is safe within the walls of Newgate, upon a warrant from the king himself."

"In Newgate!" exclaimed Margaret and Sir John, in the same breath, the latter adding:

"It is not possible, surely, Eleanor, that you have interfered; it was beyond your province!"

"Nay, nay, sir; it should not be beyond the province of any honourable woman to bring to justice those who are guilty, though some of my sex there be who duped by a false charity would let off vice. Not such an one am *I*; so, Mistress Roper, the trouble you have taken hath been thrown away. I have avenged my father's cause even against his will. Let off the guilty forsooth, when at last I have them in my power? Indeed, not so will I."

Disgusted at the malice exhibited in this harangue, veiled under a pretext of the necessity for punishing vice, Margaret, with the quiet dignity so peculiarly her own, turned to Sir John, saying:

"From what Mistress Eleanor tells us, sir, it would appear your benevolent intentions have been foiled, and that this blind and penitent Clavering is already in the hands of the law; but believe me, He who holdeth our poor hearts within His hands will grant you a reward, nevertheless, for your forgiveness."

Eleanor could scarce articulate for rage, her angry eyes looking daggers at the calm countenance of Margaret, as she said:

"Most sapient Mistress Roper," said she, "I have also executed another design which seemed good to me, but which will doubtless shock your notions of charity. I have exposed the character of the man Clavering to Sir Arthur Sedley, who had nearly fallen into the toils laid for him by his fair-faced daughter. He will *never*

espouse her, knowing the stock from whence she springs to be at once both poor and disgraceful."

"Poverty is no sin, Mistress Thornhill, and I for one shall not be sorry for Maud's sake, if Sir Arthur breaks his troth." And as Margaret spoke she extended her hand to Sir John, who vainly strove to stem the torrent of his daughter's wrath; but the effort was useless, and the poor knight realized the truth of the verse of Holy Writ which saith that "the venom of asps lieth under the tongue of an angry woman."

"Commend me to my lord chancellor and thy worthy husband, fair mistress," said he, as he bade her farewell; "and tell them that I sorely grieve that my daughter hath so ill understood her duty as to meddle with this matter. Nevertheless, we will do our best with the king to remedy the evil, if it be possible."

Eleanor vouchsafed no parting word, but darted a proud glance full of contempt and anger at the chancellor's daughter, as warmly pressing his hand, her features wearing an expression of the profoundest sympathy, Margaret hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

SENTENCED BY A SUPREME TRIBUNAL.

THE white hawthorn, so gay in the glades and dells of Croydon when Margaret visited the knight, had faded away with the buds and blossoms of the sweet spring time, and the flowers and fruits of summer had given way to another autumn; and with the lapse of time there had come anxious and sad moments to the chancellor, and days full of terror and suspense to Maud and the blind prisoner in the new prison of Porta Nuova, or Newgate, whom the king would not suffer to go free.

The excellent Bishop Fisher, struck with the deepest pity at the condition of Maud, (who, when her father was incarcerated, had with her old servant Deborah found a home under the hospitable roof of Sir Thomas,) had spoken of her to the good queen Katharine, who had consented to receive her at Ampthill as one of her ladies, in the place of the infamous Eleanor Thornhill. But the sands of life appeared to run but slowly in the breast of the imprisoned Clavering, and she shrunk from leaving London, whence she could visit him, as long as he lived, twice each week. Therefore Fisher begged the queen to excuse her non-attendance till after the old man's death, which could not be long distant, unless the close confinement he had been long subjected to should cease.

Meanwhile the king, who had refused to grant the petition of Sir John for the release of Clavering, became more and more irritated at the difficulties which lay in the way of his obtaining a divorce from the queen in order to

ally himself with Anne Boleyn; and to accomplish this most iniquitous measure he had employed in his own realm commands and promises, threats, secret intrigues, and sometimes even open violence, in order to extort decisions favourable to his views.

It was now that the chancellor began to feel the difficulties, which he had for some time feared, thicken around him; his delicate and tender conscience rendering him a most unfit associate for the unscrupulous men who were ready to sacrifice honour and duty to do the king's bidding.

Light-hearted still in the midst of the troubles that oppressed him, his admirable temper undisturbed by the storms and trials of his life, More was still to all outward seeming the happy master of his large and well-governed household; and but for her trouble concerning her father, whose trial and consequent condemnation she was expecting, these days spent at Chelsea in the society of Margaret and her sisters would have been the happiest Maud had ever known.

Gentle as was her nature, she was not devoid of spirit, and a just indignation had come to her aid when Margaret had laid bare before her the treachery of Eleanor, worked out by means of the perfidy of the false coxcomb, Sir Arthur.

"And now I have told you all," said Mistress Roper, "and I trust you will show me that you feel grateful Providence has saved you from such misery as that of being linked for life with one so false and deceitful. Eleanor and the knight, should they espouse each other, will truly be a well-matched pair; but you, my little girl, I hope will have a better spouse."

As Margaret spoke she passed her hand caressingly over

the golden locks of her favourite; little dreamed she how deeply Maud was yet to drink of the cup of sorrow.

Twice a week as I have said, she had permission to visit her father in his dreary cell at Newgate. He had been selfish in the olden time because now and then at far-off intervals she had left him for awhile; but now for long days and nights there was no friendly voice to cheer or to console him, whilst to those sightless orbs an eternal darkness was ever present.

It happened that as usual early one October morning she accompanied Sir Thomas in his barge to Westminster, whence she was to be conveyed in a coach to the dreary prison of Newgate. Her father was not alone; of this she was warned by the gaolers.

> "The quality of mercy is not strained,
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes,"

writes the glorious poet who flourished later, and the sentiment embodied in these lines found expression in other words in the heart of the imaginative Maud as she entered that dreary cell.

The scene was worthy of the painter's art. The autumn sunbeams cast their mellowed radiance through the grated aperture which did duty as a window for him who never saw the blessed light of day, and they shone like a halo over the head of a man whose hair was prematurely white; and as Maud entered the cell she heard the stranger say:

"My heart hath yearned to see thee, Clavering, to express to thee my sorrow that thou art here, to tell thee how truly I forgive thee."

"God be thanked, God be thanked, John Thornhill; thou hast smoothed my passage to the grave."

Maud darted forward, for this man supported the head of her dying father.

"And was *this* my father's work? alack, alack! Well is it he cannot see," she sighed to herself as she timidly raised her eyes to the poor scarred face once so bright in manly beauty; and then they fell on the couch beside the wall.

"He dies," said she, as she sank on her knees beside the blind man, and bathed his wasted hands with her tears.

And his quick ear, though fast becoming dead to outward sounds, had caught the sound of her footstep ere she reached his side, and clasping the withered hands together he besought God's mercy on himself, his child, and on him whose murderer he had well-nigh become.

And then the busy fancy wandered back to far-off times; his tongue run glibly on the names of the philosophers of old; passages from Greek or Latin authors were on his lips: when suddenly there was silence, deep, profound; and trembling with awe and fear Maud looked into her companion's countenance, which, repulsive to others, was now in her eyes beauteous. Its ugliness was the work of the dying man's hands; its holy calm, its gentle sympathising expression, the offspring of an emanation almost Divine, for mercy is one of the most lovely attributes of God Himself.

And yet again the silence was broken; now no longer on Seneca, and Plato, and Socrates, did Clavering call, but on the Redeemer of the world:

"Lord and Master, I commend my sinful soul to the arms of Thy mercy; to that same mercy I commend my child and him whom I did seek to slay."

And the pressure of the hand which clasped that of Maud grew weaker and more weak, one deep sigh alone disturbed the silence of the prison cell, and Maud was aware that the spirit of the blind scholar had passed away.

"And how can I ever enough thank you that you should have come to such a place as *this*, on so great an errand of mercy?" said Maud, when the first transport of her grief had passed. "I would that I could testify to you my gratitude; but ah! what am I saying? how can I, a poor and friendless orphan, ever benefit Sir John Thornhill?"

"And yet hast thou never read, maiden, how God sometimes chooses the weak things of this world to confound the strong? farewell for awhile," he added, as they stood beneath Newgate's gloomy portal, "for something tells me we *shall* meet again. Meanwhile I know thou art safe in the guardianship of the chancellor; so much I gleaned from thy father when I first entered his prison. Urged by a feeling I could in no way resist to see Ralph Clavering once again, and assure him it was by no device of mine he was kept in hard confinement, I overcame my strong reluctance to leave my home, and hastened hither, just to see him in the pangs of death."

And much wonder was expressed by the dependants of Sir John, that he whose wanderings had been confined for many years to the park and grounds of Holmeswood should have ordered a coach to be in readiness to convey him to London. Still more astonished was the coachman, whose post was a sinecure save when proud Eleanor honoured the Grange with her presence, to hear that he was to drive Sir John, feeble as he was, to such a place as the horrible prison of the newly built Newgate, recently erected on the site of the old building which existed since the days of the Norman king, Henry I., and was a prison rof felons in the days of his son John.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAUD'S CHOICE.

"AGREED then, my child; I will see that you have wherewith to pay your pension in this religious house, as you have decided on applying for admission to the convent of Ambresbury; the prioress is one Florence Bonnewe, an old friend of mine own. But have you thought well about the matter, Maud, and craved the counsel of a wise and discreet adviser? It happeneth sometimes that sorrow inspireth distaste for the world, which is mistaken for a liking for religious retirement."

"I have found, gracious madam," said Maud Clavering in answer to this remark of Queen Katharine, "falsehood and treachery, where I looked only for love and truth. I offer you my most heartfelt thanks for your goodness in thus enabling me to become a novice at Ambresbury; gladly shall I turn me from this world to prepare in holy solitude for that which is to come."

"So young, maiden! and yet you also have learned a bitter lesson as well as myself. But courage, a true and constant friend is rarely to be met, the love on which we have learned to lean perchance too trustingly may bend beneath us like a broken reed. But still there is a balm for every wound, for in the better world there liveth One whose constant love will never tire, who is faithful to us even when we abandon Him. Meanwhile I would counsel you, young mistress, to think well on the step you meditate taking. Thrice happy those methinks who are called to

so peaceful a retirement; but only to a few is it given, Maud, to serve their God beneath the secure shade of a cloister."

"Your grace has had tidings of Mistress Thornhill that was?"

"Yes, Maud, she is now Lady Sedley, the wife of one of the most shallow-pated coxcombs that ever fluttered about a court. The two are well matched, and her goodly fortune is being squandered in reckless extravagance: she worships the rising sun in the person of the Lady Anne, one of whose maids of honour she hath become. But, alack, child, we have reason to pity and bewail the case of such as these, who see no further, misled by their own passions, than the present moment. I know your story, maiden, and with your wise friend, Mistress Roper, (wise she is far beyond her years,) I bid you be thankful *you* did not become the wife of Sedley."

"I am thankful, your grace; but yet at times wounded feelings get the better of me, *she* was so treacherous."

"Then pray for and pity her," said the gentle queen; "we all have our feelings, even the most virtuous and heroic amongst us; but it is our duty to keep them in subjection to reason, or they will lead us sadly astray. But go you, and administer my poor alms to the sick and suffering, and put altogether out of your thoughts this false knight and his wife."

Long after Maud had retired from the queen's closet Katharine remained musing with folded hands, and her thoughts shaped themselves thus:

"Poor child, her heart has been made to ache full soon, and she has lacked energy to contend with falsehood and deceit. Gentle she is, but she hath little strength of mind. Well is it for her she designs to leave the world; but her

present disgust methinks rather savours of disappointment than that distaste for worldly matters which leads the heart to turn to religion. And yet sorrow hath led perchance as many hearts heavenward as the pure love of God hath done. How I feel for this poor, timid, trusting girl! it seemeth to me that from very love and sympathy I am attracted towards her. Her heart has been wrung like my own; this Eleanor hath made merry with her wounded feelings, and be it my task to cheer and console her, perhaps to help her on to a happy state of mind. And yet, alas, it is too true I am weaving fine projects with regard to this poor child, whilst I lack always fortitude and strength under mine own trials."

Here the desolate queen burst into an agony of tears. Weak and emaciated indeed she was, her eyes had lost their lustre, her figure the roundness and symmetry it once possessed, and the robe of black velvet which she wore hung loosely about her person. From her side depended a rosary of large pearls, and ever and again she pressed the cross to her lips, as sentiments of resignation and conformity to the will of God passed across her troubled mind.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHANCELLOR.

SIR THOMAS'S household was destined to contain one who became infected with the new doctrines; and to the horror of Margaret this person was none other than her husband, William Roper, who for a long time was minded to conform to them in earnest.

Whilst still a youth, Roper had carried his religious exercises and penitential austerities beyond the bounds of discretion; and eventually came the reaction which distressed especially his wife and her father, for when he grew weary of fasts and religious discipline he bethought him of the new and easier way to heaven then being propounded to the people.

Weary enough grew Margaret, and sore distressed, as she beheld him become excited respecting the new opinions and never better pleased than when he was talking of them to others, speaking of himself as an elect and saved soul, so that he could not sin or fall out of God's favour.

At length, however, he presented himself to Sir Thomas, and with the utmost gravity assured him that God had sent him to instruct the world; "not knowing, God wote," writes the old biographer, "anie reason of this his mission, but only his own private spirit."

Sir Thomas with a smile on his face replied: "Is it not sufficient, son Roper, that we that are your friends should know that you are a fool, but that you would have your folly proclaimed to the world?" An answer which was in no wise palatable to Roper, for the dispute

of words ran high between himself and his father-in-law, till at last the latter said to him, no longer with a smile, but sadly:

"I see, son, no disputing with thee will do thee good. Henceforth therefore I will dispute with thee no more, only will I pray for thee, that God will be so favourable as to touch thy heart."

And thus committing him to God they parted. So earnestly did he pray for him, adds the biographer, that not long after Roper very much detested his heresy, and like another St. Austin, being converted, became a most perfect Catholic.

It is related of Sir Thomas that his love and respect for his aged father, Sir John More, was very great. The latter was one of the oldest judges of the King's Bench, and a spectacle was exhibited to the eyes of the public each morning by Sir Thomas, when lord chancellor, going into the court where his father was seated, before he occupied his own seat, to ask his father's blessing on his knees. His father was then nearly ninety years old. His death at an extremely advanced age bettered not the chancellor's worldly prospects; the estates being enjoyed by Sir John's widow, a second wife.

Small care however had More for riches, and great was his contempt of worldly wealth. Indeed, how could he be rich whose alms to the poor were abundant, and whose gifts to the church were profuse?

Thus, for all he held so high a post, he was in a manner poor always. Nor did his income increase as his great merits deserved, so that the love entertained for him may be gathered from the fact that the bishops, considering his labours in writing learned works in defence of the Catholic faith, called together many of the clergy, and they agreed

to make him up no less a sum than four thousand pounds, to the payment of which (no small matter in those days) every bishop and abbot, with each of the clergy, contributed to the best of their power. Whereupon three of his dearest friends amongst the bishops called upon him at Chelsea, telling him that they considered themselves bound to reward him for the pains he had taken in helping them with his pen to battle with the prevalent errors of the times, adding that it was indeed not in their power to requite him as he deserved, but they desired to present him with this small sum on behalf of the members of the convocation, begging him to take it of them in good part.

And this was the chancellor's reply:

"It is no small comfort to me, my lords, that men so wise and learned have so well accepted of my simple doings, for which I never thought of any reward, save from God alone. So give I most humble thanks unto your lordships all for your bountiful and friendly consideration; but I purpose not to receive anything from you."

"But do not, I pray you, refuse this offering," said the Bishop of Bath. "Truly it is but a poor acknowledgment of the matchless services you have rendered to the church. Those who have contributed to it, in order to render you a feeble testimony of their regard, will feel grieved by your refusal to accept it."

But More continued inexorable.

"Then, my lord chancellor," said the Bishop of Durham, "I beseech you, take it to bestow upon your wife and children, and we will be well content"; and in this remark the Bishop of Bath concurred.

"Not so, my lords," said the still obstinate More; "I had rather see it all cast into the Thames than that I or mine should have one penny of it; for though your offer,

my lords, is indeed most honourable, yet have I so much regard for my pleasure, and so little for my profit, that I would not for much more money have lost the rest of so many nights as was spent upon the same. And yet on condition all heresies were suppressed I am quite willing that all my works be speedily burned."

Finding it impossible to make More revoke his determination, the bishops were fain to depart, and restore to each of the contributors the sum he had paid.

It was however soon rumoured that the clergy had offered him a large sum of money, and the new gospellers at once declared, in various pamphlets, that More had been bribed to write against them. He answered them by a flat denial, saying:

"I take God to witness they could never fee me one single penny."

His conduct on this point made every one aware that it was really for God's honour he had worked, and not out of vain glory or for the lucre of gain. It was about this time that the water-bailiff of London, who had formerly been in More's service, overheard several merchants loudly abusing Sir Thomas for his hostility to the new religionists; and knowing well the latter ill deserved what was said of him, he came with hot speed to tell him what he had heard, adding:

"Were I so high in favour with the king as you are, such men should not be suffered to utter such foul and villainous slanders about me. You would do well to call them before you and punish them for their wickedness."

The repetition of the slander was listened to with a smile; then said More:

"Why, Mr. Water-bailiff, would you have me punish those by whom I reap more benefit than by all you who

call yourselves my friends? Let them speak as vilely of me as they like, and shoot their bolts at me, an they will, so long as they do not hit me, what am I the worse? I have more cause to pity them than to be angry."

Neither the voice of public applause nor that of condemnation seemed to have any effect on More. He was not to be led on by hope of gain, nor would he swerve one iota from his duty by the fear of adversity.

Margaret,—to whom he entrusted on account of her great wisdom every secret of his heart locked up from his nearest kindred, his other daughters, and from a wife who could ill appreciate the lofty nobility of her husband's soul—watched every change in his countenance, which sometimes, spite of himself, betrayed his anxiety, as day by day he saw more clearly the dangers by which he was surrounded; and the divorce question so long impending pressed more heavily on his mind after receiving an order from the king to present to parliament the answers of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge on that subject, for which he had to go down to the lower house, in company of twelve of the peers, and address the members respecting it.

As lord chancellor it was not in his power to refuse; but every word he uttered embarrassed and perplexed him, for his mind and his conscience were not in the part he had to play. Moreover, the strange doctrine of the king's supremacy was now mooted, and to remain in his present position he felt to be impossible.

"I may no longer fill so onerous a post, Meg," said he, as they wandered to and fro in the garden. "I will speak to my good friend the Duke of Norfolk, and beg him to represent to the king that I wish to be discharged. And verily, Meg, it will serve my purpose well; infirmities of this poor body of mine call loudly for rest, and I hence-

forth will devote my time to preparing for my last end, and to the pleasures of study."

"So much has the king tried to win you over to the countenancing of his unjust cause, my father, that I fear you will in some way be made to suffer; but alack, the post of chancellor is indeed one you should no longer fill."

"You speak truly, Meg; to please the king's grace one must act against one's conscience and displease God. It is likely I may have something to suffer later. Wherefore I will—and do you also, Meg—pray I may not in any matter fall away. My dismissal will be a heavy blow to your mother, and to all my children save yourself."

And ever, even amidst the complaisant courtiers of a wicked prince, were there rising up men like my Lord Manners, on whom Henry had conferred a post of dignity, and who had formerly been a great friend of More's; but who, seeing clearly that the latter was losing favour with the king and that courtiers were frowning upon him, because he had been backward on the point of the divorce, was not indisposed to quarrel with him.

"*Honores mutant Mores*," said he, with the amiable intention of provoking More to anger. But the latter knew well how to parry the thrust.

"It is so, indeed, my lord," said he, "but '*Mores*,' in English, means 'manners' and not 'More.'" The unlooked for answer at once silenced his opponent.*

And all this time, whilst his great mind was vexed and anxious, he was mortifying himself by fasts and austerities known to none but Margaret; to whom, on account of her great secrecy and prudence, he entrusted the washing of his hair shirt. In the eyes of others he was ever cheerful

* Life of Sir Thomas More, by his great-grandson.

and full of mirth, undismayed by adversity as he was unchanged by prosperity.

The lady Margaret too had her garments of penance and girdles of hair, which, when she was in health, she failed not to wear on certain days in the week, and full often her skin was pierced therewith.*

* Bishop Fisher's Sermon, p. 11.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE sere and yellow leaves are falling from the trees of oak and chestnut in the avenue of Holmeswood Grange; and the drizzling rain of an October day, with black storm-clouds drifting on the horizon, presents buta dismal prospect from the windows of the quaint old mansion.

A bright wood fire burns on the ample hearth, its reflection playing hide-and-seek in the nooks and corners of the spacious chamber, and lighting up the dark oaken panels and the old paintings, portraits of worthies of Sir John's family who had long since passed to their rest.

On a settee beside the fire reclined Sir John, older in appearance than in years, his face pale and attenuated, his form worn almost to a shadow; but in the expression of his countenance there is a look of sullen determination, and in the thin compressed lips the evidence of a resolute will.

On the opposite side of the hearth sits his daughter Eleanor. The olive tint of her complexion is unnaturally pale; her large black eyes are full of fire; and she beats nervously with her foot upon the floor, and ever and again rises and paces the room as does a person who is restless and anxious.

On *her* handsome features too, as well as on those of Sir John, there is the expression of an obstinate will, of a fierce determination.

Suddenly she pauses in her hurried walk, and the jewels on her white hand and arm are not a whit brighter than

the light in her eyes. *He* is nervous: "Oh that she would leave me in peace!" he says over and over again to himself. But, as I have said, she pauses as if a sudden thought had occurred to her; she advances towards him, and in tones of most earnest entreaty she says:

"You understand me, father; I shall be some miles from this place before you rise. I implore you to let me have what I ask for; *he must* have it, and quickly too."

"*He!* *He*, your shallow-pated fool that you call your husband! *He* who has wasted the goodly sum I paid down on your wedding-day! I tell you he shall *not* have it; he shall have no more. And you shall have no more till my death. Dost hear me?"

"Oh yes, I hear plainly enough, father; nevertheless, I am positive you will not continue to refuse my request. This mansion itself is only in part inhabited; your tastes are so simple, your household so small, that I cannot see why you should refuse to grant me the farm and the land belonging to it. My husband will be outlawed. I shall be disgraced in the face of the whole court, if you refuse to help me. In truth it *is* mine, so to speak, for am I not your heiress?"

"Strange infatuation!" moaned out the invalid; "how can that be yours which, for the term of my natural life, is mine?"

"Father, can you take away with you your houses and your lands? You have enough and to spare whilst you live; by your refusal you will leave Sedley without help or remedy."

"Painted popinjay that he is! and it is for him that you harass your father thus. Mistress Roper, wise woman that she is, read his character rightly when she told Maud Clavering he was unworthy of her."

The mention of the admirable Margaret—whose life of study and retirement, combined with the practice of every domestic virtue, was as a rebuke to herself and her own frivolous nature, her days passed amidst the dissipations of the court of Anne Boleyn—excited her anger beyond control.

"I wish to hear nothing of Mistress Roper," she exclaimed. "I hated her when I was a girl, I hate her still; for you were always prating to me of those wonderful daughters of Sir Thomas More, and above all of this paragon of excellence, your pearl amongst women, Margaret; but *her* heart will ache, I trow. Listen, father: I tell you the queen's grace, the royal Anne, hath *her* game to play on the two rebels, More and Bishop Fisher. They forsooth, the canting knaves, to presume to think what they dare not say,—that the king should not put away the woman Katharine! but the queen sees through them both, and if they change not their cue their heads shall hang full lightly on their shoulders. *You* admire Margaret, and I detest her, and—"

"For mercy's sake, forbear; I will not listen to you." And Sir John rested his head uneasily on his pillow and shut his eyes, wishing too that he could close his ears, for what is more terrible than the tongue of an angry woman?

"I exult," continued she, "that I shall see her suffer when her father's head rolls on the scaffold, as it surely will. The king, an I mistake not, will not forgive More his squeamishness, as you did the monster Clavering; how will Mistress Roper then demean herself? I should like to see her on that day."

"As a Christian woman, and like the angel that she is, should God visit her with such heavy suffering."

Lady Sedley smiled disdainfully; and with a cold glitter

in her dark eye she went to the table, and taking from thence a parchment which had been carefully drawn up, setting forth that Sir John granted to his only child, Eleanor, Lady Sedley, the farm of Holmeswood and its adjacent lands, she brought the paper to him with pen and ink.

"Sir," said she, "you never yet refused me grant of anything of this world's goods; I implore you be not now so hard."

She grasped his hand, it was cold and nerveless; his face was ghastly in its pallor, and the features were rigid as those of a statue.

A curious look passed over Eleanor's beautiful face as she concealed the parchment in the folds of her velvet robe, and, stretching out her hand, she rang a small silver bell that stood on the table.

A servant, whose hair was white as silver, answered the summons so quickly as almost to warrant the suspicion that flitted across Lady Sedley's guilty mind that old Richard Ellwood had been nearer the door than was justifiable. However that might be, he had been the humble companion and playmate of her father in his boyhood, he had dandled her on his knee in her childish days, and imperious as she was, Eleanor scarce liked to treat him as she would have done any other domestic in her father's service.

"Alack, madam; is the master in a fit?" said Ellwood, running hastily forward, as with horror depicted on his countenance he raised the head which had fallen heavily backwards.

"My poor master, he looks an he were dead, madam; he should lose blood at once. I fancy he is only in a deep swoon; shall I not send for Giles, the potecary?"

"Yes: go yourself at once and quickly, but first send assistance to me."

In a very short time Ellwood returned, bringing with him the doctor. Sir John was still insensible; the simple remedies the servants had used having proved ineffectual, he at once opened a vein in the patient's arm, administering also a powerful restorative, and in a short time honest Ellwood had the satisfaction to witness signs of returning consciousness. By slow degrees the colour returned to his master's face, and having been placed in bed he fell into a quiet and refreshing sleep. During the whole night Ellwood never moved from his master's side, and he marvelled much as to the cause that had brought Lady Sedley to the cheerless old Grange, instead of dancing attendance on Anne Boleyn at Greenwich Palace.

The grey autumnal morning was far advanced ere Sir John awoke from a calm and refreshing sleep; and he was reclining in his old place on a couch beside a large fire, when Eleanor, her beautiful face wreathed in smiles, and looking fresh as the morning, entered his room.

She no more resembled the Eleanor of the previous evening than a lion resembles a lamb. She pulled an ottoman beside her father's couch, sat her down, and looked up in his face beseechingly, as though she would implore forgiveness.

And the tide of parental love which had flowed so strong in the heart of the old man again returned; he kissed her brow, and wondered how his Eleanor could have been so hard and cruel but yesternight. What a marvellous thing is this love of the parent for a worthless child!

"Forgive me, dear father," said she; "I was almost mad last night with grief and trouble; we cannot be at the court, and not be gay with the gay. Often have I longed

to taste the sweets of a retired life, and wished, Heaven knoweth how earnestly, to be again a resident at Holmeswood. My husband hath debts to a large amount; and oh sir! as I have told you, all my fortune hath melted away. But there, I will grieve you no more: if I can escape from the dire trouble that is before me, I will shortly visit you again; if not, forget me, dearest father, and all the trouble I have caused you."

And, rising, Eleanor threw her arms around her father's neck, and kissed him again and again.

"Yet stay, my child, leave me not with that sad troubled face," said poor Sir John. "Really you wring my very heart with grief, for now you speak as my own Eleanor. Last night you were like some saucy quean, lording it with high words over your father. Tarry awhile, and I will see what I can do for you."

"Nothing I ask of you, only your blessing and forgiveness; I did indeed forget my better self last night, and all the filial love I owe you."

"But I am your father, and I *will* give to you, Eleanor, now I see you throw aside all evil longings; but not Holmeswood, no not the Grange. Whilst I live 'tis mine."

"But, sir, I repeat I seek nothing of you, but humbly own my fault, urged only by the trouble and misery of my husband and myself. I was too importunate and over eager to obtain a large portion of mine inheritance at once, forgetting every tie of filial affection and of loving duty."

"Truly, but let the past be forgotten, though I would warn you as to the future; for, my child, only last year I bestowed on you a goodly fortune, and methinks it hath been recklessly squandered. I forgive it all, and you are

again my dearest Eleanor. Now bring me pen and ink and paper, and see what I shall do."

And having complied with his request, a smile of triumph on her countenance, he bent forwards and traced a few words on the sheet of paper, by which he signed away to his worthless daughter the farm of Holmeswood, with the lands appertaining to the same. And again, throwing her arms around his neck, Eleanor overwhelmed her father with kisses, protestations of filial affection, and expressions of repentance; and assuring him she should soon return to him again, she hastened from the sick man's room, having gained her point very cunningly, and bade her waiting woman prepare to return with her to the court, at the hour of noon that day.

"She will not rest till she hath beggared him," said Ellwood to himself, as bare-headed, in deference to the lady, he stood beside her white palfrey, the autumn sunbeams glinting cheerily through the almost leafless branches of the trees, as touching her steed lightly with her riding-whip she galloped away right joyously, followed by Mabel and two serving men.

Ellwood well knew that she had gained her point; doting love is sure to yield at last, it wilfully shuts its eyes when they ought to be wide open.

"The day is in keeping with my spirits," said Eleanor to herself as she went merrily on her way. "Yesterday all was dark and cheerless, and I was sad as sad could be; how wrong of me, methinks, almost to insist, instead of gently pleading; I had nearly lost everything, and had this tiresome journey for nothing."

Then she stopped her horse, and looked around, up at the casement of the Grange, bright and clear in the autumn day; on one of them her eyes were fixed, she

beheld her father, and knew that he must have crept to the window to look at her, as she galloped away, and that his look was a look of love.

Ah! let us hope that Eleanor is the exception, not the rule; but, alas! too many forget the nest which hath sheltered them, and the love which hath cared for them, when the *new* love enters their hearts. Would that there were more Margarets amongst us! the peerless Margaret loved her father and her kindred none the less, because Roper wooed and won her for his bride. Not one iota of the intensity of her love for More was then abated; and yet we know those who will calmly tell us that when the tie of wedlock is formed it must needs dissever previous home affections.

But, to return from my digression, thus ran the train of Eleanor's thoughts:

"When this estate is mine I will sell it, and always be near the court. I hate what are called the beauties of nature, I want life and pleasure and gaiety, and so does Sedley. What will my father say when he finds I have sold the farm? that is what I shall do, for we must have ready money."

Little did the poor invalid think as he waved his adieus from his own open casement, on what Eleanor's thoughts were bent.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BISHOP AND THE CHANCELLOR.

"TALL and comely, slender and well formed, his hair, naturally black, now grey with age, his eyes dark and piercing, his forehead large and high, his complexion also dark, in speech mild and temperate," such says his old biographer, Bailey, was Fisher, Lord Bishop of Rochester. He was walking in More's favourite spot, beneath the shade of the trees skirting his garden, and overhanging the banks of the river. The chancellor was with him, presenting a contrast to himself in his personal appearance. Well proportioned too was he, his complexion fair, his hair light brown, his eyes dark grey, keen, and bright; the expression of his countenance, naturally cheerful, wore to-day a troubled and anxious look.

"It is true, my friend," said the bishop, in answer to a remark of More's, "our lot is cast in evil times; the penal statutes may enforce conformity, they cannot produce conviction.* The king is about to bestow on this woman Anne the rights of a lawful wife, and invests himself with the supremacy of the church. We must be up and doing, More, and gird ourselves for the fight. Have you resolved to resign the great seal?"

"Yes, I have solicited my friend the Duke of Norfolk to pray the king to discharge me, pleading those infirmities of the chest which I suffer from constant bending over my writing-table as making me unable longer to serve. The

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* Lingard.

king's fingers begin already to itch after the abbey lands. There is no knowing where the evil which hangs over this unhappy realm will end; but for myself I shall rejoice that my mind and hands will thus be set free after I have yielded up mine office, for I can then give myself up wholly to preparing for the other world, to cheerful intercourse with my family, and to those literary pursuits which I love so well. My lord of Rochester, I feel overjoyed at the thought that these trammels in which I have become entangled are at last falling from me. I feel as if I were about to enter on a new life."

"And how will Mistress Alice approve the change? Methinks she will not regard it with your own eyes, More."

"Doubtless she will take it hardly, my lord. Nay, if I must own the truth, I am weak man enough to dread the avowal of her change of fortune to the dame. And how think you matters will terminate with yourself?"

"Can there be any doubt I am in imminent peril? Hath the king ever looked favourably on me since I bade him lay aside what he termed his distressing scruple concerning his marriage, for that the matter was too clear to admit of doubt, even so that, did any peril happen his soul, I would take the guilt thereof on my own conscience, and that wise and learned men deemed it an unseemly thing a divorce should even be spoken of? From that moment he, whom his grandmother recommended to my care on her deathbed on account of his youth and inexperience, has looked angrily upon me; and I doubt not, More, but that ours will be a hard hap according to this world, for we may not go against our conscience, come what will. Furthermore, as regards myself, have I not roused the indignation of the king and his advisers by exposing the hypocrisy of those who have brought into parliament the question of church reform,

when really only aiming at the property of the church? Have I not said that when a motion was made for surrendering the small monasteries into the king's hands I suspected it was not the *good* of the church but its *goods* which men were looking after, begging my lords in parliament to look at Germany and Bohemia, and the miseries that had befallen those countries, warning them all obedience would be withdrawn, first from the clergy, then from themselves; and if they sought for the cause they would find it in want of faith?"

"Truly, my lord," said More, "during your whole life you have ever kept to the brave speaking out of your mind, in every presence and at all risks. I mind me that on that very occasion his grace of Norfolk was chafed and angry, and did complain of you to the king, also that you did not flinch when he sent for you, to rebuke your boldness."

"Verily no; he has never forgiven me. I shall feel the full effects of his wrath full soon, be assured. But now tell me, are all your family in ignorance of your intentions?"

"All but one of them. My sweet Meg knoweth that this very day the matter comes before the king's grace. She is wise, and may be trusted for her secrecy beyond all the rest; she is sorely distressed at the uneasiness of my mind, and considers the step I am about to take is the only one I can conscientiously pursue. I have often discussed by the king's desire if this matter of the divorce be lawful, with the Doctors Lee, Cranmer, Fox, and Nicholas; and the seeming weakness of their arguments always convinces me of the soundness of my own opinion; and, as you know, the king hath for some time permitted me to withdraw from the council-chamber when this matter is brought under consideration.* But this state of things cannot last. I shall

* Lingard.

be constantly engaged in affairs which I cannot reconcile with my conscience. I only wish," he added, with a faint attempt at a smile, "that all my family resembled Margaret; I expect to have some trouble with my wife especially."

As he spoke thus, he and the bishop emerged from beneath the shade of the trees and entered the garden, attracted by the sound of female voices, high in angry dispute. Just within the hall stood Lady More, her somewhat ungainly figure attired in a watchet-coloured kirtle of the finest wool, and a fine coif upon her head, her naturally pale face flushed with excitement. She hugged within her arms a beautiful little dog, which had been presented to her some short time back by a friend, whilst she was threatening with angry vehemence a woman in the ragged attire of a beggar, who in tones as loud and as excited as those of Dame Alice insisted on it that the dog the latter so carefully kept and pampered was not her property, but belonged to herself. Then turning to Sir Thomas, and at once recognising him as the impartial lover of justice to the poor, she laid a complaint against his wife for keeping possession of her dog.

"Come hither, good woman," said he, at the same time taking the dog from his wife's hands, and bidding her stand at the upper end of the hall, whilst he directed the beggar to stand at the lower. "I will do every one justice. I bid each of you call the dog."

The result was that the animal responded to the voice of the beggar, upon whom, as his old mistress, he leaped and fawned, forsaking the lady.

"Be contented, dame, with my decision," said he to his wife, "for truly the dog is none of yours."

Lady More, however, was *not* contented, but repined loudly at her husband's verdict; and as soon as he had left

the hall she hastened after the beggar, and offering to pay her sufficient gold to have purchased three dogs, the latter was well content to resign the animal to the lady's keeping.*

* Life of Sir Thomas More, by his great-grandson.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KING AND THE STATESMAN.

N a noble apartment of the Honour, looking out on the blue waters of the river which stretched away like a band of silver amidst the flowery glades and green meadows of the Kentish village, were two persons. One was a man in the prime of life, extremely handsome, of fair complexion, with hair of auburn tint, for in this man's youth his beard was said to be like gold; his eyes were blue, his form well knit, though inclining to corpulence. He was attired in a doublet of murrey-coloured velvet, slashed with white satin, and a small cloak depended from his left shoulder. Almost the only ornament he wore was a heavy gold chain around his neck. He had too a sword by his side, and a small dagger in his girdle, the hilts of both of which were richly jewelled.

The companion of the king, for such was he of whom I have spoken, was none other than one of the favourites with whom he condescended to amuse his lighter hours, the spendthrift fop, Sir Arthur Sedley. His effeminate countenance wore a troubled expression as the king, whose mood was none of the best, walked up and down the spacious apartment. As usual Sedley's dress was that of one of the most extravagant gallants of the time; his tunic and hose were of lemon-coloured satin, powdered with silver stars, the rest of his attire equally gay.

"It is small use to come whining to me, Sedley; your extravagance and folly are on a par the one with the other. When the fool Thornhill, whom I have never forgiven for

that old matter concerning Clavering, allowed his daughter to marry you, she brought you a handsome dowry, as the queen hath informed me. Then, like a vain fool as you are, it is full soon squandered, and the lady wrings from her father, so the tale goes, a portion of that which he hath reserved for his own uses. Still, you thing of tinsel and foppery, you crave for more, are soon again distressed and come to me to beg. By my halidom, Sedley, I have a mind to forbid thee from ever seeing my face again. Do you think I have nothing better to occupy my mind than hearing you whine about distresses of your own making?"

"Might I venture to suggest, sire, that—"

"Venture not to suggest anything. Shame on thee and thy lady too for seeking to drain the old man's purse. I like him but little for the base spirit he showed in defiance of my will, but I marvel that you should thus behave, your extravagance and folly are alike beyond compare."

As the king spoke a page entered, announcing one whose expected visit had ruffled the temper of the king the whole of that and the previous day.

He made a strong effort to drive from his brow that lowering angry frown, and signed the knight to leave the room. Then entered the chancellor, for this was the day the king had appointed for the visit of Sir Thomas More, in order to receive his resignation of the chancellorship.

The king could dissemble well enough, but it was difficult for him to appear at his ease now with the man with whom he had formerly held such friendly converse.

Kneeling before the monarch who still remained standing, Sir Thomas resigned the great seal to his hands, pleading, as he had done by the mouth of the Duke of Norfolk, his increasing age and the infirmity under which

he laboured as his reason for vacating the honourable post the king had confided to him.

"I am not unmindful of your good services, Sir Thomas," remarked the king, making another effort to appear at ease; "and in any future suit which you may hereafter have, that shall concern either your honour or your profit, you shall not fail to find me a good and gracious lord."

But little passed between the king and his old minister. More was glad to escape from his presence, feeling an innate consciousness that his resignation was only in outward seeming taken in good part, whilst Henry, nettled at More's conduct, was glad to dismiss him. The old days of the visits to Chelsea had passed away never to return, and More was doomed to feel that the favour of princes is deceitful.

The king had flattered himself that the repugnance of More to the divorce question would gradually melt away, for he was aware how much his retirement would prejudice the royal cause in the mind of the public; but he deemed it prudent to suppress his feelings, and thus dismissing him with professions of esteem and promises of future favour, gave the seals to Sir Thomas Audley, a lawyer of less timorous conscience. He also ordered the new chancellor at his installation to pronounce a eulogy on the merits of his predecessor, and to express the reluctance with which the king had accepted his resignation.*

And still after More's departure he paced the room with a moody thoughtful brow, innately conscious that energetic and laborious as was the ex-chancellor, he would not have

* Lingard.

given up the great seal notwithstanding his infirmities, had there not been some ulterior motive.

"And, by our Lady, it is his squeamish conscience that frets him," exclaimed the king, "it is this business of the divorce and the supremacy, which both he and Fisher presume to protest against in their inmost hearts, that hath made him resign his office. But take heed, but take heed, or it shall be the worse for both of them, they shall not think to escape me by steering a middle course."

As the king spoke thus the door of the apartment was gently opened, and a lady entered. She was tall and slender, her face a perfect oval, her eyes were black, her tresses of the same colour, her complexion that of a brunette, and her whole countenance was lighted up with animation.

"Good-morrow, sweetheart," said the king, as in her robes of blue velvet Anne Boleyn swept across the rich carpet of Turkey work which covered the polished oaken floor of the king's closet. "Good-morrow to you; so you have come just when I needed you most. I feel chafed and irritated at the conduct of these men, Fisher and More, who presume to insinuate by their actions what they dare not give expression to with their lips."

"Heed them not, your grace," said Anne, advancing to the window against which Henry leaned, and looking out on the river beyond. "Heed them not: 'tis true it is a mischievous thing, and tends to prejudice the people against me, that these men whom they honour and venerate should prove such squeamish sticklers. I wonder if they reckon at any cost to themselves, or think they stand so high in favour with the king's grace that they may do as they list with impunity."

"They will find out their mistake perchance ere long,

sweetheart. I spoke fair to More, it was but prudent to dissemble; but an I have trouble with him, or my over scrupulous lord of Rochester, I shall know how to deal with them. How dare they presume to offer opposition to my will?"

"Suffer it not, your grace," said Anne; "too long have this odious chancellor and the bishop, as far as they were able by their example, prevented me from being raised to the position of queen. You will see, your grace will soon see, an I do not make much mistake, their rebellion to you will continue till the last, till—"

"They have tried our patience sorely already, Anne. By this fair hand I swear it shall not endure much longer."

"It is not far from Chelsea to the Tower, an More continues obstinate," said Anne in a low voice, rather as if she were communing with herself than addressing the king, whose ear however caught the words she had uttered.

"Nay, nay, fair mistress. I venture to hope I shall not have to deal thus far hard with my own old friend. See, he whom you are in anticipation condemning to imprisonment is walking beneath the shade of yonder trees, doubtless exulting in the idea that he hath blinded my eyes to his real intentions, and hath so easily flung aside the office which my favour invested him with, but which he seems to have regarded as a heavy yoke."

More was indeed sauntering on through the royal park, unconscious that the eyes of his capricious sovereign and his fair enslaver were regarding him. He was about to return by boat to his home at Chelsea, and his heart was as joyful as that of some glad schoolboy, that the trammels of a statesman and a courtier were laid aside. He was indulg-

ing fairy dreams of happy days in his beloved home; days devoted to religious retirement, to study, to his family; days of preparation for the better world for which More always seemed to live, for truly this was only to him as the passage to the next. There was an elasticity in his step, a brightness in his eye this day, such as he had not known for long. The face of nature seemed more lovely than usual, the flowers smelt more sweetly, the birds sang more gaily; and More, who beheld nature's God in the works of His hands, blessed and magnified Him, and exulted that the weary thrall which had enchained his spirit was at last thrown off.

And yet, and yet, there was a shadow in the background: first and foremost Mistress Alice, secondly his beloved family, who would sorely feel the change in their worldly circumstances. But More would none of it this day, and he drew a little well-worn book from his pocket, and as he walked through Greenwich park on his way to the river, he repeated the words, "Magnificavit Dominus facere nobiscum; læti sumus lætantes."* And so with a glad heart the ex-chancellor wended his way to the spot at which a boat was ready to receive him.

And the king and the Lady Anne watched him as he disappeared beneath the shade of the overhanging trees, and then sat they down to their favourite game of dice, for Mistress Boleyn was a tolerable, and generally a fortunate gamester.

* "The Lord hath done great things for us; we are become joyful."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BROKEN HOUSEHOLD.

THE day following More's resignation of the great seal was a holiday, possibly the feast of the Ascension; for he gave up the seal on the 16th of May, and it is about that time that the feast generally falls. Beyond Margaret and her husband no one was aware of the step More had from conscientious motives already taken, and he went to the parish church of Chelsea to assist at mass with Lady More and the rest of his family as he was accustomed to do on the day in question. At the conclusion of the service it was the rule for one of his attendants to go to the seat used by Lady More in the church and tell her if "my lord" had already gone. But on this the day on which he felt himself free as it were from an irksome bondage he hit on a novel way of making it known to his wife, for he went himself, cap in hand, and with a bow he said:

"May it please your ladyship to come forth, for my lord has gone."

Far from the mind of the worthy dame was the remotest idea of the real truth, so she imagined it to be one of his jests, until he succeeded in convincing her that it was too true, for that he had already resigned his office, and the king had accepted the resignation.

A bright moment this for Mistress Alice to be down upon her husband, this her hour of real trouble he did not escape. "Tilly vally, what will you do, Mr. More?" said she. "Will you sit and make goslings in the ashes? It is better to rule than to be ruled."

With his usual good nature he took no heed of what she had said, but affected to find fault with her dress, and calling her daughters, she bade them tell her what was amiss, and chid them that none of them could espy it, they but persisting they could see nothing wrong. Sir Thomas then said:

"Do you not perceive, children, that your mother's nose standeth somewhat awry?"

At these words poor Lady More broke from him in a rage. "All which he did to make her think the less of her decay of honour which else would have troubled her sore."*

During the day he called together his dependants, servants, and retainers, many of whom were, according to the custom of the times, men of family and position; and telling them that in future he could no longer keep up such an establishment as he had hitherto done, he demanded of them what kind of service they wished to procure, and whether they would like to enter that of any nobleman, as if so he would strive to settle each one to his liking.

Much moved, they one and all declared that they would sooner serve him for nothing than others for a salary; but to this he would not agree, and he arranged to place them all in good situations.

But the greatest trial was with his children, those children who had dwelt with him even after they had entered the married state; and striving to master his emotion he called them all about him, and bade them consult with him as to what they had best do, as now he had resigned his office he could no longer keep all with him as hitherto.

But neither sons nor daughters spoke a word.

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* Life of Sir Thomas More, by his great-grandson.

"Then will I show unto you my mind," said he. "I have been brought up at Oxford, at an inn of chancery, at Lincoln's Inn, and also in the king's court, and so have gone from the lowest degree to the highest; and yet have I in yearly revenue at this present little left me above a hundred pounds a year, so that now if we look to live together we must be content to be contributors together. But my advice is that we fall not to the lowest fare first. We will not descend to Oxford fare, nor to the fare of New Inn, but we will begin with Lincoln's Inn diet, where many right worshipful men of great account and good years live full well. If we cannot maintain that, we will go a step lower and come down to Oxford fare, wherewith many a learned doctor and ancient father has been content; and if our united purses will not do that much, then will we with bags and wallets go a-begging together, hoping that for pity some good folks will give us their charity, and at every man's door we'll sing a *Salve Regina*, whereby we shall still keep company and be merry together."*

In tearful silence those whom he loved stood around him, whilst veiling the grief he inwardly felt at the impending breaking up of his home, the good Christian, still with an innocent jest on his lips, sought to infuse into them something of his own spirit of cheerful content. In a worldly point of view, his shrewd practical wife was right, he had been hospitable and charitable beyond even his ample means: when first he entered the king's service he threw up a handsome income of about four hundred pounds a year, taking into consideration worth of money at that time; he then engaged in weighty causes concerning the king and

* He here alludes to the practice of begging adopted by the poor scholars of Oxford, who used to go begging through the streets, singing the *Salve Regina*.

the realm, toiling also in other countries in like matters, and thus consumed the gains of his whole life, so that at this time, as William Roper asserts in his life of the chancellor, he had not enough for necessaries for himself and those belonging to him, for previous to his acceptance of the great seal he had not purchased land above the value of twenty marks a year, and after paying his debts, his gold chain of office excepted, he had only about the value of one hundred pounds. It may readily be conceived that the greater part of his family did not look upon the change with his own contentment; and the breaking up of the household, hitherto such a happy one, was not done without much sorrow. One was located here, another there, all in separate establishments, except Margaret and Roper, who resolved to engage for their use the house immediately adjoining his own, and thus they enjoyed each other's society almost as much as formerly.

Then, having settled his family and disposed of his servants in the houses of others, he sold much of his furniture and other property, and devoted this year of 1532, the year which was the prelude to his great trials, to acts of mortification, prayer and study.

A letter to Erasmus, written about this time, runs as follows:

> From a child unto this day I have almost always wished, my dear Erasmus, to be freed from the troublesome business of public affairs, that I might live only to God and myself; and I have now, by the special grace of Almighty God, and the favour of my most indulgent prince, obtained it. My health hath failed, and bodily infirmities increased, and having these things in my head, either that I was to depose myself of the office, or that I should fail in the performance of my duties therein, seeing that I could not despatch those properly but that I must endanger my life, I purposed to forego the one rather than both; wherefore I was an earnest suitor to my

prince, and at last having obtained by his singular courtesy that, because I began to grow weary and even sink under my burden, I might be rid of that most honourable office whereto his favour had raised me above all my deserving as it was wholly without my seeking.

Often when his children gathered around him on their visits to their old home, he, watching the signs of the times and with somewhat of the spirit of prophecy, or with a presentiment that though he had done with state affairs yet the state had not done with him, it was his custom to prepare them for the bitter end, by talking to them of the joys of the better world, of the pains of an eternity of misery, of the marvellous patience and constancy of the martyrs, of the honour of dying for the love of God, and to abide, for this, imprisonment, loss of goods and friends and life: "truly," added he, "it will be a comfort to me if you all encourage me to die in so good a cause, for I warn you all, both wife and children, such miseries may yet fall upon me. Remember, all of you, what I say, *because shafts foreseen hurt not so much.*"

Not unfrequently do the disgrace and ruin of those who have figured in the busy scenes of court or public life follow on their retirement. And as if forecasting the event, More drew up his own epitaph, which he wrote from a desire to refute the reports of his enemies, who declared he had been compelled to resign his office. It contains an account of the principal events of his life, and concludes by begging the reader to pray for him that he may not dread the approach of death, and find it not so much death as the gate to a happier existence.

Some time after he had resigned his office, Thomas Cromwell, who was then high in the favour of the capricious king, came to Sir Thomas with a message from the prince.

Vain was his hope that he should be left in peace, that his counsel would be unsought; as I have before said, *he* wished to have done with the king's affairs, but his grace would not have it so.

On this occasion Sir Thomas did his best to urge the new minister faithfully to serve the king, and not by time-serving and flattery to lead him on the abuse of his power, saying: "Always tell him what he *ought* to do, and not what he *can* do; for if a lion knew his strength, hard would it be for any man to rule him."

This however was a lesson the unscrupulous and aspiring Cromwell never learned, the counsel which he gave to his prince being that which was likely to please him best; he managed to place new powers in the king's hands, and in doing so conferred something of kingly power on himself as the vicar of his sovereign.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DIVORCED QUEEN.

AGAIN the feast of the Ascension dawned on England, a sorrowful feast for Queen Katharine and her friends, for on the previous Friday the solemn farce had been enacted and Cranmer had pronounced his judgment that the marriage between herself and the king was invalid and had been so from the beginning, thus involving the illegitimacy of the princess Mary. The kingdom had been cut off from Rome by legislative authority, and an order was at once despatched to Katharine commanding her to be content with the style of dowager Princess of Wales; but to every threat she returned one answer:

"I will never be mine own slanderer; I value not the judgment pronounced by Cranmer, when the cause is still pending at Rome by the king's licence, pronounced too by a mere shadow, a man of the king's own making. I fear not those which have the power of the body, but Him only that hath the power of the soul."

Henry had not the heart to proceed to extremities against her, his repudiated wife was the only person who could brave him with impunity.*

In her forced retirement at Bugden, a spot she detested but to which her brutal lord had compelled her to retire, Queen Katharine spent her solitary life in the practice of prayer and almsdeeds, or working with her maids, embroidering rich and and costly stuffs for the honour of God,

* Lingard.

to bestow on some one of the churches; and in one of her chambers there was a window looking out into the chapel, whence she could assist at mass, and pour forth her grieved and sorrowful soul in the sacramental presence of her Lord; and there, sequestered from all the world beside, did the much tried and saintly Katharine spend great part not only of each day but even of the night, leaning forwards on the stones of the window; and her gentlewomen, who with natural curiosity marked her doings, declared that ofttimes they found those hard stones whereon her head had reclined wet as though a shower had rained on them, and imagined that in the time of her prayer she had put away the cushions placed there for her use, and that thus the stones became imbued with her tears when praying for strength to subdue the agonies of wronged affections.* Truly, the gentlewomen of Katharine of Aragon had a noble example ever before them of a vigorous wrestling with self, in their suffering mistress, for in her disposition there was all the pride and fire of the Spanish character to contend with, tempered however by religion.

And here in her solitude the unhappy queen had at last regained somewhat of peace of mind, when, as I have said, it was rudely interrupted by the brutal message of her tyrant husband, that she should be degraded from her title of queen, first communicated to her by her former page, Mountjoy, and secondly by Lee and Tunstall. Some weeks since she had established Maud Clavering as novice with the sisterhood at Ambresbury; though too good to keep her longer with her from a merely selfish motive, she nevertheless deplored her loss, for Maud had become to the desolate queen somewhat of a necessity, and she felt

* Agnes Strickland.

drawn to her perhaps from the same reason as Margaret, for very love of a gentle yielding nature.

And the queen was musing on her own wayward fortunes, on her absent daughter separated from her by the will of her inexorable husband, on the rupture with Rome, the distracted state of the whole realm, and on the probable trouble which awaited the good chancellor with whom she had passed many a merry evening before the bright eyes and handsome face of Anne Boleyn had ensnared the king; and, aware of his integrity and truth, she shuddered at the thought, fearing lest even his neutrality would in some way bring down upon his head the vengeance of the king.

Then too arose before the disturbed mind of the unhappy Katharine the thought of the heroic Bishop Fisher, whose glorious fate it was to stand by himself alone in refusing his consent to the act respecting the supremacy; also of a true and venerated friend, Father Forrest, her confessor, pining long in close confinement in dreary Newgate since an early period of the divorce question, when it first began to agitate the minds of thoughtful men. And her depression at last found vent in a burst of tears, when suddenly she heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the hitherto silent courtyard, and the clang of the great bell sent the blood from her pallid cheek and brought a nervous flutter to her heart.

A few moments more explained the cause; the fertile mind of the king always knew how to hatch fresh schemes for the torture of his wife, and the arrival of the two bishops, Tunstall and Lee, was another drop in the cup of humiliation she was doomed to drink.

The persecuted queen received them with noble dignity, and she suppressed her feelings whilst they read over to

her six articles drawn up by order of the king, intended to show her she must henceforth be considered only as Prince Arthur's widow, and that she ought contentedly to give up the title of queen.

Then the spirit of the injured woman gave way, and rising from her seat, pale as the handkerchief with which she wiped away her now streaming tears, she exclaimed:

"It is not well done of you, my lords, thus to molest me. I am and ever shall be the king's true and lawful wife, and never will I resign a title justly my own."

"It is not your own, madam," replied Tunstall. "I beg of you no more to call yourself his highness's wife, for after his highness was discharged of the marriage made with you he contracted new marriage with his dearest wife, Queen Anne; and indeed, thanks be to God, the queen hath already a fair child, and by God's grace and for the good of the realm she may yet have more."*

Then broke forth Katharine in an agony of grief and indignation, exclaiming:

"I will retain my title, my lords, until death shall set me free from the sorrows of my life. I am the king's *wife* and not his *subject*."

"Your highness will remember that those among your dependants who give you the title of queen are to be irrevocably dismissed from your service, as hath been made known to you in the articles read by my brother of Durham."†

"The king may persecute me, my lords, by driving from me all who are faithful unto me, an he will," said Katharine; "but nathless he will not win me to the point he wishes most to gain. All good men and true will hold me

* State Papers, 1,419. † Lingard.

to be, as I truly am, his lawful wife and the anointed queen of England."

Then sank she down upon a chair, and answer made she none to questions they still put to her, harassing her still on the same subject; but until their departure, after the first burst of grief and indignation had passed away, never a word did she utter, nor did she shed any more tears.

But when they had taken their departure, when again she was left in the company of her gentlewomen, then her assumed show of fortitude gave way, and burying her face in her hands she wept long and bitterly.

"My poor, poor mistress," said Lady Rochford, one of the foremost amongst her women, "how are you tried and persecuted by the most faithless of husbands, urged on by one of the lightest and most ambitious of women! but—" and here fell from the lady's lips words which caused the agitated queen to exclaim:

"Ah, hold your peace. Curse not, curse her not; the time is fast coming when you shall have reason to pity her and lament her case."* And drying her tears, she added, "Oh, my God, help me to be more patient, more resigned"; and then she turned her to the spot where she drew her best consolation, and appeared again amongst her ladies an hour later calm, and even cheerful.

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* Agnes Strickland.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEEPENING SHADOWS.

"AND so, son Roper, the king is married," said Sir Thomas. "God give grace, son, that this matter be not in a short time confirmed with an oath."

"I' faith, I like not to hear you speak thus. I see likelihood myself of that coming to pass which you foretell; I have so often experienced that you have spoken prophetically of various things that have happened."

"And Mistress Anne that was is to be borne in triumph from the Tower to Westminster, through the streets of London, with many pageants and shows. And, son Roper, my lords of Winchester and Durham and Bath have all written me, requesting me to bear them company to her coronation, and also to take twenty pounds which they sent me by a bearer to buy me a dress suitable for the occasion."

"And do you intend to go, sir?"

"Marry, not I. I shall tarry at home. And I have written thus to them."

And here More read from a paper he drew from his pocket:

"In the letter you sent me, my lords, you asked of me two things; one I was well content to grant you, that the other I might the more boldly deny. In the first case, taking you for no beggars and myself to be no rich man; for the other, take heed, my lords, that by being present at the coronation you do not next preach about it, and finally write books in defence of it. As for myself they may indeed destroy me; but God being my good Lord, I will take care they do not hurt other than the body."

Afterwards Roper pondered over these words, for he seemed to prophesy the fall of these bishops to a state of schism, and his own death, which followed soon after.

Probably too they were carried to Queen Anne's ears, for she never ceased to incense Henry more against Sir Thomas than any other that she had a dislike to on account of the antipathy he felt to her being raised to the throne. And it was not long before the king lent a more willing ear to her malignant representations, she having succeeded in overcoming the forbearance which Henry had still exercised towards him.

Sir Thomas with his usual penetration had already divined from whence the danger would come, and his prediction was prophetic, for it was by administering oaths more than by statutes that the supremacy of Henry was forced on the church.

In the quiet hours of the night he slept not, but thought over the worst that could possibly happen to him, with prayers and tears begging God to strengthen him, so that in the hour of danger the flesh might not triumph over the spirit. And as his mind was fertile in devising expedients whereby his family might feel less grievously the blow when it did come, he once assembled them to dinner, having first hired a pursuivant to come and knock loudly at his door and give him warning to appear the next day before the commissioners. Poor Lady More and his children started to their feet pale as death when the dreaded word "pursuivant" fell upon their ears, and it was not easy for More to calm the fears he had himself excited with a view to better enable them to bear the impending calamity.

The first charge was one little expected, and filled Margaret and her husband, as also More himself, with a righteous indignation.

He, her honourable upright father, the very soul of truth and integrity, was charged with accepting bribes; he, whose conduct had been so matchless, was accused of misdemeanours in the management of his late office; and before the father of Anne Boleyn, Lord Wiltshire, the declared enemy of More, and who presided as judge, the ex-chancellor stood to answer the charge.

He was accused of accepting a silver-gilt cup from the hands of one Mistress Vaughan, as a bribe; and Sir Thomas confessed to having taken the cup, but added: "it was given me long after the decree in favour of Vaughan, and was intended as a New Year's gift, and for very shame I could not out of courtesy refuse it."

Lord Wiltshire's face glowed with delight, for he fancied the matter clearly brought home against More; and unable to restrain himself, he exclaimed:

"Did I not tell you, my lords, the matter would be found true?"

"But, your honours," said More, "as you have courteously heard one half of the story, I pray you patiently to listen to the other. I declare to you, that though when the lady pressed the cup upon me I would not refuse it, I at once ordered my butler to fill it up with wine, on which I pledged her, and afterwards she drank to me; and I as freely bestowed it on her for her New Year's gift as her husband had on me, obliging her to receive it though much against her will."

The lady herself, when called to give her evidence, deposed exactly, with many others, to the truth of what Sir Thomas said.

Of a par with many actions of the same kind was one with a Mistress Croaker, a very wealthy woman, in whose favour, at no small trouble to himself, More had made a

decree in chancery against Lord Arundel. This lady had brought him a pair of gloves, containing fourscore angels. He thanked her for the gloves, but refused the money, saying, as he emptied it into her lap:

"Madam, it would be against all rules of gentlemanly breeding to refuse a gentlewoman's New Year's gift, so I accept the gloves; but as for the lining I utterly refuse it." And to her great chagrin Mistress Croaker returned home with her gold.

Cases such as these thickened, but they invariably resulted in the honourable acquittal of More from the slightest imputation of anything like bribery or corruption.

But nevertheless with heavy hearts Margaret and her husband watched the signs of the times. And a sensible depression stole over them upon a more serious charge being brought against him, and this was of listening to the pretended revelations of one Elizabeth Barton, a native of Aldington in Kent. She had been subject to epileptic fits, and the contortions of body which she suffered on these occasions were attributed by the ignorance of her neighbours to some præternatural agency. They considered as prophecies the expressions she uttered in her paroxysms, and she herself shared the illusion, and in her supposed prophecies denounced the Divine judgment on the sacrilegious king. The rector of the parish then advised her to enter the convent of St. Sepulchre, her ecstasies became multiplied, and the fame of her sanctity won for her the appellation of The Holy Maid of Kent.*

She had applied to many persons of influence, and, mixing up the king's divorce with the dreams of her delirium, she had charged them to carry her remonstrances to the

* Lingard.

king. By Bishop Fisher she was advised to address the prince in person, and he had obtained for her an interview with Sir Thomas, whom she had favourably impressed with an idea of her virtue.

As soon as the poor ex-chancellor heard of a fresh charge against him, (as by one of the late acts it was declared high treason to slander the king's marriage,) he addressed the following letter to Cromwell on the subject of his intercourse with the maid.

RIGHT WORSHIPFUL,—

After my most hearty recommendation, with thanks for your goodness, I perceive that of your further favour towards me it pleased you to break to my son Roper that I had communication not only with many that were acquainted with the maid of Canterbury, but also with herself; and beyond that, by my letters declared favour towards her, and given her advice and counsel. And of demeanour towards her as you are content to take the trouble to hear, by my own pen, the truth, I right heartily thank you, and consider myself beholden to you very deeply.

It is I suppose about eight or nine years ago, since I heard of that housewife first, at which time the then Bishop of Canterbury, God absolve his soul, sent unto the king's grace a roll of paper in which were written certain words of hers, that she had, as report said, spoken in her trances, whereupon it pleased the king to deliver me the roll, commanding me to look thereon and afterwards let him know what I thought; and at another time his highness asked me. I told him I found nothing in those words that I could regard or esteem; a right simple woman might in my mind speak it of her own wit well enough; nevertheless, I said, it was constantly reported for a truth that God wrought in her, and that a miracle was showed upon her, and I durst not be bold in judging the matter.

From that time till about last Christmas twelvemonths, there was much said of her and of her holiness, yet I never heard of revelation of hers or of miracle, saving that in my lord cardinal's days, that she had been both with his lordship and with the king, but what she had said either to the one or the other I never heard a word. But, as I was about to tell you, about Christmas was twelvemonth Father Risby, friar Observant, then of Canterbury, lodged one night

at my house, where after supper, a little before he went to his chamber, he fell to talking with me about the maid, commending her holiness, and saying that it was wonderful to see and understand the works that God wrought in her; which I answered I was very glad to hear of. Then he told me she had been with the lord legate in his lifetime, and with the king's grace too, and had told the legate a revelation of hers, of three swords that God had put in his hand, which if he ordered not well would be laid to his charge. The first she said was ordering the spirituality under the pope as legate, the second the rule that he bore in order of the temporality under the king, and the third was the meddling he was entrusted with by the king concerning the matter of his marriage.

I told him that any revelation of the king's matters I would not hear of, doubting not but that God would direct him that the thing should take such an end as He should be pleased with, to the king's honour and the good of the realm.

Then he told me that God had specially commanded her to pray for the king, and spoke again of her revelations concerning the cardinal, that his soul was saved by her mediation, and so went forth to his chamber; and he and I spoke not again of the matter. And since his departing on the morrow I never saw him after, to my remembrance, till I saw him at Paul's Cross.

After this, about Shrovetide, there came to me, a little before supper, Father Rich, friar Observant, of Richmond; and as we fell into conversation I asked him of Father Risby, how he did, on which he asked me if he had told me anything of the holy maid of Kent. I answered yes, and that I was glad to hear of her virtue. "I would not," said he, "repeat what you have heard already, but God hath wrought great graces in her, and by her to others"; and then he asked me if Father Risby had told me of her having been with the cardinal. I answered yes. "And he told you of the three swords?" "Yes," quoth I. "And of her revelations concerning the king's grace?" "Nay, forsooth," said I, "and if he would I would not have given him the hearing; and since she hath been with the king himself and told him, it is needless to tell me or any other man." And when Father Rich saw that I would not hear of her revelations, he talked on a little of her virtue and let them alone; and supper was set on the board, but he would not tarry, but departed to London. After that, I talked with him twice, once in my own house, and once in his own garden at the Friars, but not of any revelations touching the king but only of mean folk, some of which things were very strange and

others childish. However, he said he had seen her in her trances in great pain, and had been spiritually comforted by her communications; but he did never tell me she had told him those tales herself: if he had I would have both liked him and her the worse. I little doubted but that some of the tales I heard of her were untrue, but that nevertheless many of them might be true.

After this, being one day at Sion, and talking with several of the fathers at the grate, they told me she had been with them, and showed me various things some of them disliked in her; and whilst talking they said they wished I had spoken with her, they would fain know how I liked her. Whereupon, when I heard she was again there, I came to speak with her and see her myself. At which communication, in a little chapel, there were none present but we two. In the beginning I told her my coming to her was not of any curiosity, or to know of such things as it pleased God to reveal and show her, but for the great virtue that I had heard so many years every day more and more reported of her; therefore I had a mind to see her and be acquainted with her, that she might have the more cause to remember me to God in her devotions. Whereto she answered, that as God of His goodness did far more by her than she poor wretch was worthy of, so she feared that many spoke of their own favourable minds far above the truth, and that she had heard so many things of me that already she prayed for me, and always would; for which I thanked her.

Then said I: "Madam, there is one Helen, a maiden dwelling at Totnam, of whose trances and revelations there hath been much talk. She hath been with me, and showed me that she was with you, and that after rehearsing such visions as she had seen, you showed her they were no revelations but plain illusions of the devil, and advised her to cast them out of her mind; she gave credence unto you, and leaneth no longer to visions of her own, saying she findeth your words true, for she hath been less visited with such things than she was wont." To this she answered me: "Forsooth, sir, there is in this no praise due to me; the goodness of God hath wrought much meekness in her soul, which hath taken my rude meaning so well and not grudged to hear her spirit and her visions reproved."

I liked her better for this answer than for many of the things I have heard reported of her. She then said: "Persons have great need, that are visited with such visions, to take heed and prove what spirit they come of." We spake no word of the king's grace, or of any other person but of her and of myself; and after no long conversa-

tion, my time came to go home, and I gave her a double ducat, prayed her to pray for me and mine, and never spoke word with her after. But I had a good opinion of her, and held her in high estimation.

And because I often heard that many right worshipful folks had much communication with her, and many are curious and fall sometimes into talking, and better were to forbear, therefore I wrote her a letter; which since peradventure she tore or lost it, I shall insert the very copy in this letter.

"Good madam, and dearly beloved sister in our Lord.—I beseech you take my mind in good worth, and pardon me that I am so homely as, unrequired and without necessity, to counsel *you*, of whom for the revelations it hath pleased God to give you, as many wise and learned and virtuous testify, I myself have need to ask advice. I showed you that I was neither curious of any knowledge of other men's matters, least of all of any matter of princes or of the realm. It sufficeth to put you in remembrance of these things, and the Spirit of God shall keep you from talking with high persons of things pertaining to princes' affairs or the state of the realm, but only to talk of such with persons high or low as may be profitable for you to show or them to hear. At Chelsea, this Tuesday, by the hand of

Your loving Brother and Beadsman,

Thomas More, Knight."

Soon after there came to my house the prior of the Charter House at Sheen, and one Brother Williams, who talked of nothing but her virtue and revelations; but at another time Brother Williams came to me and told me a long tale of her being at the house of a knight in Kent, that was troubled with temptations to destroy himself. On another day when I came to Sion one of the fathers asked me how I had liked her: I answered that I liked her very well in her talking, but she is never the nearer tried by that; she were likely to be very bad, an she seemed good, ere I should think her the reverse. That is my manner; unless I were set to search and examine the truth or likelihood of some cloaked evil, when, though I nothing suspected the person myself, I would search to find out the truth, as yourself hath prudently done in this matter, doing a meritorious deed in bringing to light such detestable hypocrisy, whereby every other wretch may take warning and be afraid to set forth their devilish falsehood under colour of the wonderful work of God; for this woman

so handled herself, with help of that evil spirit that inspired her, that after her confession delivered at St. Paul's Cross, when I sent word to the prior of the Charter House that she was undoubtedly proved a false hypocrite, the good man had had such an opinion of her that he could not at first believe it.

I remember me further that I counselled Father Rich that in such things as concerned such folk as had come unto her, to whom she said she had told the cause of their coming ere they themselves spoke, and such good fruit as they said men had received by her prayers, he and such others as reported it should first cause the things to be well examined by the ordinaries, so that it might be surely known whether the things were true or not. "That she *is* a good virtuous woman I hear many folk report; I verily think it true, and think it likely God may work good and great things by her; but you wot well, these strange tales are *no* part of our creed; and before you see them proved, see you wed not yourself so far to the belief of them as to report for true, lest, it should hap they be afterwards proved false, it might minish the estimation of your preaching." He thanked me for my counsel, but how he used it later I cannot tell.

Thus have I, good Mr. Cromwell, declared to you as far as I can remember, all that ever I have done or said in the matter. If any one report of me any word touching breach of my truth and duty to my sovereign, I will make good my answer. Whilst I live neither man nor woman shall make me digress from my truth to God and to my natural prince.

I beseech our Lord long to preserve you.

MAISTER THOMAS.*

But another parliament was called; and to the dismay of More's family and friends, and to his own astonishment, he discovered that a bill of attainder was brought into the House, attainting the maid and her abettors, and charging himself and Bishop Fisher with misprision of treason; when he at once wrote the following letters to Cromwell and the king:—

RIGHT WORSHIPFUL,—

I am informed that there is a black plot put in against me in

* See his letters in his printed works, p. 1423; Burnet's Collection, vol. ii., p. 286.

the Higher House before the Lords, concerning my communications with the maid of Canterbury and my writing to her, whereof I not a little marvel, the truth of the matter being as God and I know it is, and as I have plainly declared unto you by my former letter.

I desire you to favour me that I may have a copy of the bill, which seen, if I find untrue surmise therein I may make humble suit unto the king's grace and declare the same. I am so sure of my truth to his grace that I cannot mistrust his goodness to me, being myself so innocent, whatsoever should happen me. At Chelsea, this present Saturday, by the hand of heartily all your own,

THOMAS MORE, Knight.

And thus ran his letter to the king's grace:—

It may like your highness to call to your gracious remembrance that at such time as of the office of your chancellor you were so good as to disburden me, it pleased your highness to say that, in any suit I should after have to your grace that should concern mine honour (the word it liked your highness to use) or should pertain unto my profit, I should find your highness a good and gracious lord unto me. Now is my most humble suit to your highness, that of your accustomed goodness no sinister information move your noble grace to have any more distrust of my truth and devotion to you than I shall during my life give cause. For in this matter of the maid of Canterbury I have to your trusty counsellor, Maister Cromwell, by my writing as plainly declared the truth as I possibly can. In my most humble manner, prostrate at your gracious feet, I beseech your grace, with your own prudence and accustomed goodness, consider and weigh the matter. And if in your so doing your own virtuous mind should tell you, that, notwithstanding the goodness your gracious highness hath by so many ways used unto me, I were a wretch of such monstrous ingratitude as to digress from my bounden duty of allegiance to your grace, then desire I no further favour at your hands than the loss of goods, lands, liberty, and life. But if in the considering of my cause your gracious goodness perceive that I have not demeaned myself towards your royal majesty, I beseech your most noble grace that the knowledge of your persuasion may relieve the torment of my present heaviness, conceived out of the dread and fear (by that I hear such a grievous bill is put by your learned council into the high court of parliament against me), lest your grace might, by some sinister information which your highness do not, as I trust

in God and your great goodness you will not. Then in my most humble manner I beseech your highness further (albeit that in respect of my former request this other thing is very slight), yet since your highness hath of your abundant goodness heaped and accumulated on me (though I was far unworthy) from time to time both worship and great honour too, sith I have now left all such things, and nothing seek or desire but the life to come, and pray for your grace the while, it may like your highness of your benignity somewhat to tender my poor honesty and never suffer (by means of such a bill put forth against me) any man to take occasion hereafter against the truth to slander me, which should do themselves more hurt than me, which shall, I trust, settle my heart with your gracious favour, to depend upon the comfort of the truth and hope of Heaven, and not upon the fallible opinion or hastily spoken words of light and changeable people. And thus most dread and dear sovereign lord, I beseech the blessed Trinity preserve your most noble grace, both body and soul, and all that are your well wishers, and amend all the contrary, among whom if ever I be or ever have been one, then pray I God that He may with my open shame and destruction declare it.

Fisher got his name removed from the bill by paying three hundred pounds to the crown. As to More, he boldly demanded to be suffered to plead against the bill at the bar of the House; but he was not allowed to speak publicly in his defence, and the hearing of the cause was given to Cranmer, Audley, Cromwell, and the Duke of Norfolk.

The evening before a day so important to the future of the ex-chancellor was spent in the company of Margaret and Roper, both of whom trembled lest he should hopelessly commit himself by the unflinching and bold avowal of his principles. A little changed was More in personal appearance by reason of his late trouble and anxiety, and a sorrowful meeting it needs must have been. He, upheld by the strength infused into his soul by conscious rectitude of purpose, yet with a natural sadness

pressing heavily at his heart; they, conscious that there might be for him but a step from the council-chamber to the Tower, and then one more from the Tower to the block. And so it was that the husband and wife besought him not to throw away his life on such a question, or to commit himself by any needless avowal of his own opinions; and he promised to do his best, consistent with his ideas of truth and justice. And so, after a long and melancholy conversation, in spite of its being now and then broken by some playful sally on the part of Sir Thomas, they bade him farewell, he accompanying them to the gate which led to the banks of the river, where they still lingered yet a few moments. To bring them, as it were, almost as closely together as if the larger house still contained them all, Roper had caused an opening to be made in the wall at the end of his garden, and a small door to be fixed therein.

It was a calm peaceful night, the weather still cold, for the winter was but at its close; but the sky was studded with stars, and the moon shone brightly on the face of the river, and lighted up every object around. As usual, when More bestowed his parting benediction on this best-loved daughter, he affectionately kissed her, and then discovered she was in tears.

"Now, fie upon you, dearest Meg," said he; "dry away those tears. If all does not go well in this world, it will in the other; and what are we but travellers in a country full of pitfalls and snares? Go and pray for thy father; and, above all, let thy prayer be that he stand firm in the hour of trial. At the same time, Meg, I will not tempt danger, fearful lest I should then perish in it by reason of my own presumption. And, son Roper, mind I look for you to go with me by boat to-morrow morning to Lambeth, and I

will appoint where to meet you on my return from the council."

And having said these words they parted; but little rest, I ween, had either father or daughter during the ensuing night.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

VERY early the next morning, weary and unrefreshed, Margaret was astir. And More looked sorrowful when he met her at the garden steps previous to his departure, for her aching eyes told him what she suffered. It was arranged between her father and Roper that the latter should spend the hours in which More might be engaged with the lords commissioners, at an inn near the palace, and that the two should return to Chelsea together.

How many times Margaret lingered beside the banks of the river, wistfully gazing in the direction of Lambeth, I will not take upon myself to say. We all know how intolerably heavily time hangs upon our hands when our anxiety is keenly alive respecting the safety or well-being of one who is very dear to us. And even Margaret's well-disciplined mind was not strung to so high a pitch as to leave her perfectly calm in this critical juncture of her father's affairs; not unfrequently too do characters such as hers suffer more on account of those who are dear to them, than they would were they themselves in jeopardy.

More had promised Roper and Margaret that he would do his best to get his name erased from the bill; and yet so little did he heed his own safety that he never urged the lords on the matter.

And courteously enough was he received, the lords commissioners requesting him to be seated, which however Sir Thomas declined, and the ex-chancellor stood before

the astute Cranmer, the infamous and insatiable Audley, his grace of Norfolk, cautious and worldly wise, and Cromwell, whose hateful principle, learned from Machiavelli, that vice and virtue are but names, had speedily earned him the hatred of the public.*

Desirous to work upon More by a show of moderation, Audley commenced the attack by reminding him of the proofs of royal favour he had received, that it was the king's wish yet to retain him in his service and reward him with higher dignities; and thus ended the chancellor:

"In fact, Sir Thomas, you can crave no worldly honour or profit at the hands of his highness but that you may hope to obtain it, provided you add your sanction to the sentence in favour of the marriage which has already been given by the parliament and the universities."

"My lords," replied Sir Thomas, "there never lived a man who would feel more pleasure at doing that which would be acceptable to his highness than myself, for he hath been most bountiful and liberal to me; but I had hoped I should never more have heard of this matter, as from the very outset I truly declared my mind to his majesty, who accepted my opinion graciously, not minding, as he said to me, to trouble me any more concerning it, since which time I never found cause to change my opinion; if I had, none would be more joyful than myself."

Long they tried to make Sir Thomas yield; but when they saw they could not do so, Cromwell exclaimed:

"The king's majesty hath bid us tell you, if you continued obstinate, that never before was there a servant so villainous to his sovereign, or a subject so traitorous to his

* Lingard.

prince, as you. By your subtle and sinister conduct you most unnaturally procured and provoked the king to set forth his book on the seven sacraments and the maintenance of the pope's authority, thus causing his majesty to put a sword in the pope's hand, wherewith to fight against himself to his own dishonour."

Sir Thomas had so lively a sense of the ridiculous that it is a matter of wonder how he kept his countenance. That the king, now grieving over the success of his own literary labours, should now turn upon him with villainy for having helped him when he aspired to the fame of authorship, and urge it against him that he had maliciously provoked him to write a book, was about one of the strangest things that ever was entered in a bill of attainder.

"My lords," said More calmly, "these threats might terrify children, but not me. But, to make answer to your last charge against me, I cannot think the king's grace will ever lay that book to my door; in that point none can say more for my discharge than himself, who knoweth right well I never promoted or counselled it; only, after it was finished, by his grace's appointment I sorted out and placed in order the principal matter thereof. And when I had found the pope's authority highly advanced and defended with the strongest arguments, I said to his grace,* 'I must put your highness in remembrance of one thing, and that is, that the pope is, as your majesty knows, a prince, as you are, in league with all other Christian princes. At some future time it may happen that your grace and he may differ on some points of the league, when there may be breach of friendship between you; therefore I think it best

* More altered his opinions later after studying the matter by the king's own wish; in fact, he laid down his life in defence of the pope's supremacy.

that portion be altered, and his authority more lightly touched on.' 'Nay,' said his grace, 'that shall not be; we are much bound to the see of Rome, and cannot too much honour it.' I then reminded him of the means by which part of the pope's pastoral authority had been pared away;* to which he replied: 'Whatever impediment there may be, we will set forth that authority to the utmost, for we have received from that see our crown imperial;' *which, till his grace with his own lips told me, I had never heard before.* And these things being considered, I trust his highness will never speak of it again, but will himself clear me from this charge."

To his intense astonishment, not a word passed about the real charge for which he had been given to understand he had been brought before them, namely, his having been one of those persons who had listened to and abetted Elizabeth Barton.

Then, in company with Roper, he went on his way to Chelsea in high spirits, for the scene in the council-chamber was over; and he acquainted him with all that had passed, and expressed unfeigned astonishment at the charge got up against him as to his having induced the king to write a book in support of the doctrines of a church, his allegiance to which he was now desirous to fling aside.

Anxious Margaret was by the river-side, awaiting his return; and as he entered the garden, leaning on Roper's arm, the latter, for the first time thinking of the bill in parliament, said:

"I trust, sir, all is well, since you are so merry."

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* He spoke of the statute of "*præmunire*," passed in the reign of Edward III., by which it was forbidden to receive bulls from Rome, or to act on their provisions (by appointments to bishoprics or ecclesiastical benefices) without consent of the king. (Lingard.)

"I am so indeed, son Roper, and I thank God for it."

"Are you then out of the parliament bill?"

"By my troth, son, I never remembered it."

"Never remembered that, sir, which affects you so nearly, and all of us, for your sake! I am very sorry to hear it. I trusted, when I saw you so merry, that all had been well."

"Wouldst thou know, son, why I am so joyful?"

"That would I gladly, sir."

"In good faith, I rejoice, son, that I have given the devil a foul fall; because I have, when before those lords, gone so far that without great shame I can never go back. I thirst greatly to drink of the cup of Christ's passion."

"At which words," says the biographer,* "Margaret and I waxed very sad; for though *he* liked it well, it liked us but a little."

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* Roper's Life of More.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LULL IN THE STORM.

IT was the evening after the examination of Sir Thomas; and whilst there was sadness in the hearts of all at Chelsea, save one who was the most nearly affected, a scene was taking place in the palace at Greenwich respecting the ex-statesman whose uncompromising demeanour made him such a thorn in the side of his royal master.

The lords commissioners before whom he had that morning appeared proceeded together by boat to Greenwich towards evening, in order to explain to the king the result of the interview.

He received them with eager haste. What would not Henry have given if he could but have bent to his own purposes the will of the inflexible More?

He could not restrain himself even until the obsequious Cromwell and Audley should have told their tale, but striking his fist heavily on the table beside him, exclaimed:

"Out with it at once, Audley! Does he dare continue to resist my will?"

"He bore himself boldly enough, your highness," was the reply. "He was nothing won over by fair promises, nor was he to be daunted by threats. He urged that your favour had been shown him in the matter of the divorce, so that your highness had promised he should never more be molested in that matter."

"Yea," said Cromwell, "and with a smile on his face he told us such threats might terrify children, yet not so him, when we hastened, as your grace had bidden us, to repre-

sent unto him the traitorous villainy of his present behaviour. And—"

"'Sdeath, my lords," said Henry, interrupting him, and passionately stamping his foot on the ground, "I will bear no more at the hands of this wretch, whom I have loaded with my benefits. Push the matter on against him; I insist on his name being kept in the bill of attainder. Dost hear? Dost hear what I say?" he shouted in those angry and passionate tones he so often used.

"If your highness would be pleased to listen to me," timidly interposed Audley, "I would humbly venture to suggest that the belief in the minds of those in the Upper House, and indeed in the public mind generally, is so favourable to the late chancellor, and so powerfully bent to hear him speak in his own defence, that if his name be kept in the bill it will, I dare venture to assert, be overthrown, and have no power over the rest against whom it be directed."

"But his name shall *not* be withdrawn, I say. Marry! to what a pass are things come? The bill *shall* pass, my lords; I say it shall pass, without a cavil. We will look well to the punishment of all who dare to murmur. And, by the rood, we will be in the House at the time too, and see if they shall dare reject it."

"But let me beseech your highness to revoke your determination," said Lord Audley, falling on his knees before the king, as did Cromwell and his grace of Norfolk.

"If I might make so bold as to venture to say," said Cromwell, "that if in your own gracious presence your subjects should throw the bill out, it will be an encouragement to them hereafter to contemn their sovereign lord; and it may be that we may find fitter matter later, wherewith to proceed against him."

"And what says your grace?" said Henry, somewhat

soothed by the latter remark of Cromwell. "Speak up without fear; both in the cabinet and the field, as well as on important embassies, are we debtors to your grace. We would have your mind too. Are we to let free this mighty scrupulous knight, who doth presume to disagree with his sovereign lord?"

"I cannot but agree, your highness, with what the Lord Chancellor Audley hath said, as also with the worshipful Master Cromwell, for in this case of the maid of Kent all men do account Sir Thomas More free of blame; nay, they reckon him rather worthy of praise than of reproof, seeing that he advised her to abstain from speaking of state affairs."

Henry then became more pliant; and, condescending to yield to their petitions, he dismissed them in a little more amiable mood than that in which he had received them.

On the morrow Secretary Cromwell met Roper, and gladdened his heart by telling him his father-in-law's name was no longer in the bill; a pleasing message which he, without delay, transmitted to his wife. She hastened at once to her father, and, with her face radiant with smiles, told him the news.

The ex-statesman, however, was deeper versed in the wiles of the court of Henry than was his daughter, and gravely replied: "Meg, '*quod differtur non aufertur*;'" * aware that the evil day would come nevertheless.

A week later the Duke of Norfolk honoured Chelsea with a visit, with the friendly hope of inducing Sir Thomas to comply with the king's wishes; and leading the conversation to the trouble from which he had but just escaped, he exclaimed, after congratulating him on so doing:

* "That which is deferred is not dismissed."

"But, by the mass, Sir Thomas, it is perilous striving with princes; therefore, as a friend, I advise you to conform to the king's pleasure, for, by the rood, *Indignatio principis mors est.*"*

"Is that all, my lord?" replied More calmly. "Then, in good faith, there is no more difference between you and me than that I shall die to-day and you to-morrow. If the fury of a prince causeth but temporal death, we have greater cause to fear that which is eternal, which the King of heaven can condemn us to if we scruple not to displease Him by fearing an earthly prince."†

This remark of the unflinching More established in the duke's mind the opinion he had already began to form, that it would be as it were a trial of strength between the king and his ex-minister, and that the latter must inevitably be the loser; and he bade him farewell with the conviction that the crisis in the affairs of Sir Thomas would soon arrive.

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* "The anger of a prince bringeth death."—*Life of Sir Thomas More, by his great-grandson.*

† Roper's Life of More.

END OF PART I.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"THE fitting matter," alluded to by Chancellor Audley, when advising the king to allow the name of More to be erased from the bill, was to force him to declare the lawfulness of the king's marriage with Anne Boleyn, thus rendering illegitimate his daughter Mary; and he was to be made to do this by taking the oath of succession.

A few days previously the maid of Kent, with Brocking, Masters, Deering, Rich, Gold and Risley, who were considered her abettors, were executed at Tyburn. To sustain the charge of treason it was held that the communication of such prophecies had in view the bringing the king in peril of his life; and the being acquainted with them, and yet concealing, amounted to the offence of misprision of treason. The accused were, however, never brought to trial; no defence was allowed; and the bill received the royal assent. Barton died confessing her delusion.

The pursuivant, whose coming More had once feigned, in order to prepare his family for the trial when it should really happen, at last made his appearance, summoning Sir Thomas to appear at Lambeth, before the king's commissioners, in order to accept the oath.

On the morning of the 13th of April, 1534, the summons so long expected and dreaded by Margaret and her family arrived. It was a moment of supreme trial, the expectation of which, however, had been well-nigh as terrible to bear as that which realised their fears.

Calmly he received the summons; he spoke cheerfully to his wife and daughter; and then, according to his invariable custom, spent an hour at Chelsea church, made his confession, communicated, and heard mass; returned to his home, partook of a frugal meal, and then made his preparations to take boat for Lambeth.

But though a great philosopher, More was no stoic; he could not summon courage to say that hard word "Farewell" composedly; it had been ever his custom, when about to leave his home, for his wife and children to accompany him to the river side. But on this morning, when even brave Margaret scarce knew how to control her emotion, or to speak, lest the ready tears she strove to repress should burst forth, he would not suffer them to follow him beyond the garden gate, with the solitary exception of Roper, who was to accompany him to Lambeth.

A bright sunny April morning it was, with a blue sky over their heads, unflecked by a single cloud; the plants were putting forth their first tender blossoms, birds were singing their sweet songs, and flashes of sunlight rested on the casements of More's dear home in which he had passed such happy days and hours before he became chancellor of England.

And now he nears the garden gate, and looks up the river in the direction of Lambeth; then again, and it was a last look, and perhaps his heart told him so, as he gazed at his dear old home; and putting forth his hand, he motioned back those he loved, not saying a word the while, but pulling the wicket after him he brushed aside the overhanging boughs of the golden laburnum, branches of which he had the previous day plucked for his grandchildren; and, with a countenance as sad as his heart was heavy, he took his place in his boat, looking not again at the home of his happier days.

Margaret had indeed lingered by the gate with the hope that he would give her the chance of bidding him a last farewell; but no, the loving father felt he dared not trust himself to speak; there was no last look even at her, as heretofore, no wave of the hand; and with tears streaming down her face, she pushed open the garden gate and stepped down to the water's edge, watching the boat as it skimmed lightly over the surface of the waters, till at last it became as a mere speck in the distance.

Sorrowful and silent sat More, whilst the conflict was going on within him; but it lasted not for long. Roper was buried in his own sad musings, perfectly conscious of the cause of his father-in-law's grief, when he was aroused by feeling his ear smartly pulled; and looking round, he beheld the dearly loved and venerable countenance of More wearing its usual glad expression.

"I thank our Lord, son Roper, *the field is won*," said he.

"I am very glad, sir," said Roper, answering at random, scarce knowing what he meant; but later he saw cause to believe, and no doubt rightly, that Sir Thomas had alluded to the contest which had been going on within him, and

his struggle against the claims of natural affection which for awhile had made itself heard.

And in a very little while the grey walls of Lambeth church and palace appeared in sight, a pleasant sight too, for those whose minds were less anxious than that of Sir Thomas, as they loomed darkly up in the background; the sunlight, playing on the ivied walls of the old church, and then piercing through the branches of the trees, shone upon the casements of the palace.

A very few words passed between himself and Roper, as with a warm pressure of the hand they bid each other farewell, Roper continuing on his way to Westminster.

It was a great grief to More to behold, when brought before the commissioners, a throng of timorous clergy, amongst whom were several bishops, who without stay or hindrance unhesitatingly took the oath. The commissioners were Boston the abbot of Westminster, the Archbishop Cranmer, and Audley the chancellor. *Two only* of all that appeared before the commissioners stood firm to their principles; one of them was a Dr. Wilson, the king's own confessor, who was at once on his refusal "genteely sent straight into the Tower," the other was Bishop Fisher.

The bishop had two days before received a letter from the primate, summoning him to his presence; and aware what the termination *must* be, he composedly put his house in order, and made his will as one who is about to die. Then he set out for Lambeth, and passing on his way through Rochester, he was met by a multitude of persons to whom he gave his blessing, riding amongst them bareheaded. After he had journeyed some twenty miles, he stopped for rest and refreshment on the brow of Shooters Hill, then mounted his horse again, and arrived in

London the same night. And whom should he meet as soon as he reached Lambeth, on the morrow, but his own dear old friend, Sir Thomas ?

"Well met, my lord," exclaimed the latter, "I hope we shall soon meet in heaven."

"This should be the way," answered the bishop, "for it is a very strait gate we are in, Sir Thomas."*

On the oath being tendered to him, he requested time to consider it; five days were granted to him after some hesitation on the part of the commissioners, when he withdrew to his own house in Carlisle Place, near Lambeth Marsh, then a pleasant spot in the midst of rural scenes, now the lowest and most densely populated neighbourhood in the extensive parish of Lambeth.

More now stood before the commissioners, and being called on to take the oath, he refused, referring to the existing statutes; he was then remanded whilst the oath was tendered to the clergy, he being the only layman who had been summoned, and he was told he could walk in the gardens of the palace for awhile, perhaps with the hope that he might yield after being left a little to himself.

But instead of walking in the grounds he betook himself to a small ruined chamber, overlooking the gardens, the calm surface of the river, Westminster Hall, and the majestic old abbey; and absent in spirit he forgot for awhile his own troubles and the truculent times in which he lived, as his mind conjured up memories of the past.

But the sound of cheerful voices in the garden beneath aroused him from his reverie, and he sighed as looking forth he beheld various members of the clergy with whom he was acquainted discoursing merrily with one another;

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* Bailey's Life of Bishop Fisher.

their consciences had not been so nice as to jeopardize their well-being.

After a short delay he again stood before the commissioners, and Cranmer triumphantly exhibited a list of the names of those who had taken the oath, warning him of the king's anger if he remained obstinate. But More was inflexible; neither archbishop, nor abbot, nor chancellor could make him untrue to his conscience; their efforts were useless; and he was finally committed for four days to the custody of Boston, the abbot. It has been alleged that then the king's mind was to discharge him, but that Queen Anne pressed him to show him neither favour nor mercy; and four days later the oath being again tendered and again refused, Sir Thomas was sentenced to imprisonment within the Tower.

CHAPTER II.

WITHIN THE FORTRESS.

UNLIKE the day of his arrival at Lambeth, that appointed for the incarceration of Sir Thomas within one of the dreary prison lodgings of the Tower was wild and stormy. Occasionally indeed the sun shone out, but at rare intervals, and again the lowering clouds would gather, and a heavy storm of rain fall pitilessly down.

No longer, as in the days for ever past, was he taking boat for his beloved home at Chelsea, whither he had often proceeded from this very spot, but to the gloomy fortress as a prisoner of state.

The past, with all its sweet recollections of home and kindred, that home which he knew full well he should never see again, pressed heavily upon him when he felt himself for the first time a prisoner, and realized the trouble which for a long time he had so anxiously feared.

It was not his life alone that Sir Thomas was about to forfeit by refusing to take the oath, but all that constituted its charm; the sweetest home a father ever enjoyed, a wife who atoned for a shrewish temper by a boundless devotion to her husband, three idolized daughters whose minds and hearts he had formed, and who were models of grace and wisdom (the eldest especially, whom Erasmus regarded as a treasure of virtue and knowledge), sons-in-law who made it their study to constitute the happiness of his daughters, a library full of rare and valuable works which he had collected in his travels on the continent, the mansion he had himself built, the chapel of which he was the architect,

that retired sanctuary in which it was his wont to pray each morning, a garden which he had planted with his own hands, its fresh greensward stretching down to the river, that garden in which he had held such pleasant converse with his friends, and with the poor who were yet far more numerous.*

All this More abandoned when he went on his way to the Tower of London. No outward expression of what he suffered did he manifest to Sir Richard Wingfield, who had the charge of conducting him thither, maintaining in this most trying moment an air of calm composure.

And now the ancient fortress loomed out beneath a cloudy sky, and, as he thought of the sins that had been committed within its walls, a shudder passed through his frame.

The boat was steered in the direction of Traitor's Gate. One step from the prison to the scaffold, thought the ex-chancellor, as a wicket composed of heavy beams of massive oak was opened, and the boat shot beneath the arch.

The evening of the stormy day was coming on betimes, and the rapidly increasing darkness threatened another storm even before they could reach the gloomy shelter of the prison house; no sound struck upon More's ear save the dull plash of the water as it beat against the walls of the arch, but suddenly a ray of the fading sunlight pierced through the clouds, shining upon the dark waters as the boat struck against the steps, on one of which stood the lieutenant of the Tower.

And the customary form of delivering the warrant and receiving an acknowledgment for the body of the prisoner being gone through, Sir Richard, observing his gold chain

* La Vie de Henri VIII., par Audin.

about his neck, whispered him to send it home to his wife or one of his children.

"Nay," replied Sir Thomas, "that will I not, for if my enemies take me on the field I should like them to have something for their pains"; rather choosing perhaps the king's officers to have it in the Tower, than that it should be lost at Chelsea, that house having been already plundered and searched by the king's orders.

As he landed at the steps the process of fleecing him under the name of "garnish" was at once commenced by the porter demanding of him his outer garment.

"Marry, porter," said More, taking off his cap, "here it is, and I am sorry it is not a better one."

"No, no, sir, by your leave it is your coat I must have too."

Without a word, More gave it him, and following his conductors ascended the steep and narrow spiral staircase, lighted here and there by small loopholes, leading to the dreary cell in which he was to be imprisoned.

On entering it, a smile crossed his face as he beheld, on a small wooden table beneath the grated loophole which did duty as a window, a writing desk, with pen, ink, and paper. It was however removed in a few days by the jailer; but not until Sir Thomas had made good use of it.

He immediately sent for one John à Wood, an old servant of his own, who could neither read nor write, and who was sworn by the lieutenant that should he see or hear anything against the king he should declare it to him at once. The use to which he applied the pen and ink was to write the following letter to Margaret.

Copy of original letter of Sir Thomas More to Margaret Roper, on his first being made prisoner in the Tower:—

April 17th, 1534.

MY DEAREST DAUGHTER,—

When I was before the lords at Lambeth, I was the first called in; though Master Doctor, the vicar of Croydon, and several others, had come before me. After they had declared to me why I was sent for (at which I wondered), seeing there was no other secular man there but myself, I asked to *see* the oath, which they showed me under the great seal, as also the act of the succession, which was delivered me in a printed roll. I then read them to myself, and considered the act with the oath, and showed them that my purpose was not to put any fault in the act or he that made it, or in the oath or any man that swore it, nor to condemn any man's conscience; but, as for myself, my conscience so moved *me*, that though I would not deny to swear to the succession, yet to the oath I could not swear without jeopardy to my soul. And that if they doubted if I refused the oath for the grudge of my conscience or for any fancy, I was ready to satisfy them on my oath, which if they trusted not, what should they be the better for giving me an oath; and if they trusted I would swear true, then I hoped they would not move me to swear the oath they offered me to swear, it being against my conscience. To this my lord chancellor* said, they were all very sorry to see me refuse the oath, saying, I was the very first who *had* refused it, which would cause the king's highness to conceive great suspicion and great indignation towards me; and then they showed me the roll, with the names of the lords and commons who had sworn and subscribed their names already. And seeing I still refused to swear the same myself, not blaming any that *had* sworn, I was bid go down into the garden; but I tarried in the old ruined chamber that looked into it, and would not go down on account of the heat. And then saw I Master Doctor Latimer come into the garden, walking about with various other doctors and chaplains of my lord of Canterbury; and very merry I saw he was, for he took one or two about the neck right handsomely. After that came Master Doctor Wilson forth from the lords, and he was with two gentlemen sent straight unto the Tower. What time my lord of Rochester was called in before them I cannot tell; but at night I heard he had been before them; but where he remained until sent hither, I never heard. I heard also that Master vicar of Croydon and the remainder of the priests of London that were sent for were

* Sir Thomas Audley.

sworn, and that they had such favour at the hands of the council that they were not detained and made to dance attendance to their own cost, as suitors are sometimes wont to be; but were speedily dismissed. And that Master vicar of Croydon, either for joy or for thirst, or else that it might be seen *quod ille notus erat pontifici*,* went to my lord's buttery bar, called for drink, and drank *valde familiariter*.†

As soon as they had played their pageant, and gone out of the place, I was called in again, and was told what a number had sworn since I had left, without any scruple, for which I blamed no man, answering only for myself as before. Then again they spoke of my obstinacy, that since I refused to swear I would not declare any special part of the oath that pricked my conscience. And I told them that I feared the king's highness would, as they said, take displeasure enough only for refusing the oath; and if I should say why, I should only but further exasperate him, and would rather abide all the harm that might come unto me than occasion his highness further displeasure than the offering of the oath to me constrained me of pure necessity. Then many times they imputed obstinacy to me, that I would neither swear nor say why I declined; and rather than I would be thus accounted, I said I would declare the cause in writing upon the king's gracious licence, or such commandment of his as might be my sufficient warrant that my declaration should not offend him, nor put me in danger of any of his statutes; and above that, I would give an oath in the beginning that if I might find those causes by any man answered as might satisfy my conscience, I would after swear the principal oath also. To this they said that, though the king would give me licence under his letters patent, yet would it not serve against the statute. To which I said, that if I had them I would stand to his honour; but if I may not declare the cause without peril, then to leave them undeclared is no obstinacy.

My lord of Canterbury then took hold of my saying that I did not condemn those who swore, saying it showed that I did not take it for a certain thing that I might not swear, but as very doubtful; but you do know for a certainty, without doubt, that you are bound to obey your sovereign lord and king, and so are bound to leave off the doubt of your uncertain conscience in refusing the oath: take the sure way, obey your prince, and swear it. Now in my own mind not

* "That he was known to the chief-priest." † Right jollily.

convinced, yet this argument, coming suddenly out of so noble a prelate's mouth, I could only answer I thought I might not do so, because in my own conscience this was not a case in which I *should* obey my prince, whatsoever others, whose conscience or learning I would not take on me to judge, thought in the matter; the truth seemed to me on the other side, for I had not informed myself suddenly, but by long leisure and diligent search; and if that reason may conclude, then have we a sure way to avoid all perplexities; for in whatever matter the doctors stand in doubt, the king's command, given on whichever side he liketh, solves the doubts.

Then said my lord of Westminster, howsoever the matter seems unto your mind, your mind is erroneous, when you see the great council of the realm determine the contrary; and you ought to change your conscience.

To this said I, were there not one on my side, and the whole parliament on the other, I would be sore afraid to lean to my own mind; but I have on my side as great a council, and a greater; so I am not bound to change my conscience, and conform it to the council of one realm against the whole of Christendom.

Then Master secretary swore a great oath, that he had rather that his only son had lost his head, than that I should have refused the oath; for that the king would hold me in suspicion, and think the matter of the nun of Canterbury contrived by me.

"The contrary is well known," said I; "and whatever shall happen me, it is not of my power to help it without peril to my soul."

My lord chancellor then repeated before me my refusal to Master secretary, as he was going unto the king's grace; and in the repeating said I denied not, but was content to swear to the succession.

"As for that point, I will be content," said I, "so that I may see my oath so framed as may stand with my conscience." When said my lord:

"Marry, Master secretary, mark that, so he'll not swear that either, but under some certain fashion."

"Verily, no, indeed," quoth I, "I will see it made in such a manner first, that I shall know I am neither forsworn nor swear against my conscience. As to swearing to the succession, I see no danger; but it is reasonable that to my oath I look well myself, and take counsel also and never swear for a piece and set my hand to the whole; but, so help me God, as regards the whole oath, I never led any man *from* taking it, nor advised any to *refuse* it, nor put any scruple in any

man's head; but leave every man to his own conscience. And methinks it were right every man should leave me to mine."

As I have said, the pen and ink were in a few days taken from him, when happily he perceived some coals remaining in the stove. These he sharpened against the wall, and employed himself in writing on the wall of his cell the following sentences from the Psalms:—

"Taste, and see how sweet is the Lord."

"Who will give me wings like a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest?"

"In peace, in the self-same I will sleep and take my rest."

Letter to Margaret, dated May 3, 1535:—

Our Lord blesse you, my dearly beloved daughter.

Doubtless you have heard that there came hither lately the king's councillors to examine three fathers of the Charter House, who be now judged to death for treason, whose causes I know not. Mayhap this may put you in trouble and fear concerning me being here prisoner, especially as it is not unlikely you may have heard that I also was myself before the council. So I thought it necessary to advertise you of the truth, so that you should neither conceive more hope than the matter giveth, lest upon another turn it might aggrieve your heaviness; nor more grief and fear than the matter giveth on the other side.

Shortly ye shall understand that on Friday in the last day of April Master lieutenant came in here unto me, and showed me that Master secretary would speak with me, whereupon I shyfted my gown, and went out with him into the gallery, where I met many, some known and some unknown, in the way. And in conclusion coming into the chamber where his mastershypp sat with Master attorney, Master sollicitor, Master Bedyll, and Master Doctor Tregonnell, I was offered to sit down with them, which in no wise I would. Master secretary then showed unto me that he doubted not but that I had by such friends as had resorted unto me seen the new statutes made at the sitting of the last parliament. I answered: "Yes, verily; howbeit, forasmuch as being here I have no conversation

with any people, I thought it little need for me to bestow much time upon them, and therefore I redelivered the book shortly, and the effect of the statutes I never marked nor studied to put in remembrance." Then he asked me whether I had not read the *first* statute, of the king being head of the church, whereunto I answered "Yes."

Then his mastership declared unto me, that since it was now by act of parliament ordained that his highness and his heirs be and ever of right *have* been, and perpetually *should* be, supreme head on earth of the Church of England under Christ, the king's pleasure was that those of his council there assembled should demand my opinion and what my mind was therein. Whereunto I answered that in good faith I had well trusted that the king's highness would never have commanded any question to be asked of me, considering that I from time to time declared my mind to his highness, and also your mastership, Master secretary, by mouth and by writing. And now I have in good faith discharged my mind of all such matters, and neither *will* dispute king's titles nor pope's; but the king's true faithful subject I am, and will be, and daily I pray for him, and all his, and for you all that are of his honourable council, and for all the realm, and otherwise than this I never intend to meddle. Master secretary answered, that he thought this manner of reply would not content nor satisfy the king's highness, but that his grace would exact a more full answer; and his mastership added, that the king's highness was a prince, not of rigour but of mercy and pity; and though he had found obstinacy at some time in any of his subjects, yet when he should find them at another time submit and conform themselves, his grace would show mercy; and that concerning myself his highness would be glad to see me take such conformable ways, as I might be abroad in the world again amongst other men, as I had been before. Whereto I answered, I would never meddle in the world again, to have all the world given me; and as to the rest of the matter I have fully determined never to meddle or study any worldly concern, but that my whole study should be on the passion of Christ and my own passage out of the world.

They then sent me away for awhile, and after called me in again, when Master secretary said: "Though you are a prisoner condemned to perpetual imprisonment, you are not discharged of your obedience to the king's highness"; and he asked of me whether I thought that the king's grace might not exact of me upon like pains

as other men. Whereto said I, "I will not maintain the contrary." And said he: "Even as the king's highness will be gracious to them that be found conformable, so will his grace follow the course of law to such as be obstinate," adding, "your demeanour in this matter is such as very likely makes others as stiff as they be." Whereto I answered, "I give no man cause to hold any point one way or the other, nor never gave any man advice or counsel." And, in conclusion, I could no further go, whatsoever pain should come thereof. "I am," quoth I, "the king's true faithful subject and daily bedesman, and pray for his highness and all his and all the realm; I do nobody no harm; I say none harm, I think none harm, but wish everybody good. And if this be not enough to keep a man alive, in good faith I long not to live. And I am dying already, and have since I came here been many times in the case that I thought to die within one hour. And I thank our Lord I was never sorry for it, but rather sorry when I saw the peril past, and therefore my poor body is at the king's pleasure. Would God my death may do him good."

After this Master secretary said: "Well, ye find no fault in that statute, find you any in any of the *other* statutes after?" I answered: "Sir, whatsoever thing should seem to me other than good in that, or in any of the other statutes, I will not declare what fault I find, nor speak of it." To which he said gently, that of anything I had spoken there should be no advantage taken; and whether he farther said that there was none to be taken I am not well remembered; but he added that report should be made unto the king's highness, and his gracious pleasure known. Whereupon I was delivered again to Master lieutenant, which was then called in, and so was I brought again into my chamber. And here am I yet in such case as I was, neither better nor worse. That that shall follow lieth in the hands of God, whom I beseech to put in the king's grace's mind that thing that may be to His high pleasure, and in mine to mind only the weal of my soul with little regard of my body, and you with all yours, and my wife, and all my children, and all our other friends, both bodily and spiritually heartily well to fare. And I pray you and them all to pray for me, and take no thought whatsoever shall happen me, for I verily trust in the goodness of God, seem it never so evil to this world, it shall indeed in another world be for the best.

Your loving Father,

THOMAS MORE, Knight.

Another letter, written by Sir Thomas to his daughter, Mistress Roper :—

Our Lord blesse you and all yours.

Forasmuch (dearly beloved daughter) as it is likely that you have heard that the council were here this day, and that I was before them, I have thought it necessary to send you word how the matter standeth. And verily, to be short, I perceive little difference between this time and the last, for, as far as I can see, the whole purpose is to drive me to say precisely one way or the other.

Here sat my lord of Canterbury, my lord chancellor, my lord of Suffolk, my lord of Wiltshire, and Master secretary. And after my coming Master secretary told me he had reported unto the king's highness what had been said by his grace's council unto me, and my answers to them, which I heartily thanked him for. Whereupon he added that the king's highness was neither content nor satisfied with me, but thought I had been the cause of much grudge in the realm, and that I had an obstinate and an evil mind towards him, that my duty being his subject was (and he had sent them in his name to command me on my allegiance) to make plain answer, did I think the statute lawful or not, that he should be supreme head of the Church of England, or else utter plainly my malignity.

"I have no malignity, and so can none utter," said I. "And as to the answer, I can make none other than I have made before. And very grieved I am his highness should have such opinion of me, howbeit, I shall comfort myself with considering that the time will come when God shall declare my truth before his grace and all the world; and though haply it may seem small cause of comfort, because I must take harm here first, in the meanwhile, I thanked God I was very sure I had no corrupt affection, looking first upon God, then upon the king, according to the lesson his highness taught me at my first coming to his noble service, the most virtuous ever prince taught a servant. The opinion he has of me now is to my great grief; I have no means to help it, in this matter further I could not go, nor other answer make."

"But," said both the lord chancellor and Master secretary, "the king may *compel* you to make a plain answer one way or the other." Whereto said I: "I will not dispute the king's authority, but verily, under correction, it seemeth to me, if my conscience give me against the statute (wherein it giveth me I do not say), that, I nothing

doing or saying against it, it is hard to make me say for or against, to the peril of my soul or the destruction of my body."

To this said Master secretary: "When you were in office you examined heretics and malefactors, whether they believed the pope to be head of the church, and compelled them to make a precise answer; and why should not the king, sith it is a law made that his grace is head of the church here, compel men to answer now as they were then compelled to answer about the pope?"

"I protest," quoth I, "that I wish not to stand in contention; but there is this difference, that here, as through the whole of Christendom, the power of the pope was considered an undoubted thing, not like a thing agreed on in this realm." To which said Master secretary, they were as well burned for denying that as beheaded for denying this, and as good reason to make them answer one as the other. "A man is not so bound in conscience by a law of one realm," said I, "when there is a law of all Christendom to the contrary, touching a point of belief, though there hap to be made in some place a law to the contrary."

Then they offered me an oath, by which I should make true answer to such things as should be asked me on the king's behalf.

"Verily, I never mean to swear any book oath more, as long as I live," said I.

"Then," said they, "I was very obstinate, for of all those brought to the star-chamber there are none who have not taken a similar oath."

"Very true," said I; "but I can understand what your questions will be, and as good to refuse them at first as at last."

My lord chancellor said he thought I guessed the truth, and I should see them. There were but two; the first was, had I seen the statute? the second, did I believe it lawfully made? At once I refused the oath, saying that the first I had confessed to, the *second* I would make no answer.

This was the end of my examination, and I was sent away. In the former communication it was wondered at that I should take thus much on my conscience; whereto I said I was very sure my conscience, informed by much diligence, might stand with my salvation; I meddle not with the consciences of those who think otherwise, I am no man's judge.

And they also said: "If you had as lief be out of the world as in it, why not speak out plain? It appears you are not content to die, though you say so." "The truth is," I replied, "I have not led so holy a life as to be bold enough to offer myself for death, lest God

for my presumption suffer me to fall; therefore I put not myself forward, but draw back. Howbeit, if God draw me to it Himself, then trust I in His great mercy, that He will not fail to give me grace and strength."

"I like you much worse to-day than I did the last time," said Master secretary; "then I pitied you, now I think you mean not well."

But God and I know both that I do mean well, and so I pray God do by me. I pray you and mine other friends to be of good cheer, whatsoever befal me. Take no thought of me, but pray for me, as I do for you and all of them. Your tender loving father,

THOMAS MORE, Knight.

After the examination recorded above, which I prefer to copy from the original letter to Margaret, rather than to give the sense of it in my own words, the councillors looked significantly at each other, and withdrew, pausing as they left the Tower to bid Kingston exercise strict vigilance over Sir Thomas; the lieutenant at once understood that there was small hope for the ex-chancellor.

This Kingston was one of those good souls who never forget a service rendered to them. In the days of the ex-chancellor's prosperity he had never been repulsed by him, More always feeling pleasure at granting various requests made to him. And now that so sad a reverse had befallen More, he strove often, when unseen, by every means in his power to soften the severity of his imprisonment. One day he himself carried to More's cell a delicate little dish, and complained in a whisper of bringing him no better cheer; but he added, "I am watched, and walls have eyes as well as ears. I cannot alter matters without incurring the king's displeasure, so must beg you to accept my good will."

"I believe you, good Kingston," answered More; "and I thank you most heartily for it. Assure yourself I do not mislike my ordinary fare; when I do, then spare not to thrust me out of your doors."

Throughout the whole of a weary month had Margaret constantly besieged the council-chamber, imploring chancellor Audley and those of the ministers with whom she was acquainted to allow her to see her father. Finally, Cromwell, trusting to her influence with More, gave orders for her free access to him.

Audley had paid a visit to Allington, the husband of Alice, Margaret's cousin, and expressed a regret that More should be, as he said, by his obstinacy casting away his life, throwing out various hints which he trusted would be conveyed to More through Margaret.

And on her way from Chelsea to that dreary cell many were the arguments she thought she would use, which would surely be irresistible, especially the example of the bishops, the conduct of the clergy, the will of the king, the statutes of parliament. She had taken the oath herself, with the clause "as farre as it would stand with the lawe of God." And it may be believed that, understanding imperfectly the importance of the question it involved, her ardent wish to save the life of one so inexpressibly dear to her prevented her from looking very closely into the subject. We can fancy how her heart beat with agitation as she toiled up those steep and narrow steps leading to his cell; how it ached for him as she looked through the loopholes that gave so scant a light; how it exulted with joy as the barred door was unfastened; how it beat with mingled grief and gladness as again she stood in his presence. Those who truly love can understand all this.

She saw all at one glance: the venerable face paler and thinner than when last she gazed upon it; the form stooping a little more than of yore, for this one month's imprisonment had been very rigorous; the fine bright spirit

sobered down, as it came to look the end, now so near, more closely in the face; and, throwing her arms around his neck, she shed tears of mingled joy and sorrow.

"Before we talk of worldly matters, let us pray together, Meg," said he, and the "seven psalms and letanies sayde," they rose from their knees, and drawing her towards him he tenderly embraced her. Then said he: "I believe, Meg, that they who have put me here think they have done me great displeasure; but I assure you, my own dear daughter, that if it had not been for my wife and children, I would long ere this have chosen a straiter cell; and since I have come here without my own will, I trust that God of His goodness will discharge me of my care, and graciously supply the want of my presence amongst you. I thank God I find no cause to reckon myself worse here than in my own house. Methinks God dealeth with me as with a wanton child, and doth set me on His lap and dandle me as He hath done His best friends, His saints and martyrs, whose example may He make me worthy to imitate."

Then Margaret gently urged him with some of the arguments she had thought of on her way thither; but the tears with which she bathed the face of her father, her affectionate embrace, would have been the most powerful argument she could have used: had More only been a father he would have been vanquished, but he was a Christian, and he stood firm.

"What, Mistress Eve!" said More, "hath my daughter Alice played like the serpent with you, and set you to tempt your own father, and labour to make him swear against his conscience, and so send him to the devil?" Then earnestly and sorrowfully he said: "Daughter, we two have talked this thing over before to-day, but touching this I can in no wise do it. Many years I have studied

the matter; but I can see nothing to make me change my mind. There is no help, God hath placed me in this strait; I must either deadly offend Him, or abide what may happen me."

Then looking over the letter Margaret had received from her kinswoman, he read it again.

"Lord Audley thinketh but lightly of this matter," said he; "and even as you have suggested to me, Meg, so think many whom we both esteem; still, daughter, if I should even see my lord of Rochester swear the oath it would in no wise alter my mind. Some are led by favour, others by fear; some frame their own consciences, some perhaps think they will repent and get shriven, and so God will forgive them. But I can use no such ways, Meg, in so vast a matter. This however I will say to comfort thee; my own conscience will well stand with my salvation. I am sure of it, Meg, as that there is a God in heaven; and for the rest, lands, liberty, and life itself, I trust He will strengthen me to bear the loss, should it so hap, rather than I should put my soul in peril. But how now, mother Eve? art thou musing with some serpent upon some persuasion to present father Adam with the apple again?"

Though the tears were welling up into her eyes, Margaret could not but fall in and answer him with a touch of his own pleasantry.

"In good faith, father, I can no more," said she. "I am as Cressida saith in Chaucer, even at my wit's ends, and know not what to say unless I could persuade you with the fool Harry Patenson's reasoning. When he heard you were in the Tower because you would not swear, he grew angry: 'Why, what aileth him that he will not swear?' said he; 'I have sworn.' And so, father, may I not say, why should you not swear as I have sworn myself?'"

"That is like Eve too, Meg, for she offered the fruit she had eaten;" but then more gravely he added, "I have not forgotten the counsel of our Lord, Meg, that we should count the cost ere we begin to build. Full many a night, while my wife slept, I have weighed and counted what peril might befal me. Ofttimes I had a sad heavy heart, but yet, I thank my Lord, I never thought to change."

"But, my father," argued Margaret, "we do not always adhere to our resolutions. You may see fit to change; and pray Heaven it be not too late."

"May God preserve me from so doing," replied the prisoner. "The more I suffer, the more speedily shall I be delivered. In Jesus I place all my hope, He will not suffer me to yield; and even though I should be on the point of falling, I would cry out as Peter did, and shall be saved from drowning. Courage, Meg; and do not sadden thyself at anything that may happen in this life. Nothing *can* happen but what God wills; and whatsoever it be, be it never so bad, it shall indeed be the best. And so, my good child, commend me to all my friends; and I pray right heartily that you will all serve God, and be glad and rejoice in Him."

And many months rolled drearily on; and Margaret one day ventured, earnestly desirous to save her father's life, to address him again respecting the oath. She had heard that the monks of the Charter House, with the learned and virtuous Father Reynolds, of Sion, were about to be executed; and her heart trembled for him she loved: for terrible as was his captivity, still it was not death; at present she could see him, speak to him, embrace him, and listen to the wise teachings of his beloved voice.

Copy of the original letter, written with a coal, in answer to Margaret:—

Our Lord blesse you.

If I had not been, my dearly beloved daughter, at a firm and fast point, I trust in God's great mercy, this good great while before, your lamentable letter had not a little abashed me, surely far above all other things, of which I have often not a few terrible ones. Surely none of them ever touched me so near nor were so grievous to me as to see you, my well beloved child, in so vehemently piteous a manner labouring to persuade me to the thing concerning which I have for pure necessity, for respect to my own soul, so often spoken precisely to you.

Concerning the chief points of your letter I can make no reply; for I doubt not you well remember that the matters which move my conscience (without declaration whereof I cannot touch upon the points) I have often told you I will disclose to no one. Therefore, daughter Margaret, I can in this do nothing, but as you labour and entreat me to follow your mind, again to desire and pray you to desist from such labour, and with my former answers to keep yourself content. A deadly grief to me, much more deadly than to hear the decree of my own death (for the fear of that, I thank our Lord the fear of hell, the hope of heaven and the passion of Christ daily more and more assuage) is, that I perceive my good son your husband, and you my good daughter, and my good wife, and my other good children and innocent friends, are held in great displeasure, and are in great danger of harm thereby. To hinder which resteth not with me, I can but commit all to God (*Nam in manu Dei*, saith the Scriptures, *cor regis est, et sicut divisiones aquarum quocunque voluerit impellit illud*), whose great goodness I most humbly beseech to incline the noble heart of the king's highness tenderly to favour all of you, and to favour me no better than God and myself know that my faithful heart towards him and my daily prayers for him deserve; for if his highness might see my mind such as God knows it to be, it would, I trust, soon soothe his great displeasure. But while I am in this world I can never thus show it, so that his grace might think differently of me; I can but leave all in the hands of Him, for fear of whose displeasure, for the safety of my soul, without reproaching any one, I now endure this trouble; out of which I beseech God to bring me when it pleaseth Him, into His endless bliss in heaven; and meanwhile to give me grace, and you also, in all our agony and trouble devoutly to dwell on the remembrance of that bitter agony which our Saviour suffered before His passion at the mount; and if we do so diligently I verily trust we

shall find therein great comfort and consolation. And so, my dear daughter, may the blessed Spirit of Christ, of His tender mercy, govern and guide you all, to His pleasure and your weal and comfort, both body and soul.

Your tender, loving father,
THOMAS MORE, Knight.

Many bitter tears did Margaret shed over this letter; and after it had been perused by each member of the family, she sat her down in the solitude of her chamber, read, and re-read the precious document, which she again watered with her tears, and then penned the following epistle. It testifies to the fact that Margaret now entered fully into the spirit with which her father was animated.

MINE OWN GOOD FATHER,—

It is to me no little comfort, since I cannot talk to you as I would, at least to console myself in this bitter time of your absence by such means as I may, by as often writing to you as shall be expedient, and by reading again and again your most fruitful and delectable letter, the faithful messenger of your very virtuous and spiritual mind, rid from all corrupt love of worldly things, and fast knit only in the love of God and desire of heaven, as becometh a true worshipper and a very faithful servant of God, who I doubt not, good father, holdeth His holy hand over you, and shall (as He hath) preserve you both body and soul (*ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*), now when you have cast away all earthly consolations, and resigned yourself willingly, gladly, and fully for His love to His holy protection. Father, what think you hath been our comfort since you departed from us? Surely nothing but the experience we have had of your life past, your godly conversation, wholesome counsel, and virtuous example, and a certainty not only of the continuance of the same, but also a great increase by the goodness of our Lord to the great rest and gladness of your heart, devoid of all earthly dross, and garnished with the noble vestures of heavenly virtues, a pleasant place for the Holy Spirit of God to rest in. May He defend you (as I doubt not, good father, of His goodness He will) from all trouble of mind and body, and give me, your most loving, obedient daughter and handmaid, and all us your children and friends, to imitate all that we praise in you, and to our only comfort

remember you, that we may meet with you, mine own dear father, in the bliss of heaven, to which our most merciful Lord hath bought us with His most precious blood.

Your own most loving and obedient daughter and petitioner, Margaret Roper, who desireth above all worldly things to be in John à Wood's * place to do you some service. But we live in hope that we shall shortly receive you again. I pray God heartily we may, if it be His holy will.

Once more the father writes:—

My own Good Daughter,—

Our Lord be thanked, I am in good bodily health and peace of mind, and of worldly things I desire no more than I possess. I beseech Him make you all rejoice in the hope of heaven, and of such things as I sometimes used to talk with you all concerning the world to come. Our Lord put them all into your minds, as I trust He doth by His Holy Spirit blessing and preserving all of you.

Written with a coal by your tender loving father, who in his poor prayers forgetteth none of you, nor your babes, nor your nurses, nor your good husbands, nor your good husbands' wives, nor your father's shrewd wife neither, nor our other friends; and thus fare you heartily well, for lack of paper,

THOMAS MORE, Knight.

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* John à Wood was his own servant.

CHAPTER III.

MANY SNARES.

ONE morning, as Margaret was sitting conversing with her father, their attention was attracted by the footfalls of guards without the Tower, the clang of arms, and the neighing of horses; and advancing to the window Sir Thomas beheld the three Carthusian friars being led to execution.

"See, Meg," he exclaimed, "these good fathers are going as cheerfully to death as if they were bridegrooms about to be married; God is taking them to their reward. How happy are they, whilst your poor father, not worthy of so great happiness, is condemned still to remain in this vale of misery. And now tell me, Meg," added More, "how goes the world? What news is there of the new queen?"

"In faith, father, never were things merrier; there is nothing at the court, as they do say, but sporting and dancing."

"Alas, Meg, is it even thus with her? It pitieth me to think unto what misery that poor soul will come, *with those dances of hers she will spurn off our heads like footballs;* but it will not be long before her own head will dance the same dance as ours."

How literally were these words fulfilled! it is one amongst many sayings of Sir Thomas, which exhibit him as almost endowed with the spirit of prophecy.

At last the unfortunate Lady More obtained leave to see her husband; and her first salutation was, though not at

all pleasant, characteristic of her rude blunt ways. With upraised hands she exclaimed:

"What, the good gear, Mr. More? I marvel that you who have always been taken for a wise man now choose to play the fool. Abiding here indeed in this close and filthy prison, among the rats and mice, when you might have your liberty with the favour and good-will of the king and the council, if you would but do as others have done as learned as you, and seeing you have at Chelsea a right fair house, your library, your garden, and all other necessaries about you; and might be merry with your wife, your children, and your household! I wonder why in God's name you tarry longer here."

Very calmly More heard this long speech; then he said to her cheerfully:

"I pray thee, Alice, tell me one thing. Is not this house as near heaven as my own?"

Of course poor Lady More could not agree with her husband's lofty aspirations, so she altered her usual ejaculations when angry, scornfully exclaiming:

"Twittle twattle, will this gear *never* be left?"

"But say, Mrs. Alice, is it not the truth?"

"*Bone Deus*, man, will it never cease?"

"Well then, Alice, if it be as I have said as near to heaven as my own house, why should I not be as happy here as there? For were I but under the ground some seven years, and then to arise and go to that fair house of mine, I should not fail to find some therein that would bid me get out of it, and tell me it was none of mine. What cause then have I to like a house that would so soon forget its master? Again, tell me how long you think we may live to enjoy it."

"Some twenty years, may be."

"Truly; now an you had said a thousand, that would have been somewhat; and yet methinks he would be a bad merchant that would put himself in danger of losing eternity for a thousand years: how much the more if we are not sure to enjoy it for one day!"

Poor Lady More, however, she did her best for her husband in her own way, as we may see from the following letter to Cromwell, written on account of her extreme want.

Right honourable and my especial gud Maister Secretarye,—In my most humble wyse I recommend me unto your gud maistershypp, knowlegying myself to be most deeply boundyn to your gud maistershypp for your manyfold gudnesse and lovying favor, both before this tyme and now dayly and always shewyd towards my poure husband and me. I pray Almyghtye God to continue your gudnes so styll, for thereupon hangith the greatest part of my poure husband's comfert and myne. The cause of my wrytynge at this tyme is to certyfy your espescial gud maystershypp of my great and extreme necessyte, which on and besydes the charge of my own house doe pay weekly 15 shillings for bord-wages of my poure husband and his servant for the mayntaining whereof I have been compellyd of verey necessyte to sell part of myn apparell for lack of other substance to make money of. Wherefore my most humble petition and sewte to your maistershypp at this tyme is to desyre your maistershypps favorable advyce and counsell, whether I may be so bold to attend upon the king's most gracyouse highness. I trust theyr is no dowte in the cause of my impediment, for the younge man being a ploughman had been dyseased with the aggue by the space of three years before that he departed. And besides this, it is now fyve weeks sith he departed, and no other person dyseased in the house sith he left. I humblye beseche your espeeyal gud maistershypp (as my only trust is, and as know not what to doe, but utterly in this world to be undone) for the love of God to consider the premisses; and thereupon of your most abundant gudness, to shewe your most favourable helpe to the comfortyng of my poure husband and me in this our great hevynes, extreme age, and necessyte. And thus we, and all ours, shall dayly duryng our

lyves pray to God for the prosperous successe of your ryght honourable dygnyte.

By your poure contynuall Oratryx,

To the Ryght Honorable, DAME ALIS MORE.
and her especyall gud Maister,
MAISTER SECRETARYE.*

In spite of the vigilance of their respective jailers, Sir Thomas managed to write to and receive letters from his companion in captivity, Bishop Fisher. The latter was deprived of the common necessaries of life, and one of the snares employed with regard to each prisoner was to represent to him that his fellow-sufferer had taken the oath. Thus on one day, when Margaret was on her way to the council-chamber, with a petition she was about herself to present to the lords on behalf of her father, she was met by Audley, who said to her:

"Your father is much to be blamed. Fisher resembled him, but he has become wiser, and has taken the oath."

"Are you quite sure of it, my lord?" said Margaret, giving a spring for joy, says Fisher's biographer.

"Yes, I am quite certain; Fisher is now with the king. You will soon see him in liberty and in great favour."

Margaret at once hastened to her father, and exclaimed in triumphant tones:

"Father, my lord of Rochester has taken the oath."

"Silence, daughter," said More in accents of surprise, "it is not possible."

"The lord chancellor has just told me so."

"Away, away, thou foolish one," said More; "thou art not used to their tricks; but understand, if the bishop had done so, it would be no precedent for sin."

* Leonard Howard's Collection of Letters.

Fisher was more simple, and believed those who told him that More had taken the oath; but though it added to his grief it did not shake his constancy.

"I am sorry that his courage hath failed him," said he; "yet should I not blame him, not being beset by the temptations of wife and children; but anyway, it affecteth me not, for unless I would make shipwreck of my conscience I cannot take your oath."

Never was More left long at rest. Soon came to his cell Mr. Rich, Sir Richard Southwell, and one Palmer, deputed by the king to take away all his books.

Whilst Southwell made up in a parcel the books and manuscripts, Rich took Sir Thomas aside and led him towards the window of his prison, signing to his companions to pay attention to whatever the prisoner might say.

But Southwell and Palmer, touched with pity, did not care to listen, they looked with compassion on the bent form of the venerable prisoner, and turned away as if intent on their work.

A few indifferent words passed, and a smile played on the countenance of Rich as he meditated his address to the unfortunate prisoner.

"Truly, Sir Thomas More," said he, after a silence of several minutes, "I marvel at you. I know you are a man both wise and learned; you are a great lawyer, a profound logician. I pray you, sir, let me be so bold as to put a question to you. Suppose an act of parliament were made, that all the realm should take me for king, would not you take me for king also?"

"Yes, truly," said More.

"Marry," said Rich, with an air of frankness, "I put the case farther. Suppose there were an act of parliament to take me for pope, would not you then take me for pope?"

"That is quite another thing," said More; "the parliament has power to meddle with the state of temporal princes. But before replying to your second question I ask you, supposing parliament should make a law that God should not be God, would you then, Mr. Rich, give it your assent?"

"No, Sir Thomas," replied Rich indignantly; "no parliament could make such a law." Rich added a sequel.

"No more could the parliament make the king supreme head of the church," was the answer which Rich gave as the reply of More, and upon it he was afterwards indicted of high treason.

And his beloved books, the solace of the drear hours of his captivity, were all removed; then he closed his windows, saying with a touch of his old humour, "When all the tools and wares are gone, the shop windows may be shut up."

Fisher had been a long while imprisoned in the Bell Tower. He was allowed but scant nourishment, his garments were in rags, he had not even a prayer-book for his use; at last he obtained a pen and a piece of paper by dint of many entreaties, upon which he traced a few trembling lines, which he addressed to Cromwell.

"Have mercy on me," wrote this aged man, over whose head nearly eighty years had passed: "I have neither shirt, nor linen, nor garments; I am ashamed of my nakedness. I would, however, bear with this poverty, if I had wherewith to give warmth to my body. Also, I have so little to eat; God knoweth, at my age one has many wants; if I am left in want of common necessaries my strength will soon go. I implore you, in the name of common charity, beg of the king to restore to me his gracious bounty. I should feel very grateful if he would take me from this cold

prison. Two favours I ask of yourself: one is to let me see a priest to whom I may make confession for the approaching feast of Christmas, also that a volume of prayers be lent me; and may our Lord grant you a happy new year and many of them."

It was hoped that the sufferings of the bishop would have made him lose his courage, but he remained inflexible, and eventually Rich, the solicitor-general, was sent to him as bearer of a message from the king. He entered the captive's dungeon with a smile upon his face, saying that his majesty desired to know the mind of so enlightened a prelate as to the supremacy which parliament had recognised as an attribute of royalty. "The prince has many scruples," added Rich, begging the prisoner to speak out fearlessly.

The old prelate grew courageous. "More than once," said he, "have I spoken on this subject with his majesty; it is not now, when my days are numbered, that I can change my former opinions. I think now as I did formerly, that if the king is solicitous about his salvation he will put away this notion of spiritual supremacy."

To this remark Rich made no reply, but at once withdrew.

Audley, under the great seal, issued a special commission for the trial of Fisher and More, placing himself at the head of it. As less skill was apprehended from the aged prelate in defending himself, and there was a colouring against him from the infamous arts of Rich, the wary Audley began with him, although the conviction of the ex-chancellor was an object of greater importance. Scarcely able to stand at the bar of Westminster Hall from age and weakness, he was charged with having traitorously

attempted to deprive the king of his title by maliciously speaking these words: "The Kyng oure Soveraign Lord is not supreme Hedd yn Erthe of the Cherche of Englande."

The only witness for the crown was Rich, the solicitor-general, who, though supposed not to have exceeded the truth in stating what had passed between him and the prisoner, covered himself with infamy, for he had the baseness voluntarily to swear that in a private conversation he had held with the bishop when paying him a friendly visit in the Tower, he heard the prelate declare that he believed in his conscience, and by his learning he assuredly knew, that the king neither was nor by right could be supreme head of the Church of England.

Then the aged prelate, bending beneath the infirmities of age, pleaded his own cause without the aid of counsel, which could not be permitted against the crown.

"Mr. Rich," said he, "I cannot but marvel to hear you come and bear witness against me of these words. This man, my lords, came to me from the king, on a secret message as he said, with kindly words and commendations from his grace, declaring what good opinion his majesty had of me, and how sorry he was for my trouble, and then broke the matter of the supremacy, telling me the king had sent him in the most secret way to know my opinion; and when I warned him the new act of parliament might endanger me if I said aught against its provisions, he replied 'that the king willed him to assure me *upon his honour and on the word of a king*, that whatsoever I should say unto him I should not abide peril for it, though my words were ever so against the statute'; and the messenger gave me his most solemn promise that he would repeat my words to no living soul save the king alone. And therefore, my lords, seeing it pleased his majesty

to send to me thus secretly to know my poor advice and opinion, methinks it is very hard to allow the same as sufficient testimony against me to prove me guilty of high treason."

Then observed Rich:

"I said to him no more, my lords, than his majesty commanded, and I argue, as counsel for the crown, that assuming the statement to be true, it is no discharge in law against his majesty for a direct violation of the statute."

The malicious Audley then decided, and his opinion was shared in by the other judges, that this promise from the king neither did nor could by rigour of law discharge him. He had declared his mind and conscience against the supremacy; yea, though it were at the king's own request, he committed treason, and nothing could save him but the king's pardon.

"But," still urged the venerable prelate, "it is only treason *maliciously* to deny the king's supremacy; I cannot surely be guilty for expressing an opinion to the king himself by his own order."

"Malice does not mean spite or ill-will in the vulgar sense, but is an inference of law," replied Audley; "if the king's supremacy be spoken against, that speech is to be held and understood as malicious."

"But in my case," urged the prelate, "there is but one witness, which in treason you know is insufficient."

His objection puzzled the court; but, determined to have the old man's blood, Audley replied, with a shameless violation of the rule:

"This is a case in which the king *personally* is concerned; the necessity for two witnesses does not hold good; the jury will consider the evidence, and as they believe or disbelieve so will you be acquitted or condemned."

The bright glorious sunshine flashed across the wan and haggard face of the venerable prelate, as he raised his sunken eyes to the infamous Audley and the parasites who sat beside him.

Audley had indeed so scandalously aggravated the case, straining it to high treason, that the jury at once perceived the verdict they must return, unless prepared to heap danger on their own heads, which none of them cared to brave.

Yet in the crowded court that day were many present whose faces were bathed in tears when they looked on that venerable father of the church, about to be sentenced to a cruel death on evidence given contrary to all faith, and the promise of the king himself.

The jury after a short time returned; they brought in a verdict of *guilty*.

The aged prelate lifted his emaciated hands to heaven, and prayed God to forgive those who persecuted him unto death. And Audley arose, and putting on a grave and solemn countenance, he passed sentence of death in the revolting terms usual on such occasions, ordering that his head and four quarters should be set up where the king should appoint, and ending by the mockery of a prayer that God would have mercy on his soul.

This wicked judge had not the apology of having any taste for blood himself; he might have been better pleased perhaps to have sustained Fisher's objections, and directed an acquittal; he was merely a tool of a tyrant, who hearing that Paul III. had sent Fisher a cardinal's hat, exclaimed, "I will take care he has never a head to put it on."*

He had been led to and fro to his dungeon in the Bell

* Bayley's Life of Fisher.

Tower, sometimes on horseback, sometimes by boat, for he was too infirm to walk; and he at once prepared himself to appear before God.

Early one morning Kingston came to his cell, but knew not how to declare his message.

"My lord," said he, hesitating, "you are old—infirm, breaking up; one day more or less—my lord, the will of his grace is that this morning—"

"Thanks, I understand: at what hour?"

"At nine, my lord."

"What is the hour now?"

"Just five."

"Five o'clock. I can sleep two hours longer then."

"The will of the king is that you should not speak long to the people."

"His grace may rest content."

And Fisher went to sleep.

At seven he arose, and dressed himself in his best, clothes and books having been given him.

"Why such care?" asked an attendant.

"It is our marriage day," said the prelate; "it becometh us to use solemnity." And then, too weak to stand or walk, he leaned against his dungeon wall, with breviary in hand, for the last time.

As he left the dungeon in which he had been condemned to a far more rigorous punishment even than More, he asked for a New Testament; opening it at the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel: "*Now this is life eternal that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.*"

Arrived at Tyburn, he gave his book to one of the guards, and turned him to the people, saying: "I die for

our holy faith; pray for me; may God receive my soul and save the king and his people!"

The morning sun shone brightly on his face, and raising his hands he exclaimed: "*Approach unto Him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be confounded.*"

Then when they had removed his outer garments, he sung the *Te Deum Laudamus* in a loud voice; then laying his venerable head upon the block, he received the blow which severed it from his body at a single stroke. His head was afterwards exposed on London Bridge. His remains were at once stripped, left on the scaffold the rest of the day, and then buried with every kind of indignity in a grave in Allhallows Church, Barking, which the soldiers dug with their halberds. The head was said to be preserved from corruption, the lips remaining red, and Henry ultimately ordered it to be thrown into the Thames.

CHAPTER IV.

CONDEMNED.

IT would be impossible to describe the feelings of Margaret and her family on hearing of the execution of the intrepid and saintly old bishop. The rigour of his imprisonment in the Bell Tower had alone deprived the heroic Margaret of the consolation of seeing him, and she would fain have followed the mournful cortege to Tyburn, but for the positive commands of Roper forbidding her to do so. Meanwhile the agitation of herself and her family became extreme; the trial and condemnation of the bishop being merely the prelude to the arraignment of the ex-chancellor, whom the terror and anxiety of the sorrowful group at Chelsea led them to consider as already condemned.

They were not doomed long to suffer the agonies of suspense. On the 1st of July Sir Thomas issued forth from the old fortress to stand his trial at Westminster.

He was conducted on foot; an old mantle was thrown over his shoulders, his body was bent, his form attenuated by illness and privation, he leant for support upon a stick, his appearance testifying to the sufferings he had endured during his long captivity, but betraying no more emotion than when as chancellor of England he left his home at Chelsea to administer justice.

Those who were to be his judges had already taken their places when he entered the hall. All of them had had in happier days the honour of sitting at More's table; some of them had been, like Audley, the present chancellor,

amongst his intimate friends. To the left of the court, and near the jury, was Richard Rich, the creature of Cromwell, partially concealed by a curtain.

The king's attorney then read the indictment, a document drawn up with much dexterity. The principal charges against Sir Thomas were his refusal to take the oath required by parliament regarding the spiritual supremacy of the king, and his obstinate disobedience to his sovereign. The indictment also referred to the letters he had written to Bishop Fisher when in prison, his allusion to the oath, which he had compared to a two-edged sword, killing both soul and body, and his conversation with Rich. More was then accused of the crime of high treason.

Then the lord chancellor arose, and said to the prisoner:

"You have heard the indictment read, you see how criminal are the facts of which you are accused; but so great is the goodness of the king that he will pardon you, we trust, your great obstinacy, if you will even now change your opinion."

More, supporting himself by his stick, replied in a calm voice:

"Noble lords, I thank your honours for this your courtesy; but I beseech Almighty God that I may continue in the mind I am in through His grace unto death."

Then he paused, as if to recollect himself, and continued:

"When I think how long my accusation is, and what heinous matters are laid to my charge, I am stricken with fear est my memory and wit, which are decayed together with the health of my body through my long imprisonment, be not now able to answer these things on a sudden, as I otherwise could."

Here More's voice failed, his limbs trembled, and the

lord chief justice ordered a chair to be brought to him; and seating himself, he continued:

"If I am not mistaken, the indictment contains four principal heads, each of which I will answer in order. In the first I am accused of disapproving of the king's marriage with the Lady Anne Boleyn; yes, truly, I always told the king my opinion therein as my conscience dictated, and you cannot find in my candour a crime of high treason, the king having commanded me on my oath of allegiance to give him my opinion on this matter; if it can be an offence to tell one's mind plainly, when our prince asketh us, I suppose I have been already enough punished for this fault by the loss of all my goods, and imprisonment, having been shut up these fifteen months.

"The second charge is that I have twice refused, in a spirit of malice, to answer the councillors of the crown this question, 'Is not the king the supreme head of the church?' I answered them that this law belonged not to me, whether just or unjust. I protested I had never said nor done anything against it, that I desired henceforth to occupy myself only with the bitter passion of our blessed Saviour, and of my passage out of this world. In all this I have not rendered myself guilty of any crime of treason; there is no law to punish silence, God only being judge of our secret thoughts."

Here the attorney-general Hales interrupted him:

"We can impute to you no guilty word or action, but we have your silence, which is a manifest sign of a malicious mind, for no faithful subject would refuse to answer when interrogated in the name of the law."

"My silence is no sign of a malicious mind," replied Sir Thomas, "which the king himself may know by many of my dealings, nor of any contempt of your law, for it is a maxim

of civil as of canon law that *qui tacet consentire videtur*, 'he that holdeth his peace seemeth to consent.' You say that a faithful subject cannot refuse to answer; but the duty of a good subject is to obey God rather than man, to have more care of his conscience than of any other matter, especially that his conscience procure no scandal to the state or revolt to his prince. And mine, my lords, is very tranquil. I protest, in the name of Heaven, that I have not revealed to any man living my interior thoughts.

"I come to the third article. I am accused of seditious acts against the parliament, because whilst in the Tower I wrote various letters to the Bishop of Rochester, exciting him to violate the law. Let them show me those letters, let them be read; but no, the bishop has burned them, say they. Well, I will tell you what they contained. Some were only of private matters, as about our old friendship and acquaintance. One of them was in answer to his, whereby he desired of me to know how I had answered in my examinations to this oath of supremacy; touching which, this only I wrote unto him again, that I had already settled my conscience, let him settle his to his own good liking, and no other answer I gave him. God is my witness, as God I hope shall save this my soul; and this I trust is no breach of your laws.

"The last objected crime is that, being examined in the Tower, I said that this law was like a two-edged sword, for in consenting thereto I should endanger my soul, in refusing it I should lose my life; which answer, because Bishop Fisher made the like, it is gathered that we conspired together. What the bishop answered I know not. If his answer were like mine, it proceeded not from any conspiracy of ours, but from the likeness of our wits and learning. And, to conclude, I unfeignedly avouch that I

never spoke word against this law to any living man, although perhaps the king's majesty hath been told the contrary."

The attorney made no answer, but the word Treason was on the lips of all the judges; and to convince the jury of the guilt of More, the testimony of Rich was invoked.

Slowly arose Rich from his seat, and passing through the motley throng, he took his place at the bar *as a witness*, and declared that in his cell in the Tower, and in presence of witnesses, More had condemned the act of parliament touching the spiritual supremacy of the king.

Through the windows of the old hall streamed a glorious flood of sunshine, shedding as it were a halo over the head of the glorious confessor, who, rising from the seat which had been given to him, fixed his penetrating gaze full on the face of his cowardly accuser, the false witness Rich. Then, turning to the bar:

"My lords," he exclaimed, in a voice calm and clear and deep, as when in his palmy days of greatness he had sat as judge instead of standing at the bar as criminal, "if I were a man to laugh at an oath I should not stand here at this time in this place as an accused person." And turning to the solicitor-general, he added: "and if this oath which you have taken be true, then I pray that I may never see the face of God, which I would not say were it otherwise, to gain the whole world. In truth, Mr. Rich, I am more sorry for your perjury than for mine own peril; but know you, that neither I nor any man else to my knowledge ever took you to be a man of such credit, as neither I nor any other would vouchsafe to communicate with you in any matter of importance. You know that I have been acquainted with your manner of life and conversation a long space, even from your youth to this time; we dwelt

long together in one parish, where, as yourself can well tell (I am sorry you compel me to speak it), you were always esteemed very light of your tongue, a great dicer and gamester, and not of any commendable fame either there or at your house in the Temple, where hath been your bringing up. Can it therefore seem likely to your honourable lordships that in so weighty a cause I should so unadvisedly overshoot myself as to trust Mr. Rich, a man always reputed of me for one of so little truth and honesty, so far, about my sovereign lord the king, to whom I am so deeply indebted for his manifold favours as one of his noble and great councillors, that I would declare only to Mr. Rich the secrets of my conscience touching the king's supremacy, the special point and only mark so long sought for at my hands, which I never did nor would reveal after the statute once made, either to the king's highness himself or to any of his noble councillors, as it is well known to your honours, who have been sent for no other purpose, at sundry times, from his majesty's person to me in the Tower? I refer it to your judgments, my lords, whether this *can* seem a credible thing to any of you.

"And if I *had* done," continued More, after a pause, during which he had wiped away the perspiration which stood upon his brow; "if I *had* done as Mr. Rich hath sworn, seeing it was spoken but in familiar secret talk, affirming nothing, but only in putting of cases, it cannot justly be taken to be spoken maliciously; and where there is no malice there can be no offence. Besides, my lords, I cannot think that so many worthy bishops, so many honourable personages, so many worshipful, virtuous, and well-learned men as were in the parliament assembled at the making of that law, ever meant to have any man punished by death, in whom there could be found no *malice*; for if *malice* be

taken in a general signification for any sin, no man there is that can excuse himself thereof. Finally, I declare to you, my lords, that his highness's bounty so long and so plentifully poured upon me were in my mind matter sufficient to prove the falsity of the accusation which this man urgeth against me. Wherefore, my lords, I commit to your honourable consideration if this oath be likely or not to be true."

Guilt was on the side of Rich, truth on that of the ex-chancellor; and his eyes fell beneath the gaze of the unfortunate captive, and as a last effort to bolster up the truth of the story he had told, he begged the bench to call as witnesses Palmer and Southwell, who had accompanied him in his visit to the Tower.

Palmer, however, declared on his oath that he was so busy thrusting Sir Thomas More's books and papers into a bag, that he paid no heed to their conversation. Sir Richard Southwell also declared that he was appointed only to look after the conveying away of the books, and lent no ear to the discourse of Rich and More.

But all was of no avail; the presiding judge, Audley, summed up, and declared that the silence of the prisoner was a sufficient proof of malicious intention, without even reading over a copy of the indictment.

The twelve jurors then arose, and retired into the council hall. They were absent but one quarter of an hour. When they returned, the chancellor turned towards the foreman, saying:

"Is the accused guilty?"

"Guilty," replied the foreman, his hand laid upon his heart.

Audley was so delighted that, forgetting established usages, he rose to pronounce the sentence, when More exclaimed:

"My lord, when I occupied the sea now used by you, my custom was always to ask the prisoner before sentence whether he could give any reason why judgment should not proceed against him."

"What have you to say?" demanded the chancellor with somewhat of hesitation.

"My lords," replied Sir Thomas, "the act of parliament in virtue of which I have been condemned is contrary to the laws of God and His church, the supreme government of which no temporal prince may take upon him, as it rightfully belongeth to the see of Rome, to whom Christ has transmitted His authority in the person of St. Peter. No realm can make a particular law incompatible with the general laws of the church. Your law is even contrary to the statutes of this our realm not yet repealed; as you may see by Magna Charta, where it was declared 'that the English church should be free, and have her rights and liberties untouched.'"

"But," said the lord chancellor, "do you not see the universities, bishops, and all the learned men in the realm have agreed to this act, and have taken the oath? I am much astonished, Sir Thomas, that you alone should so vehemently argue against it."

The prisoner arose, leaning for support on his stick, and his wan and emaciated countenance was lighted up as he exclaimed:

"And if the number of universities, bishops, and learned men were still greater, then do I, my lord, see little cause why I should change my opinion. I do not doubt but of the learned and virtuous men that are yet alive (I speak not only of this realm, but of all Christendom about), there are ten to one that are of my mind in this matter; and if I should speak of those learned doctors and virtuous fathers

that are already dead, of whom many are saints in heaven, I am sure there are far more, who all the while they lived thought in this case, as I think now. And therefore, my lord, I think myself not bound to conform my conscience to the council of one realm against the general consent of all Christendom."

Chancellor Audley paused, uncertain what reply to make. Then turning to the lord chief justice, loath perhaps to have the burden of the condemnation to lie upon himself, he asked him openly to give him his advice whether this indictment were sufficient or no.

And Sir John Fitz James arose, and striking the table with his fist, he exclaimed:

"My lords all, by St. Gillian, I must needs confess that if the act of parliament be not unlawful, then the indictment is not, in my conscience, insufficient." An answer like that of the Scribes and Pharisees to Pilate.

And my lord chancellor arose, and amidst the hush of the crowded assembly, said he:

"You have heard what my lord chief justice hath said. What further need have we of witnesses, he is guilty of death." *Quid adhuc desideramus testimonium? reus est mortis.* Audley was as another Caiaphas.

And then he pronounced the sentence in a loud, firm voice, delivering the usual barbarous formula: "that Sir Thomas should be brought back to the Tower of London by William Kingston, the sheriff, and from thence be drawn on a hurdle through the city of London to Tyburn, there to be hanged till *half dead*. After this, to be cut down, *yet alive*, and his four quarters to be set up over the four gates of the city; his head upon London Bridge."

Whilst the sentence was being pronounced, the counte-

nance of More remained unmoved. As the last words fell upon his ear, a slight smile was on his lips and his eyes beamed with joy.

"Well," said he, "seeing that I am condemned, God knows how justly, I will freely speak for the disburdening of my conscience. When I perceived that the king's pleasure was to sift out from *whence* the pope's authority was derived, I confess I studied for seven years to find out the truth thereof, and I could not find in the writings of any one doctor of the church that a layman was or could ever be the head of the church; it is contrary to the sacred oath the king took at his coronation."

"How?" said Audley in a scoffing tone, "do you make yourself out wiser than bishops, theologians, nobles, and all the people, great and small, of England?"

"My lord chancellor, for one bishop opposed to me by you, I have a thousand on my side; against this kingdom, the whole of Christendom in every age."

"Now, Sir Thomas," exclaimed his grace of Norfolk, "you show your spirit of hatred and malice, your obstinate and malicious mind."

"No, your grace," said the intrepid old man, "in me there is neither hatred nor malice, it is my conscience which forces me to protest against your sentence; it is to God that I appeal."

"Have you anything more to say?" said one of the judges.

"More have I not to say, my lords, but that, like as the blessed apostle St. Paul was present and consented to the death of St. Stephen, keeping their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet they be now two holy saints in heaven, and there shall be friends together for ever, so I verily trust, and heartily, that though your lordships have been

on earth my judges to condemnation, yet we may hereafter meet merrily together to our everlasting joy. May God be with you and with my sovereign lord the king, and grant him faithful councillors."

A general feeling of sorrow and commiseration ran through the spectators; and after a lapse of more than three centuries, during which statesmen, prelates, and a king have been unjustly brought to trial under the same roof, considering the splendour of his talents, the greatness of his acquirements, and the innocence of his life, we must still regard his murder as the blackest crime that has ever been perpetrated in England under the form of law.*

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* Campbell's Lives of the Chancellors.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

ND the executioner raised the axe, turning the edge towards the prisoner, who, bowing to the assembly, moved away, walked through the hall with a steady step and composed countenance, and was conducted by Sir William Kingston back to the Tower. On leaving the hall he met his son John, who threw himself at his feet to ask his blessing, his eyes full of tears, whom Sir Thomas blessed and kissed most lovingly. Poor John More! he had left his house in Yorkshire, his wife's inheritance, and had wandered through the streets of London in order to obtain this much coveted blessing.

Kingston, a tall and comely knight and a dear friend of More's, led his feeble fainting steps to the boat, with the tears even then running down his cheeks; but little did he guess the scene that awaited them at the Tower wharf. Fearful that in this world she should never again behold him or receive his last blessing, Margaret, his best beloved child, had alone of the females of her family ventured forth. She, with a superhuman courage, born out of her great love, had lingered to await the cortege at the Tower wharf. She had long watched for his approach; and when she beheld his venerated form, she burst through the crowd and the guard of halberdiers who surrounded him. She threw herself at her father's feet, embracing his knees, and with streaming eyes piteously besought his blessing; then rising, she flung her arms about his neck, exclaiming in agonizing accents:

"My father! oh, my father!"

The cortege for a few moments paused; rough men lifted their hands to their eyes as though to screen them from the ardent rays of the July sun, but in reality to brush away their tears and conceal their emotion.

Poor captive! What an age of supreme agony must have been concentrated in those few brief moments! He extended his hands over the head of his beloved child; he looked up to heaven as if imploring its aid; for a moment he was unable to speak.

"My good daughter, my child," at last he murmured, in a voice choked by his emotion, "God bless thee. I am innocent, and am about to die; it is the will of God. Submit, my dear one, to the decrees of Providence, and forgive those who have condemned me."

And the halberdiers moved on, the procession wending its way to the gloomy fortress; but Margaret, like one whose reason had departed, again retraced her steps. Caring not for the throng of people or the soldiers who guarded him, she rushed hastily back; she pushed her way through the crowd; she threw her arms around his neck, and many times she kissed him; and More, now entirely overcome, stood speechless, whilst large tears poured down his cheeks, and the very guards turned away to weep. And then came she who was once Margaret Giggs, afterwards Clements, with her last embrace and kiss; and Margaret's maid Dorothy also. But still the daughter lingered; the last kiss was hers; and then these two were severed for ever on this side the grave. She fell insensible at the prisoner's feet.

On a sign from one at the head of the cavalcade the executioner moved on, whilst the unhappy father cast a parting glance on the prostrate form of his beloved Margaret, and proceeded on his thorny way.

At the Old Swan, supposed to have joined the school of St. Anthony, the scene of More's early studies, with a heavy heart Kingston had bade him farewell, the tears trickling down his cheeks; whilst Sir Thomas, with a forced composure, spoke to him cheerfully, saying:

"Good Kingston, do not trouble yourself about me; but be of good cheer. I will pray for you, and your good lady your wife, that we may all meet in heaven, where we shall be happy for ever."

And, again within the walls of his prison-house, his wonted composure returned; the bitterest drop in the cup of his unmerited afflictions was over, it was his last parting with Margaret.

He was not left long alone; a troublesome courtier importuned him for an hour, begging him to change his mind. He told him he had changed it, and messengers were deputed from the king to ascertain what he meant.

"Good sirs," he replied, "he was too hasty in repeating my words. I had meant to have shaven my beard; but after I bethought me that my beard should fare no better than my head; and that was the only change I spoke of."

Then too came to him the royal commissioners, questioning him on many points, which he answered with his accustomed truthfulness. It was then made known that the royal mercy and favour commuted his sentence into being simply beheaded.

"I thank the king heartily for his great kindness," was More's reply, with a touch of his old humour; "but I pray God to preserve all my friends from the like favours, and all my posterity from such pardons."

The time that passed between his sentence and his execution was spent by Sir Thomas in prayer, and in writing with a coal to his daughter, to a friend, and in scratching

pious ejaculations on the walls of his dungeon or any scraps of paper he could find.

"Who would save his life to displease God? If thou hast been with Christ at the wine feast of Galilee, shrink not to stand with Him before the judgment-seat of Pilate!"

Now too he sent to his beloved Margaret the hair shirt and discipline. "Having finished his combat, he sent away his weapons," says his old biographer.

Here I subjoin his last letter to Margaret, with the heading thereof.

On the daye nexte before Sir Thomas was beheaded, beynge Mounday, and the fyfte day of July, he wrote with a cole a letter to his daughter, Maystress Roper, and sente it to her (whiche was the last thinge that ever he wrote), the copy whereof here followeth:—

Oure Lord blesse you, good daughter, and youre good housbande, and youre little boye, and all your and all my chyldren, and all my godde-chyldren, and all my frendes. Recommende me when you maye to my goode daughter Cicely, whome I beseeche oure Lorde to comforte. And I sende her my blessyng and to all her chyldren, and praye her to praye for me. I sende her an handkercher, and God comforte my goode sonne her husbande.* My good daughter Dauncey hath the picture in parchemente that you delivered me from my Ladye Coniers; her name is on the back. Shewe her that I heartelye praye her, that you may sende it in my name to her agayne, for a token from me to praye for me. I lyke special well Dorothy Coly; I pray you be good unto her. I marvel whether thys be she that you wrote me of; if not, yet I pray you be good to the t' other as you may in her affliction, and to my goode daughter Joane Alleyn† too. Give her, I pray you, some kynde answer, for she send hither to me this day to pray you be good unto her. I cumber you, good Margaret, much; but I would be sory if it should be any longer than to-morrow, for it is St. Thomas' Even, and the (octave) of St. Peter; and therefore to-morow long I to go to God: it were a day verye mete and convenient for me. I never liked your

* Giles Heron.

† This was no kin to him, but one of Mistress Roper's maids.

maner toward me better than when you kissed me laste, for I love when daughterly love and deare charity hath no leysure to loke to worldlye curtesy. Farewell, my dere chylde, and pray for me, and I shall for you and all youre frendes, that we may surely mete in heaven. I thanke you for youre gret cost. I send now to my good daughter Clement, her algorisme* stone; and I send her and my good sonne and all hers God's blessing and myne. I pray you at time convenient recommend me to my good sonne John More; I liked well his natural fashion.† Our Lord blesse hym and his good wyfe my loving daughter, to whom I pray him to be good, as he hath gret cause; and that if the land of myne come to his hande, he break not my will concerning his sister Dancy. And our Lord blesse Thomas and Austin, and all that they shall have.

Very early in the morning of the 6th of July he was visited by his friend, Sir Thomas Pope. He needed none to tell him the cause of the visit.

Pope sat down beside More's sorry bed, and said to him:

"My dear old friend, I bring to you a message from the king and the council, and I would that it had fallen to the lot of any other to deliver it."

"Nay, Mr. Pope, say not so; but tell me at what hour my death is decreed."

"At nine; therefore it is meet you should prepare yourself."

"I heartily thank you for your good news. I have been much indebted to the king for the benefits he hath bestowed on me; yet I am the more bound to his grace for putting me here, where I had much time to think of my last end; and God knoweth most of all I am bound to him that it pleases him to rid me of this wretched world."

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* An Arabic word, used to imply the six operations of arithmetic in the science of numbers.

† On the Tower wharf when he came from judgment, where his son asked his blessing.

"And the king's further pleasure is that you say not many words at your execution."

"You do well to warn me of the king's pleasure. I had purposed to speak to the people, but on no matter wherewith his grace could be offended; however, I shall obey his highness's command. And now I beseech you, my good friend, entreat his majesty to allow my daughter Margaret to be present at my burial."

"The king has already expressed his willingness that your wife, children, and friends should have liberty to be present."

"I am much beholden then to his grace for vouchsafing to think of my poor burial."

As Sir Thomas spoke, Pope arose and took him by the hand, and the tears he had striven to suppress during their conversation now burst forth.

"Be calm, Pope; be comforted, my good friend; I trust we shall meet again in heaven, where we shall live in eternal bliss."

Then they parted; and Sir Thomas, who prepared for death as for a solemn banquet, put on a silken gown which a friend had sent him whilst he was in the Tower. Then he knelt down, and offered up an earnest prayer.

Kingston entered his dungeon, and seeing him arrayed in the silken gown, exclaimed against his wearing it:

"The fellow who will take it for his perquisite is but a javill."

"What, Mr. lieutenant, shall I reckon *him* a javill, who will benefit me this day? Nay, I tell you, Kingston, were it cloth of gold, I should think it well bestowed on him. I mind me that St. Cyprian, the famous bishop of Carthage, gave the executioner thirty pieces of gold, because he was going to do him this good turn."

"Nay, Sir Thomas, I cannot agree or be of the same mind with you. I do beg of you not to leave the gown for that man."

"Well, Kingston, my friend, be it as you will; for the sake of our old friendship, I will not deny you so small a matter. Give me my frieze gown instead; and out of the little money I have had sent me here is a gold angel left; let this be given to the executioner, in token that I bear him no ill-will."

And as the clock of St. Peter ad Vincula tolled the hour of nine, he came forth from his dreary dungeon in the company of the lieutenant. His beard had been long unshaven, his face was pale and thin, in his hands he bore a red cross, and his eyes, still clear and bright, were raised to heaven.

As he passed by a good woman's house, she came forth, and presented him with a cup of wine; but he gently put it aside, saying, "Christ at His passion drank no wine, but gall and vinegar." Then came another woman of quite a different stamp, crying after him for certain books she had given into his keeping when he was chancellor, to whom he meekly turned, saying:

"Good woman, have patience but for one hour, when the king's majesty will have rid me of the care of thy papers and all other matters also."

Then too came another, bribed to hoot after him, exclaiming that he had done her an injustice when he was judge, to whom he said:

"I remember your cause very well; and if I now were to give sentence in your cause, I would not alter what I have already done."

Very different were the words of a citizen of Winchester who met him on the way, who, sorely tempted to suicide by

thoughts of despair, threw himself at the martyr's feet and begged his prayers.

"Go," said More, "go and pray for me, and I will pray for you."

He turned confidently away, and his despairing thoughts ceased ever after.

And now the bright summer sun shone on the scaffold and its grim belongings, and More looking at it steadily laid his hand on Kingston's shoulder, saying:

"I pray you, sir, see me safely up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself."

A large throng of persons had assembled, and he began to address them; when, the sheriff interrupting him, he contented himself with briefly asking their prayers, calling them to witness that he died in the faith of the holy Catholic Church, and loyal to his God and his king.

Then he knelt him down, and said aloud the *Miserere* psalm; having ended which, he arose, and the executioner asking his forgiveness, he said, kissing him:

"Thou wilt do me this day the greatest benefit. Pluck up thy spirit, man, and be not afraid. My neck is very short; take heed, therefore, that thou strike not awry, to save thy credit."

The executioner would have covered his eyes; but he stopped him, saying, "I will cover them myself," and he bound them with a cloth he had brought for that purpose. Then laying his head on the block, he bade the man wait, until he had removed his beard, adding, "That, at least, has committed no treason."

The next moment a single blow of the axe had severed the head from the body, and the soul of the martyr had passed to the hands of its Maker.

CHAPTER VI.

MARGARET.

BEWILDERED, dazed, as she was by the terrible calamity which had fallen upon her, Margaret had yet moved about in her family circle with a show of outward composure, though her heart was in truth ready to break.

All the sorrow and anguish of the last few weeks had culminated in the exquisite agony of the previous forty-eight hours. She had wept till her eyes refused to shed any more tears ; sleep had vanished from her eyelids. She moved about her accustomed duties mechanically, her whole heart with the lonely captive at the Tower.

All was over now !

Yes ; the spirit of her persecuted father was happy with its God, for if ever unflinching honesty of purpose, noble self-sacrifice, and a life full of good and holy works crowned by violent death for conscientious religious principle, constitute the martyr, such was Sir Thomas More.

The venerable head of her dearly loved father was placed on a pole on London Bridge, but the body awaited burial in St. Peter's chapel, in the Tower, and she had taken upon herself the sad consolation of preparing it for interment.

During the whole of More's long imprisonment his loving daughter had conveyed to him for his support such means as she could raise from friends or by her own exertions.

On this morning of the burial she found, when she

reached the Tower, that she had forgotten to bring a sheet with her to fold round the body. She had already distributed all her money as a dole to the poor for her father's soul, and not a penny was left to any of those who were with her.

Mrs. Harris, her maid, volunteered to try and release her from the difficulty. Presenting herself at the first draper's shop she came to, she made her bargain as to the price of some linen; and then opening her purse she made as though she were about to look for money before trying if they would give her credit for the sheet, when to her amazement she found therein the exact sum she had agreed to pay, though previously she had not a cross about her.

In later times this narrative, told in all the old biographies, has been omitted, probably as bordering too much on the marvellous. Those who read it must draw their own conclusions; it is too full of interest to be omitted.

But great was the horror of Margaret whilst that venerable head remained on the bridge; oftentimes would she leave her house when none knew whither she had gone, but disguised so as no person should know her. She was wont to turn her steps in that direction, and there gaze on the venerable relic and remain rooted to the spot for some time as if by a species of fascination.

At length the rumour reached Roper's home that the head of his late father-in-law was to be cast into the Thames, and Margaret at once determined in some way or other to become its possessor. And she contrived to purchase it, doubtless bribing the person who would have had the task of flinging it into the Thames.

Afterwards she caused a leaden box to be made, in which she placed the head of the martyr, after she had shed over

it many tears, requesting her husband to bury it with her in her own tomb whenever she should die.

And then Mistress Roper was summoned before the council, and the pale but still beautiful woman, whose face bore evidence of that inward grief which dieth not, stood bravely before the assembled lords.

"You keep your father's head as a relic, Mistress Roper," said the chancellor; "also you have it in contemplation, we understand, to publish his works. It would be well to remember that he suffered death as a traitor, and to be cautious, fair mistress, lest thou thyself be condemned."

"I procured my father's head, my lord, lest it should become food for fishes," exclaimed Margaret, a slight flush mantling her cheek the while, "hearing that an order had gone forth that it was to be cast into the Thames; and for the rest, I have buried it where I thought fit. Methinks, my lords," added Margaret, "I speak to such amongst ye as have daughters; they could scarce do less than I have done, if the hard hap of life should render them fatherless in such a way. Alack, they would not stop to reckon up the cost to themselves, nor care whether in the eye of the law you had been deemed guilty. I did procure that venerated head, my lords, it listeth me not to tell you how. Nathless, I glory in the deed, and if for such I be deemed worthy of punishment, I am in your hands; do with me as it pleaseth you. Moreover, I will publish his works when opportunity shall serve."

For a short time Margaret was dismissed, whilst the council held conference as to how they should punish this peerless daughter for an act of filial duty. Then it was resolved to commit the admirable woman to prison. She was not, however, detained for long, the indignation of the people being excessive concerning her imprisonment.

Though John More was considered as not very bright in his intellect, so that Sir Thomas once told his wife "she had prayed so long for a boy that now she had one who would be a boy as long as he lived," yet his character was marked with sufficient strength to induce him to venture the denial of the king's supremacy, for which Henry in one of his sudden gusts of passion ordered him to be committed to the Tower. He lay there for some time under sentence of death, but was released after Margaret obtained her freedom.*

And then in the lives of Margaret and her husband came a dreary aching void, and it was very long before their spirits regained their usual tone; at last they removed from Chelsea, residing alternately at Canterbury and the manor house of Well Hall, in Eltham, the latter being Roper's family seat.

Before the committal of her late father to the Tower, he had made a conveyance for the disposing of all his lands, reserving for himself an estate only for term of his life, some part of which was to go to his wife after his death, and some to his son's wife Anne, in consideration of her being heiress of some land that brought in more than a hundred a year, some also to Margaret and her husband, in recompence of their marriage settlements, with various remainders.

This conveyance was made long before the matter in which he was attainted was constituted an offence, and yet after by statute cleverly avoided; and so were all his lands that he had by this conveyance settled on his wife, contrary to the order of law, taken from them and brought into the king's hands, except that portion set aside for Roper and his wife. More had indeed reserved this, as he did the

* Preface, Hunter's Life of More.

rest, for the term of his own life; but on consideration, two days after, by another conveyance he gave the same at once to them in possession, and so because the statute had affected only the first conveyance, the second was without its compass, and Margaret's and Roper's portion was safely secured to them.

When news of his death was brought to the king he was playing at tables, Queen Anne looking on.

"Thou art the cause of this man's death," said he, and after awhile, leaving his play, he betook himself to his chamber and there fell into a melancholy fit; but if he felt any remorse when he rebuked Anne, remembering the time when he had put his arm round More's neck in the garden at Chelsea or was instructed by him in the motion of the heavenly bodies from the roof of his house, the feeling was transitory, for he not only gave orders for the head of his victim to be placed where it must have been conspicuous to his own eye in passing from Whitehall to Greenwich, but he expelled Lady More from the house at Chelsea, and seized whatever property More had left behind him.*

"The innocent mirth so conspicuous in the life of More did not forsake him at the last. His death was of a piece with his life, there was nothing in it forced or affected. He did not look upon the severing of his head from his body as a circumstance which ought to produce any change in the disposition of his mind; and as he died in a firm and settled hope of immortality, he thought any unusual degree of sorrow and concern improper." †

"His character, both in public and private life, comes as near perfection as our nature will permit. . . . No good Roman Catholic could declare that the king's first marriage

* Campbell's Lives of the Chancellors. † Addison.

had been absolutely void from the beginning, or that the king could be vested by act of parliament with the functions of the pope as head of the Anglican church. . . . I own I feel little respect for those by whose instrumentality the Reformation was brought about, and with all my Protestant zeal I must feel a greater reverence for Sir Thomas More than for Cranmer or Cromwell." *

After More's death the Emperor Charles V. sent for Sir Thomas Eliot, the English ambassador.

"My lord ambassador," said he, "we understand that the king, your master, has put his faithful servant and grave counsellor, Sir Thomas More, to death."

To which Sir Thomas Eliot replied that he understood nothing about it.

"Well," said the emperor, "it is too true; and this we say, that had *we* been master of such a servant, of whose doings ourselves have had these many years no small experience, we would rather have been deprived of the best city of our dominions than have lost such a worthy counsellor."

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* Campbell.

CHAPTER VII.

THE END OF A STORMY LIFE.

"In England death has either snatched every one (of worth) away, or fear has shrunk them up."—ERASMUS.

THE terror that seized on the mind of the hapless Katharine, when she heard of the execution of her old friends More and Bishop Fisher, rendered her health much worse, together with her removal insisted on by the brutality of Henry to Kimbolton Castle, and whither she was forcibly removed notwithstanding her most earnest protestations, for the doors of her apartments were shut against her. The place to which she was conveyed was an ancient pile, with tower and gateway and double ditch; a very strong place in a cross country valley, a house buried in wood and open uplands to the east and west, each knoll of which was crowned with either abbey tower or village spire. A green bright country, full of deer and birds, and fen water fowl, open to the March winds, and asking of its dwellers who would keep in health a good deal of exercise on horse and foot, neither of which the unhappy queen was permitted to do.*

Extreme anguish did Katharine suffer at the imprisonment of the unfortunate Father Forrest, one of the friars who had been present at the solemnisation of her marriage, and whose testimony the king much feared, his own creatures having denied that aught beyond a simple betrothal

* Agnes Strickland.

had taken place. The queen considered herself as the cause of his terrible sufferings, and in one of her many solitary hours penned him the following letter,* which safely reached him in his prison of Porta Nuova (Newgate).

My Reverend Father,—

Since you have ever been wont in dubious cases to give counsel to others, you will necessarily know all the better what is needed for yourself, being called to combat for the love of Christ and the truth of the Catholic faith. If you will bear up under these few and short pains of your torments which are prepared for you, you will receive, as you well know, the eternal reward, which, whoever will basely lose for some tribulation of this present life, I verily esteem him wanting both in sense and reason. But, oh happy you, my father, to whom it has been graciously granted that you should experience this more fully than other men, and that none otherwise than by these bonds, by this imprisonment, by these torments, and finally by a most cruel death for Christ's sake, you should happily fulfil the course of your most holy life and faithful labours. But woe to me, your poor and wretched daughter, who, in the time of this my solitude and the extreme anguish of my soul, shall be deprived of such a corrector and father, so loved by me in the bowels of Christ. And truly, if it were lawful for me freely to confess what is my most ardent desire in reference to this, to your paternity to whom I have always revealed (as was my duty) all the secrets of my heart and conscience, I confess to you that I am consumed by a very great desire to be able to die, either to go with you or before you, which I should always seek, and would purchase by any amount of the most heavy and infinite torments of whatever sort, provided it were not a thing repugnant to the Divine will, to which I always willingly submit all my life and my every affection and desire; so much do I dislike, and so greatly would it displease me, to allow myself any joy in this miserable and unhappy world, those being removed of whom the world is not worthy.

But perhaps I have spoken as a foolish woman; therefore since it appears that God has ordained, go you my father first, with joy and fortitude, and by your prayer and tears plead for me, that I may speedily and intrepidly follow you through the same wearisome and difficult

* Wood's Letters of Illustrious Ladies.

journey, and meanwhile that I may be able to share in your holy labours, your torments, punishments, and struggles.

I shall have all this by your last blessing in this life; but when you have fought the battle and obtained the crown, I shall expect to receive more abundant grace from heaven through your means. As to the rest I think it would be an extravagant thing in me, to exhort you to desire above all other things that eternal reward, and to seek to acquire and gain possession of it at whatever expense or pain in this life, you being gifted with such excellent knowledge of Divine things and (what I ought to mention first) brought up from your youth in a religion so holy, and in the profession of the glorious St. Francis.

Nevertheless, since this is a supreme good bestowed by God on mortals, that for His sake they may endure grievous pains, I shall always supplicate His Divine Majesty with continual prayers, with passionate weeping and with assiduous penitence, that you may happily end your course and arrive at the incorruptible crown of eternal life.

Farewell, my revered father, and on earth and in heaven always have me in remembrance before God.

Your very sad and afflicted daughter,

KATHARINE.

Poor Katharine had the consolation, almost unlooked for, of hearing from her old friend and adviser; part of his letter to her ran as follows.

"Your servant Thomas gave me your majesty's letter, which found me in much affliction, yet in constant hopes of release by means of death from the captivity of this miserable body. Not only did your letter infinitely comfort me, but it excited in me patience and joy. Christ Jesu give you, daughter and lady of mine, above all mortal delights which are of brief continuance, the joy of seeing His Divine presence for evermore. Remember me in your most fervent orisons, pray that I may fight the battle to which I am called, and finally overcome, nor give up for the heavy pains and terrible torments prepared for me. Would it become this white beard and these hoary locks to give way in aught that concerns the glory of God? Would it become, lady mine, an old man to be appalled with childish fear, who has seen sixty-four years of life, and forty of those has worn the

habit of the glorious St. Francis? Weaned from terrestrial things, what is there for me if I have not strength to aspire to those of God? But as to you, lady mine and daughter in Christ, sincerely beloved, in life and death I will continue to think of you, and pray God in His mercy to send you from heaven, according to the greatness of your sorrows, solace and consolation. Pray to God for your devoted servant, the more fervently when you hear of horrid torments prepared for me. I send your majesty, for consolation in your prayers, my rosary, for they tell me that of my life but three days remain."

Alas, poor queen! Her tears fell fast as she perused the letter, but the end was not as yet. Father Forrest and his fellow-prisoner, Abell, who suffered in the same cause, languished in prison long after Katharine's eyes were closed in death.

At last the hour approached when Katharine became aware that she was about to leave this world. And what think you could weigh more heavily on her heart, for the stroke of death must needs have been most welcome to her, than the wish once again to fold her daughter in her arms?

Yet once again she repeated the request so often refused; she imploring permission to behold the princess Mary only once, before her death, the daughter from whom she had been separated lest she should imbibe her mother's principles.

How anxiously she waited and watched for the answer to that motherly appeal, which was doomed to meet with a brutal refusal! yet still the poor Katharine could not rest till she had written to that tyrant husband, and calling one of her ladies to her bedside, she said to her:

"Bring hither writing materials, and write a letter to the king, which I will dictate."

And this was the epistle the broken-hearted woman dictated.

MY LORD AND DEAR HUSBAND,—

I commend me unto you. The hour of my death draweth fast on; and, my case being such, the tender love I bear you forceth me in a few words to put you in remembrance of the health and safeguard of your soul, which you ought to prefer before all worldly matters, and before the care and tendering of your own body, for the which you have cast me into many miseries and yourself into many cares. For my part, I do pardon you all, yea, I do wish and devoutly pray God that He will also pardon you.

For the rest, I commend unto you Mary our daughter, beseeching you to be a good father unto her, as I heretofore desired. I entreat you also on behalf of my maids to give them marriage portions, which is not much, they being but three. For all my other servants I solicit a year's pay more than their due, lest they should be left unprovided for.

Lastly, do I vow that mine eyes desire you above all things.*

And yet there was a little earthly comfort destined for her before she passed away to the better world; one faithful soul sought her out in spite of every obstacle, and stayed by the suffering woman to the last.

It was the first evening of the new year, a clear frosty evening, with a keen north-east wind piping across the uplands around Kimbolton Castle, and cutting across the face of the wayfarer with the keenness of a razor.

About six o'clock a lady presented herself at the castle gate; half frozen with the intensity of the cold, faint and exhausted, she trusted to her woman's wit to help her through the difficulty which she well knew awaited her, for the instant she mentioned the queen as princess dowager she was asked for the license authorising her to visit her.

"I pray thee ask me no questions just now, but let me come to the fire," said she. "I am cold and half dead with

* Agnes Strickland.

fatigue. I rode hard lest I should not be in time to see the *princess dowager* alive, was thrown from my horse, and scarce know how I travelled on the rest of my dreary journey."

"I am sorry to hear of your mishap, madam," said Sir Edward Bedingfeld, "for your journey is a fruitless one, with respect to your wish to see the princess."

"Oh, I can satisfy you, rest assured," replied the lady: "I have a multitude of letters which will exonerate you from blame, and will show them all to you in the morning, only I must beseech you lose no time, remember the strict bond of friendship which has subsisted between the princess and myself, and afford us both the happiness of once again beholding each other."

A moment more, and the castellan's hesitation was conquered by his better feelings. Moreover, he *did* believe the lady's story, and so he led the way followed by the faithful woman, who like the unfortunate Katharine was of Spanish extraction, who had followed her as maid of honour from her own country, and who could not rest unless she could stand by the bedside of the dying queen.

And thus the wit of the lady outmatched that of the castellan, and when once in the chamber of the queen, from which they attempted not to remove her by force, Lady Willoughby heeded but little the disappointment of the king's officers, when the following day they neither beheld the lady or her letters.

Yet six days longer lingered Katharine, wondrously consoled by the presence of her friend, and delighted that she could pour out the sentiments of her heart in her native tongue, which no spy could understand. And on the morning after the feast of the Epiphany, after a restless night, the welcome summons came: the queen knew that

the hand of death was upon her; she was at once anointed with the holy oil, made her confession, and received the Holy Eucharist; and after four hours' struggle with expiring nature she breathed forth her soul into the hands of her Maker, exchanging a stormy and much tried life for one of eternal blessedness in the kingdom of her Father.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRIORESS OF AMBRESBURY.

ENCOURAGED by the success of his former counsels, Cromwell ventured to propose the dissolution of the monasteries. The notion was received with welcome by the king, whose thirst for money was not exceeded by his love of power; by the lords of the council, who promised themselves a large share in the spoils; and by Archbishop Cranmer, whose approbation of the new doctrines taught him to seek the ruin of those establishments which proved the firmest support of the ancient faith.

With this view a general visitation of the monasteries was enjoined by the head of the church. Commissioners duly qualified were selected from the dependants of Cromwell. The visitors had secret orders to repair in the first place to the lesser houses, to exhort the inmates to surrender their possessions to the king.*

Maud Clavering had not been very long a professed nun, under the name of Sister Clare, when the first attempt was made on the part of Cromwell's emissaries to persuade the prioress voluntarily to surrender her convent.

We can scarcely imagine perhaps, certainly not describe, the feelings with which a community of women, whose lives have been long spent in religious seclusion, and who have forgotten the world and the world's ways, hear that a decree has gone forth by which that beloved asylum, their convent home, is to be ravished from them at the

* Lingard.

will of some tyrannical, rapacious king. The Prioress of Ambresbury must have been a difficult lady to deal with; she must have given a little trouble to the emissaries of the villainous Cromwell, for said the commissioners, when they addressed him on the subject:

"We came to Ambresbury, and there communed with the prioress for the accomplishment of the king's commission. Albeit we have used as many ways with her as our poor wit could attain, yet in the end we could not persuade her into any conformity. At all times she rested on these terms: 'If the king's highness command me to go from this house, I will gladly go, though I beg my bread; as to pension, I care for none.' Many times she prayed us to trouble her no further, for she had declared her mind, in which we might plainly gather from her words she was fully fixed before our coming." *

A staunch old nun, true to her trust, was the amiable prioress, Mother Gonzaga; and when the dreaded commissioners had departed, her sisters would flock about her and question her as to how she had got rid of them so quickly; for it was owing to her steadiness that for a while the dreaded crisis was averted.

The youngest in the pious house at Ambresbury was the newly professed Sister Clare, the very happiest days of whose still young life were those which she passed in her convent. Humble, gentle, and pious, she was sure to win favour with the elder nuns; they considered themselves fortunate in having her amongst them.

The nuns of Ambresbury formed a happy sisterhood, though the world, ignorant of the fundamental rules of

* Letters of commissioners upon the surrender of Ambresbury, fol. 553, State Paper Office.

the monastic state, chooses to deny that happiness is ever to be found therein. Obedience and humility are as it were the key-stones of the arch on which the virtues of the religious are built up; yet the obedience is far from a slavish rendering up of the will to a superior; the faithful observance of the rules of her order is the guide of a nun's life, and following them she aims at the perfection to which she is supposed to aspire.

The good prioress had learned from the letter of Queen Katharine the early sorrows of her young *protégée;* and between these two, the stately Mother Gonzaga and the gentle girl nun, a great love had soon sprung up. In works for the decoration of the altar, as she was skilled in embroidery, Sister Clare passed much of her time; then there were the duties of the choir, prayer, and sundry works for the poor; so that the young nun's days flew on in a happy round of innocent and useful employment.

The brutal tyrant Henry, urged on by his evil minister Cromwell and his rapacious nobles, was the first to cast a shadow on the happiness of the nuns of Ambresbury. The convent was built in a sequestered valley, and was enriched by sundry pious bequests and by the fortunes of the gentle maidens whom God had called from the world to serve Him in retirement. Its cloisters were spacious, its beautiful church and choir decorated with a chaste simplicity; yet no cost was spared on their adornment, for within it day and night reposed the Sacramental Presence of the Lord. The red lamp was ever burning, typical of the flame of love that should dart up heavenward from the soul of man; and ever before the altar, in the busy hours of the day or the silent watches of the night, was one of the sisters of Ambresbury prostrate before it.

But the cloud that had long been gathering over the

unhappy land grew darker and darker; and as the sisters paced the silent cloister, or wandered in the gardens, where little could be heard beyond the murmuring ripple of the waters of a rivulet hard by, or the song of the birds, their thoughts oftentimes came back from heaven to earth.

A monstrous act of injustice is this, whether perpetrated by the eighth Henry in all his greed of plunder, three centuries since, or in these our own days on the hapless nuns of the fair land of Italy!

And one bright sunny day the great bell of the convent was loudly rung, as it was wont to be when the king's commissioners paid their unwelcome visit. The lady prioress was closeted with them longer than usual, and very pale was she when again she met her daughters in religion.

"The royal mandate has arrived, my sisters," said she as they thronged around her. "Happy those amongst us who have friends to receive them; and happier still those the day of whose mortal life is far spent."

The grief and despair of the sisterhood may be better conceived than described. It had been decreed that the superiors should receive a pension for life, and the nuns each a single gown from the king; and they were left to support themselves as best they could, or to seek relief from the charity and commiseration of others.*

The blow was overwhelming; but as the day grew on they became gradually more calm, and each one set to thinking what she should do. The greater part of them were sure to sink under this cruel stroke of fortune. What is a woman fit for when, the world forgetting and by the world forgot, after ten, fifteen, twenty years and more of religious seclusion, she be thrown on its scant mercy again?

* Lingard.

Sister Clare had begged permission to stay with the prioress beyond her usual time; then had gone to her cell, and had wept herself to sleep. Then the former took up her pen, and wrote the following letter to Cromwell.

RIGHT HONOURABLE, MY SINGULAR GOOD LORD,—

I humbly recommend me unto your good lordship, and have received the king's most gracious letters and yours, touching the resignation of my poor office in the monastery of Ambresbury; according to the purport of which letters and your good advertisement I have resigned my said office into the hands of the king's noble grace, before the commissioners thereto appointed, trusting that such promises as the same commissioners have made unto me for assurance of my living hereafter shall be performed. And so I most humbly beseech your good lordship, in the way of charity, to be means for me unto the king's highness, that I may be put in surety of my said living during the little time it shall please God to grant me to live. And I shall continually during my life pray to God for the preservation of the king's most excellent noble grace and your honourable estate long to endure. At the poor monastery of Ambresbury, the tenth day of this present month August,

By your poor Oratrice,
FLORENCE BONNEWE,
Late Prioress there.

To the Right Honourable my singular good Lord, my Lord Cromwell, and Lord Privy Seal.

[*Endorsed*] "FLORENCE BONNEWE, Prioress of Ambresbury, desiring to have her stipend for life."*

Little did she think as she looked upon her weeping sisters, or gazed on each familiar object from which she was to be torn for ever, that a fiat had gone forth against herself, which rendered the tyrant king's decrees innocuous in her regard. Yet so it was; the corn was ripe for the harvest, and the Master was about to gather it in. Without any bright or shining talents, the Mother Gonzaga

* Wood's Letters of Illustrious Ladies.

had the rare quality, granted but to a few, of attracting the love of others to herself. She may be said to have held in her hand the hearts of her sisters in religion. She herself was one of the most humble of the large sisterhood. If called on by the defective virtue of a sister to administer a reproof, she herself suffered far more in giving the correction than did the delinquent who received it. She truly was the mother and the friend of all.

The next day the community employed themselves in packing up any little personal trifles they intended to remove. The usual routine of the day was broken; each was thinking of the grim future the will of a tyrant king had placed before her.

But, amidst the disorder that now prevailed, the nuns, during the short time granted wherein for them to disperse, still remained faithful to their choir duties. The prioress had remained in her accustomed place in the choir beyond her usual time. The nuns awaited the customary signal for them to arise and proceed to their cells; but they waited in vain. The head of the Mother Gonzaga was still bent as in earnest devotion, the thin hands clasped together; but the veil thrown a little on one side revealed the deadly whiteness of her face. Alarmed, she knew not why, the sub-prioress spoke to her; she answered not, nor did she move. Yet still thought those who gathered round, "she hath but swooned away; the excitement and the grief she feels is more than she can bear." Then they threw aside the veil; but they gazed upon the features of the dead; in the very act of supreme adoration the spirit of the last prioress of Ambresbury had passed away.

Her death, occurring almost immediately after she had penned the letter to Cromwell, saved her from any share in the calamities of her convent.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING.

"DID I not say that we should meet again?"

"Yes, truly; but little did I think where or in how sad a plight."

"Poor child, thy life has been a stormy one. The king has made short work in the task of spoliation. And so thou art turned adrift upon the world?"

"Even so. Right can never stand against might. Our good Prioress of Ambresbury bravely defended her own, but she had to yield at last. She hath been mercifully taken to a better world, and not left to see the misery of her sisters."

It was Maud who uttered these words. She was pale and thin; her nun's habit, which she still persisted in wearing, was threadbare; her veil was torn, her whole appearance that of one who had suffered much bodily hardship.

The only friends she had possessed on earth were Queen Katharine and the family of Sir Thomas More. The hapless queen had thrown aside this mortal coil, and had passed to a better world. Lady More had been expelled from her home at Chelsea, the brutal king granting her an annuity of but twenty pounds a year; and the once happy family were scattered about in various directions. Margaret Roper alone could have helped her, and she with her husband were absent from home.

Distressed in mind and body, and entirely without means, the terror-stricken nun immediately thought of Sir John

Thornhill; and remembering his kindness in the prison of Porta Nuova, or Newgate, she at once resolved on going to Holmeswood.

She arrived at the close of a winter's day. The sound of music burst upon her ears as she wandered, with bruised and aching feet, up the long avenue leading to the house. The leafless branches of the trees were laden with hoar-frost; but here and there the bright red berries of the holly glistened through its snowy mantle. The windows of the Grange were lighted up, some merry gathering was taking place; and Sister Clare shivered under her scanty covering, and quickened her weary steps.

Could she but see Sir John alone! but the probabilities were against the fulfilment of her wish. Some great change, thought she, must have taken place with him as well as myself; for he never would have allowed such gay revels to take place in a house of which he was the master. How sad too her own fate! she a cloistered nun, turned adrift from the home she loved, and which she had hoped would shelter her till her death, now condemned to roam through the land a solitary wanderer.

And slowly the poor pale sister made her way, not to the principal entrance of the Grange, but to the servants' offices in the rear of the house, and very timidly she rang the bell at a side gate.

It was answered by the old servitor Ellwood. "Might she see Sir John Thornhill?" she inquired in faltering tones, leaning against the wall for support, for she was faint and exhausted by reason of a long fast and much fatigue. It was evening now; and save for a cup of milk and some bread she had begged of a peasant's wife in the early morning, she had not broken her fast that day.

"Sir John is sick unto death, and—"

"But he would see me eftsoon, if you will but tell him that Sister Clare, a nun from one of the suppressed convents, who was known in the world as Maud Clavering, craves an audience."

She observed the old man start as she pronounced her name. Then he said:

"Alack, sister, the world goes hardly with you and with him; but come this way. Let not the gay dame, Lady Sedley, or any of her courtly company, see you. Abide here awhile, and I will seek Sir John."

It was now the nun's turn to start. She had little thought she was encountering the chance of meeting Sir John's daughter at Holmeswood.

The old man ushered her into a small ante-room, and opening a door which gave ingress into a larger room, went to a cupboard, from whence he produced bread, meat, and wine, which he placed before her, begging her to eat and refresh herself in his absence; and he would turn the key in the door to guard her from intrusion.

He was not gone very long; but the agitation of Sister Clare was too great to admit of her taking any refreshment beyond a piece of bread and a glass of wine.

"Follow me," he said, on his return. "We will go up the back staircase; we shall then be sure to meet none of these mummers by the way. A nice house for a dying man, I warrant me!" he added in an under tone, as he hobbled along a narrow passage at the end of which was a flight of stairs; and going before her with the lamp, he requested her to follow him.

Joyous strains of music burst upon the ear. It was a house of rejoicing instead of sorrow for sickness unto death, and the nun drew aside in dismay as, when she reached the gallery at the top, she encountered a handsome

but somewhat bold-looking woman, who, gazing at her with much astonishment, exclaimed:

"Marry, Master Ellwood, my mistress will not approve of strangers seeing Sir John."

"Pass on, Mistress Mabel, and mind thine own business," said Ellwood, muttering, as the woman flaunted off: "I would sooner have met any one on the way, sister, rather than the pert serving-woman of Lady Sedley, who, alack, ruffles it so gaily at Holmeswood."

Then turning to the right he entered a spacious corridor, quite at the farther end of which was Sir John's chamber.

"Thou hast seen the good knight before, sister. I pray thee be not alarmed; prepare to behold a great change. I tell thee his days are numbered, and the fault lieth with his own false daughter; and if ever there lived a man who we may hope will be pardoned his own sins, for that he has practised forgiveness of injuries, that man is my dear master."

Then Ellwood brushed away the tears which fell down his honest face, and, opening a door, signed the nun to follow him.

The chamber which she entered was spacious and lofty, but furnished simply enough for the cell of an anchorite. On a large bed in the centre of the apartment was extended the form of Sir John Thornhill, and one glance told Sister Clare that she stood in the presence of one not long for this world.

Then Sir John made the remark with which this chapter commenced.

He was resigned, nay cheerful, for when the Sister Clare expressed her regret at seeing him in so suffering a state, he replied:

"Verily, sister, I would not have it otherwise; for it is

the will of God. And thou too hast to bear the cross of Christ. Thou walkest on Calvary, maiden; but fear not, it will lead, though bathless the path be thorny, to the blessedness of heaven."

Not as I have written did Sir John address the nun, but in broken and disjointed utterances. His voice was tremulous and weak, his breathing short and laboured.

Then said he, as a strain of gladsome music burst upon the ear:

"That is not the plaintive hymn, sister, which dying ears would like to listen to; but it soon shall give place to the Alleluias my heart yearneth for. And thou, poor soul, turned out of thy convent, would that I could help thy dreary future; but thou hast come to help me instead."

"Willingly, Sir John." "Let me be your nurse," the sister would have added, but the glazed eye told her no earthly care could save him; and then too, the dying man's daughter, how might not she resent her coming!

"But I am glad to see you, Maud Clavering," said the knight, for the first time addressing her by the name she bore before she entered religion. "I mind me I can give thee something too. Ellwood, my good friend, come here to me."

The old man advanced and bent his head low to catch the words which fell so feebly from his master's lips.

"Thou knowest, Ellwood, I possess a ruby of great price. I wish thee to give it to this sister."

The old man hesitated.

"My lady, your daughter, knows you have that jewel, Sir John; she will think, perchance, I have unlawfully possessed myself of it when—"

"When I am dead, thou wouldst say. Nathless fetch it to me."

"Nay, nay, my kind friend, thy goodness to me must not bring him into trouble. Providence will come to my aid," said the nun.

Even as she spoke the door was hastily opened, and Lady Sedley, brilliantly attired, entered the room.

"Mabel told me that a stranger was here," said she, advancing to her father. "What meaneth such intrusion? Oh, a religious I perceive, sent I suppose by the monk who was here but yester even, by whom you were shrived. But my father is well tended whilst I am here, so there is no need for other service."

And as proud Eleanor spoke, she looked at Sister Clare, who stood in the place she should have occupied, seeing she supported her father's head upon her arm.

Sister Clare was wofully altered, but still it was the same sweet face as of old, and the violet eyes fringed with long silken lashes fell beneath the glance of Lady Sedley, who, recognising her as their eyes met, exclaimed:

"Maud Clavering here! here, and in the garb of a nun. Aye, the king will have none of them. And so, young mistress, judging from your sorry plight, you are from one of the suppressed monasteries. I desire you to go, and at once give place to my father's daughter."

"In the name of charity, madam, I beseech you banish me not thus harshly; I can tend well the sick; allow *me* to be his nurse."

"Depart to those whose gay company you have left, my child; this sister will remain with me till the morrow."

"Not so will I; for she is a Clavering, I do not forget the old feud."

Then the sister gently removed her arm from the sufferer's head, and clasping her hands, said she:

"What have *I* to do with the wrongs of the past? I again implore you to allow me to stay this night. Hark! how the wind shrieks and howls; do not send me forth; let me stay with *him*. I will leave Holmeswood ere noon to-morrow."

"Be it so; for this night alone then I leave him in your care." Then advancing to the bed she lightly pressed her lips on the face of her father, over which a grey shadow was passing, saying: "I will be with you at daybreak, dear father, and shall hope to see you better."

"It is well," thought the nun, as Lady Sedley swept past her in all her brave finery; "before to-morrow's sun shall rise he will have passed away, and small cause shall I have to linger here."

Then dismissing Ellwood, who slept in a room adjoining the sick man's chamber, promising to call him if any sudden change took place, she sat her down beside the bed, and with rosary in hand said her beads, praying earnestly that the transit to eternity might be peaceful, and free from any sharp death agony.

And her tears fell fast as she looked on the scarred countenance of the knight, and thought of her father and his sad story; and from him her thoughts recurred to her own sad past and present, to the late beloved Prioress of Ambresbury, the innocent lives her sisters had led, the aged ones who had been turned adrift to wander through the world uncared for. She had hoped, with the sanguine temperament of youth, to have found relief for herself in the friendship of Sir John, and lo, for him, the world was at an end. Oh, but for a boundless charity, how his victims must have detested the tyrant king!

And the hours wore on, till the clock in the tower had tolled twelve, and still ever and again sounds of revelry penetrated to the sick room; but gradually the nun knew by the closing of the various chamber doors and the intense quiet that succeeded, that the gay company had separated for the night. And softly rising she put a large log on the fire, trimmed her lamp, and then returned to her melancholy watch.

It was in the small hours of the night that the spirit of the knight went forth. Often, for he was sensible to the last, were the poor glazed eyes fixed earnestly on the young creature whom God had sent to watch beside him, and to supply the place of his ingrate daughter. She moistened his lips with a cooling draught, she prayed with him and for him, she spoke to him with burning lips of the goodness of God, of the haven of rest in store for him, of the glory of the bright hereafter. And then his mind wandered; the present was no longer with him; his mind was busy with memories of the past, his restless fingers plucked the bedclothes, he babbled of the scenes he could never mingle in again, and the grey shadow on the face grew still darker.

His head rested on her arm. Should she draw it away and summon Ellwood? for she knew he would die soon. But no, she resolved not to leave her post, and wiping away the death dews with her disengaged hand, she whispered in his ear the name of the Redeemer.

"*Jesu, miserere mei,*" said the dying man.

Then he made a slight movement, thus enabling her to remove her arm from beneath his head; and availing herself of the opportunity, she hastily summoned Ellwood, and then returned to Sir John.

And very gently came the last summons. There was no

death agony, no sharp struggle with departing life such as often attends the last moments of the dying; but peacefully, calmly, like the gentle zephyr of a summer day, just as the winter night was on the wane and the new day about to dawn, the spirit of the good knight of Holmeswood passed to its rest.

Then the nun and the old servant, after reverently closing the eyes of the dead, knelt them down and prayed fervently for the soul that had appeared before its merciful and just Judge, praying that piteous, earnest prayer of the church, "Eternal rest give to him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine on him."

Then, when she had risen from her knees, Sister Clare bade Ellwood farewell, for the first grey dawn of the winter morning was lighting up the Surrey hills, and the wanderer must be up and going.

The old man started back amazed.

"Nay, sister; what, dost thou think Richard Ellwood would suffer thee to leave thus early, and without breaking thy fast? What would *he* say, could he but lift up his voice and speak?" said he, pointing to the rigid form extended on the bed. "Poor friendless one," he added, "tell me, where art thou going?"

"To the fair city of Canterbury, good Ellwood; Mistress Roper is settled there, and expected home next week. Meanwhile a peasant woman, to whom she hath been very good, will shelter me for love of her."

"Come to mine own room then, and refresh thyself first; and I fancy, sister, it was wrong of me to fear an evil suspicion should rest on the mind of Mistress Sedley anent myself, so take thou the glittering ruby the good master wished to bestow on thee."

"Nay, nay, good Ellwood; far be it from me to touch

that which might jeopardize thee with thy mistress. She would say the jewel should of right be hers, so let her have it."

"Wilt thou be ashamed, then, to accept five gold angels, sister, of a serving man; right honestly have I earned them. Hereafter we may meet again. I pray thee accept them, good sister, if only as a loan."

"Indeed, I will gladly take them, and I heartily thank thee, Ellwood, and may He who holdeth the hearts of His creatures in His hands reward thee. And now I would not tarry longer. I charge thee tell the Lady Sedley that I thank her for allowing me to receive the last sigh of her father, in the which I see it was the hand of Providence did bring me hither. Furthermore, tell her I am assured we shall cross each other's path again. I will pray for her meanwhile."

Then pausing to press her lips on the cold brow of the corpse, she followed Ellwood to the room to which he had taken her the previous night, and making a slight and hasty meal she departed, ere yet the household, sleeping heavily from the effects of the late hours of the previous night, were astir. Conducting the nun to the principal entrance, Ellwood unbarred the door, and the keen fresh morning air revived her, bringing back a colour to her pale face.

"Now God be with you, Ellwood," said Sister Clare: "if you ever wish to hear how the world fares with me, write to Mistress Roper, addressing your letter to St. Dunstan's Place, Canterbury. She is a good and a true woman, and her husband hath a large and bountiful heart; they will help you if ever you are in need."

Then the nun turned away, sighing deeply as she gazed up at certain windows, which she knew to be those of the

room in which *it*, that thing of awe, no longer of this world, "that stark cold image of clay," reposed.

The bright rays of a wintry sun were just shining forth as Sister Clare walked with a brisk pace up the avenue, the clear blue sky was unflecked by a single cloud, the wind had subsided, and all nature looked bright and pleasant.

Like many others, some perhaps *far* more desolate than herself, (for she was known to Margaret, and then as now there were not many Margarets in the world,) she was wandering on her way in search of the means wherewith to live. In her convent she could teach, she could nurse the sick, she could embroider and pass her days in many useful duties, but "out in the world," ah! that was *quite* another matter, as she had seen when she dwelt in the old house at Aldgate; "but God's providence is great," thought she, "I will hear what Mistress Roper adviseth."

But think, I pray you, how many young, and aged, and delicate, had the rapacious Henry turned adrift; for after all it was only to get the money of the monastic institutions that he dissolved them. And as history never fails to reproduce itself, in the fair land of Italy now, as in England then, the same old injustice is in this our day being carried out doubtless with the same design. I cannot do better than close this chapter in the words of Sir Henry Spelman, in his "History of Sacrilege."

"To enter into a discussion on the innumerable benefits that the monastic system bestowed on the church, on the poor, on art, on science, on literature, to dwell on its innumerable offices of intercession, on its boundless hospitality, on the asylum it offered to the unprotected, the refuge to the aged, to contrast the monastery with the union, the lot of the nun with that of the governess or apprentice,

the holiness of St. Albans as it was with the godlessness of Manchester as it is, to prove that the discipline of monasteries even when they fell was singularly strict, the lives of their inmates extraordinarily pure, to quote the testimony of their adversaries in their favour, to show that the commissioners for the dissolution, men fleshed in iniquity, pleaded hard on behalf of some of them, to ask what now we have to supply their place, what training for candidates for holy orders, what asylums for aged priests, what machinery for pouring forth an army of preachers on a district assaulted by infidelity or heresy, what schools of ecclesiastical literature, what funds for its encouragement and promotion, what places of retreat for those that are overcharged with the business of this world, to inquire whether the parish doctor supplies the place of the infirmarian, whether the tenant of the abbey fared not better than he who is taxed to his utmost by an absentee landlord, whether daily and nightly devotion were not likely to bring down a greater blessing than churches opened once or twice a week, all this we say, we do not mean to consider. This only we will say, how false, how futile, how absurd beyond all common absurdity are the stale Protestant figments concerning abbeys, we equally want words and inclination to express."

These reflections of Spelman's also lead me to quote from Lord Campbell's "Chancellors," as exhibiting clearly the way in which the unfortunate abbey lands were dealt with.

"The grand object of Audley's ambition was to get the site and lands of the dissolved abbey at Walden, in Essex. For this purpose he writes to Cromwell with much earnestness, and it must be owned with candour and simplicity, showing that some extraordinary recompence was due to

him for having sacrificed even his character and conscience in the king's service. 'I beseech your good lordship, be my good lord in this my sute. Yf it shall plese the kynge's majeste to be so good and gracious lord to me, it shall sett forth as moche my poor estymacion as the valu of the thynge. In the besy world I sustayned damage and injury, and this shall restore me honeste and comodyte.' *

"Afterwards he urges his claim on this ground, with still more force and *naïveté:* 'I have in this world susteyned *greate damage and infamie* in serving the kynge's highness, which this grant shall *recompens.*' †

"This appeal was felt to be so well-founded, that in consideration of the law laid down by him on the trials of Fisher, More, Anne Boleyn, Courtenay, and De la Pole, and of the measures he had carried through parliament to exalt the royal prerogative and to destroy the constitution, and of the execration heaped on him by the whole English nation, as well as by way of retaining fee for future services of the like nature, and recompence for farther infamy, he received a warrant to put the great seal to the desired grant.

"But Henry, never contented with showering favours on those who pleased him, till changing his humour he doomed them to destruction, likewise bestowed on him the site and precinct of the priory of the canons of the Holy Trinity, of Christ Church, near Aldgate, where the chancellor erected for himself a commodious town mansion, with gardens and pleasure grounds.

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* Letters on Suppression of Monasteries, published by Camden Society, p. 245.

† Dugdale's Baronage, tit. "Audley."

"Still insatiable, he wrote to Cromwell 'that his place of lord chancellor being very chargeable, the king might be moved for addition of some more profitable offices unto him.' No rich sinecure was just then at hand, but a vacant blue riband was offered him to stay his importunity, and he was installed knight of the garter, being the first lord chancellor who, while in office, had reached that dignity."

CHAPTER X.

TWO YEARS AFTER.

IT is a merciful dispensation of Divine Providence in our regard, that the sharpest sorrow becomes chastened by the soothing hand of time. Were it otherwise, life would indeed be insupportable.

Margaret retired after her father's execution into the bosom of her family, the troubled past having, it is true, cast a shadow over the whole of her future life; but the healing influence of time had nevertheless done its work, and, if not happy, she strove to be cheerful and resigned.

Children were growing up around her who bid fair to reproduce in their own persons the virtue and talents of their mother; indeed, Margaret watched over their education with the same care as her deceased father had done over her own.

The famous Roger Ascham, tutor to the princess, afterwards Queen Elizabeth, declared that she was very desirous of having him for their tutor, to instruct them in the learned languages, but that he could not be persuaded to leave the university, being fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, whereupon she procured the services of Dr. Cole and Dr. Christopherson, both famous for their skill in the Greek tongue.

In the troubles however that the tyranny of Henry caused on account of religion, Margaret and her husband by no means led a life of supine indifference. Roper was open-handed as the day, and his wife gloried in distribut-

ing his alms, which increased as he prospered in life, as heretofore she had done those of her father.

The unfortunate Lady More was not deserted by her in the days of her widowhood. When Margaret was at Canterbury she was frequently a visitor at her house. But after the execution of Sir Thomas the whole family, all of whom had entered the married state in extreme youth, were scattered about in various directions. And of Margaret's sisters, Cicely and Elizabeth, even as we have met with no record of them during their father's life, so was there none after his execution.

Of his adopted daughter Margaret Giggs, however, who had married Dr. Clements, the records of the past have preserved somewhat of her doings during the year that followed the death of Sir Thomas.

In the persecution of the monks of the Charter House, Mistress Clements bribed the jailer to let her have access to them; she disguised herself as a milkmaid with a pail on her head full of meat, wherewith she fed them, putting meat into their mouths, they being tied and not able to stir or help themselves, which having done she afterwards cleaned their prison-house, performing every duty with her own hands.

"After several days, the king understanding that they were not dead ordered a stricter watch to be kept over them, so that the jailer durst not let her in any more; but by her importunity and increased bribes she caused the tiles to be removed from over their heads, and by a string let them down meat in a basket, approaching the same as nearly as she could into their mouths, and they did stand chained against the posts; but they not being able to feed themselves, or at least very little, and the jailer very much fearing that it would be perceived in the

end, refused to let her come any more. And so, soon after, they languished and pined away, one after another, what with the stench and misery and want of food which they there endured." *

William Roper possessed a fine seat called Well Hall, in the pretty Kentish village of Eltham, surrounded by pleasant rural scenes; but the home Margaret loved the best was the old Place House of her husband's family at Canterbury.

And on a soft spring evening, after her return home with Roper, she having spent some weeks with him in the Netherlands, she went to hear vespers at St. Dunstan's church. Of this church Margaret was very fond, it was so near to her home, only a little beyond her own house, on the opposite side of the way; and in the early morning when the sunlight shone upon the windows of the ancient fane, and but few of the busy world but yet astir, it was her delight to spend an hour before the altar, and again when the day was over, with all its busy anxious cares, to keep watch at the vesper hour, praising her God in the Virgin's glad *Magnificat* for His mercies to her and those she loved. And then would she turn her steps to the Roper chancel, founded by one John Roper, in the reign of Henry IV., the object of its pious founder being that masses should be said at the altar of St. Nicholas, for the souls of such of the family as were dead, and the welfare of those that were living, to be served by two chaplains, each of whom had £8 a year assigned him, to be paid by him and his heirs, besides a house to live in adjoining the family mansion.†

And an altar cloth, of rare and curious make, of blue

* "Troubles of our Catholic Forefathers," by Rev. J. Morris, S.J.
† Hasted's History of Kent.

cloth, having on it the figures of cherubs, and in the middle a crucifix elegantly wrought in needlework, embossed with gold, is yet to be seen, given by Margaret for the use of the church; probably it is the work of her own hands, or those of her daughters.* But I have wandered far away from the point at which I started.

As usual then, Mistress Roper had turned her steps to St. Dunstan's. It was the anniversary of her father's death, a day ever after kept by her in the strictest seclusion, fasting, and prayer.

She had knelt long in the Roper chancel, and the bitter memories of the day on which he died had awakened the old sorrow. She was praying for him, but with the fond feeling at her heart that he needed not her prayers but was pleading for her in the beatitude of heaven; for she loved to think of him as having won for himself the martyr's glorious crown on the day on which his head fell beneath the executioner's axe.

The sun had sunk low beneath the western sky, and gradually its rays of ruby and amethyst and gold, which had pierced through the windows of the church, lighting up the altar of St. Nicholas, had faded away; yet still Margaret lingered before it. And in a little while the moon arose, and its silvery beams lighted up the now almost deserted church; the lamps had been all extinguished, save a few left burning here and there near the confessionals, or before the various altars.

Suddenly a deep sigh broke the stillness, and disturbed Margaret's meditations; and raising her head, she beheld the tall and slender form of a woman leaning against a pillar near which she herself knelt. Rising from her knees,

* Hasted's History of Kent.

she was about to move away, when this person advanced and touched her on the arm.

Mistress Roper paused, and gazing on a thin white face and a form clad in poor garments, hastened to bestow an alms, when a flash of moonlight shone upon the upturned countenance, and she recognised at once the unfortunate Sister Clare. She had been the guest of a humble, simple countrywoman, ever since the night in January on which she left Holmeswood, and wandering to Canterbury had been succoured by this woman, formerly a servant in the employ of the Ropers. And, with her heart touched with pity, the love Margaret had formerly borne for Sister Clare burst forth anew, and assuring her of a hearty welcome on the part of her family, she conducted her to her home.

An ancient building too it was, said to have stood some distance *behind* the present house and gateway in St. Dunstan's Street, these buildings having then formed only the inferior offices.

Leading her through a spacious courtyard, Margaret made her way to a trimly kept garden, and then to a stone terrace, which she ascended by a flight of steps, and at once introduced her visitor to the bosom of her family. To such a man as Roper the sorrowful history of the damsel was of itself a recommendation, for Margaret's husband closely trod in the footsteps of the brave old chancellor, Sir Thomas More.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MISTRESS OF RAYHAM FARM.

SHARP easterly wind swept across the broad fields and level plains of Swaycliffe, a village some six miles from Canterbury, on one bitter March morning about eight years after the meeting of Sister Clare with Mistress Roper. It was a bleak, dreary morning; the lowering black clouds threatened rain, unless kept off by the high wind, and a cloud of dust blowing full in her face for a moment nearly blinded a comely or indeed a handsome woman, of some thirty years of age, who was anxiously watching the state of the weather from the door of a small but substantial farmhouse, of the old fashioned English type.

It was a long, low, irregular building, with but one storey, with a thatched roof, and small diamond-shaped casements. All around were extensive fields and meadows, good pasturage for cattle; and a well-stocked farmyard was in the rear of the house.

With a heavy sigh the female at the door turned her to an aged woman within the house place.

"I fear me much, Deborah," said she, "I must wait and see if the storm blows over. It is six good miles from here to St. Dunstan's, and a road bad for a lone woman to travel; unless indeed Giles cometh back from market in time to go thither with me. But I mind me the messenger said Mistress Roper was not in *speedy* danger: nathless, the clerk of St. Nicholas had brought her the holy oils."

As she spoke, she turned to an aged woman whose

furrowed and wrinkled face betokened that she had, unlike her companion, been inured to a life of much rough work in the open air; and she was about to close the door, when her attention was attracted by the gaunt form of a female, who, ever and again beaten back by the gale of wind coming from the sea, and almost blinded by the dust, was trying to make way to the farmhouse,—one of but very few habitations in the small and almost unfrequented village of Swaycliffe, for there were only some half dozen dwellings.

"There is some poor woman making towards the house," she resumed. "Pray heaven she be sent on no errand from the Place House, to tell me all is over."

Breathless, exhausted, as she spoke these words, the wayfarer reached the farmhouse door, and implored the mistress of the farm to grant her rest and refreshment.

"Willingly," said the former, relieved to find that her apprehensions were unfounded. "Come in, my good woman, and be seated by the fire whilst Deborah prepares you a good meal."

But there was that about the stranger which was much at issue with her outward bearing. She possessed an air of refinement which accorded ill with her sordid garments; her features, once marked with an air of somewhat bold beauty, were haggard with evil passions or with suffering, perhaps with both; and heavy masses of hair, once black as the raven's wing, now thickly striped with grey, streamed from beneath her linen coif.

"Marvellously like, and yet, and yet! no, it cannot be," thought the fair, comely mistress of Rayham, as she moved about and aided Deborah in endeavouring to spread a simple but substantial meal, ever and again earnestly scrutinizing her stranger guest.

At last her suspicions became changed to certainty;

years had passed, but the expression of the pale proud face had never been forgotten. Time and misfortune and suffering had somewhat softened it, but it was still the same.

Anxiously the mistress of the farm peered forth on the wild bleak morning, her thoughts not only with Mistress Roper, who was sick unto death at the old house at Canterbury, but with the stranger within the farm, who had that morning claimed her charitable care.

Suddenly a thought glanced across her mind. She determined at once to satisfy her curiosity, and entering the home place, she advanced straight to the weary woman, and looking at her with a pitying expression in her soft eyes the while, said she:

"Lady Sedley, said I not we should meet again?"

"Ah, hast thou recognised me then?" said the woman, throwing from her face the dishevelled hair which streamed from beneath her coif; "have I wandered thus far, have my footsteps been led to Rayham Farm, to meet with thee, Maud Clavering, in the warm-hearted woman who I was told would be to me a friend?"

"And so will I, wouldst thou but forget the past. Have I ever wronged thee? Thou canst not say it."

"Of a truth, no. But even couldst thou forgive, thou never mayest forget. It was Mistress Roper I was seeking; and in my way thither, faint and exhausted, I heard the farm of Rayham had for its mistress a friend of hers, gentle and kind of heart. But I will leave thee, mistress; for, if thou canst forgive, the memory of the past may never be forgotten."

As Lady Sedley spoke thus, she rose from the table, and made for the door.

"Yet pause, I beseech you," said the mistress of Ray-

ham: "the Christian code knows not such fine distinctions; to forgive implies forgetfulness, the mind garners up no bitter remembrances of the past. You are suffering and sorrowful; let that be the one only claim on my friendship."

For a moment Lady Sedley paused as if irresolute; then said she:

"My fortunes changed with those of her whom I had followed. When the queen's head fell on the block I returned to my home, that home in which we last met. Surely a curse rested on him and me: he a spendthrift steeped in vice and sin, I the daughter who had brought my father's hairs in sorrow to the grave. To be brief, a few years of riotous dissipation and reckless waste, and the end was nigh at hand. To please *him*, I sold the broad acres my father had bequeathed me, and we revelled in London on the proceeds of my inheritance; but he for whom I had outraged filial affection, he for whom I had almost forsworn my God, turned traitor at the last, and when he had squandered all reviled me bitterly that I had no more to give. Let me tell the rest briefly; you may even guess it, methinks.

"Woman is faithful to her tyrant as is the spaniel to its master, and oftener licks the hand that strikes her than turns again. Thus it was that I clung to him when he grew hard and unfeeling, when I could no longer supply his wants; but the day that severed us from each other was not very distant. The once elegant and luxurious Sedley had now become negligent in his attire, a gamester and a brawler; and yet I clung to him so madly, so foolishly.

"At last, one day when worn out in mind and body I had fallen asleep over work such as I once beheld in your hands, I was aroused by the tramping of heavy feet

upon the stairs without; rough voices sounded in my ears, and the next moment the lifeless body of my husband, the once fastidious Sedley, was borne into my room.

"I fell into a swoon, and remained long unconscious. When I recovered I learned that whilst heated with wine he had engaged in a drunken fray in which he had lost his life.

"Shall I own, after having told you this, that yet I sorrowed for him faithfully and deeply? Ah, yes, inscrutable weakness of the female heart! the most erring are oftentimes loved the most deeply. And was I innocent? Truly not; if he was reckless and dissipated, so alas was I.

"I have told you all, mistress of Rayham; now go I forth again to seek good Margaret Roper; she whom I once hated I turn to in the days of my sorrow and repentance."

"Margaret lieth at the point of death, Lady Sedley. Will you tarry with me? it resteth but with you to say that my home shall be your home. The Rayham farm belongeth to William Roper; it is mine for the term of my natural life. It furnishes far more than enough for my simple wants."

"And hast thou never married, fair mistress?"

"Ay, yes, truly have I; but my espousals were not of this earth, and the king's decrees could not dissolve them. And when these same decrees had turned me as a wanderer into the world, Mistress Roper saw I loved not society, and offered me this farm as a home, and full seven years come Martinmas have I been mistress of Rayham. Say, once more, wilt thou be as my sister and share it with me?"

"Yes, truly, thankfully do I accept thine offer; but I mind me not long shall I burden thee, mistress; I may see the golden grain ripen in thy corn-fields, but mine eyes will be closed ere the reapers shall gather in the harvest."

"But the time of that last hour is known but to the Creator; meanwhile, make thyself happy here, sister. I leave thee now for awhile, for the shadow of death truly resteth over the 'Pearl of Canterbury,' whom God willeth to summon in the prime of her life, beautiful in mind and body."

Then turning to Deborah, said the mistress of Rayham:

"I will tarry no longer, but will speed on my way alone. Bid Giles come to the Place House to fetch me on his return thither."

And then the gentle woman passed on her way, threading with rapid steps the level plains, thence between the intricate woods of Thorndon and Clowes, till weary and breathless she reached the Place House.

The angel of death had already entered, and had borne before its Maker the soul of the wise, the good, the generous Mistress Roper!

And nought but the sound of wailing and desolation was heard, for she who was snatched away yet in her prime was a woman holy and just in word and in work, one whose vacant place would not be soon filled up.

Not long had she breathed her last sigh on the bosom of her daughter Mary, and with her husband and the other members of her family around her bed, when the mistress of Rayham, to whom she had been a wise counsellor and a faithful friend, entered the Place House breathless and weary.

And long she wept, and long she prayed, beside the bier of her who may truly be called "the Faithful Woman."

CHAPTER XII.

IN MEMORIAM.

EFORE the day appointed for the interment of the much lamented Margaret Roper, a large concourse of relatives and friends of the celebrated lady had assembled in Canterbury and its adjacent villages, in order that they might assist at her obsequies.

Snatched away whilst still in what may be termed the prime of life, her loss was the more bitterly felt by her devoted husband and her sorrowing family. Far and near the poor and suffering had tasted of her liberality; therefore of these there was a numerous throng.

In consequence of the proximity of the Place House to St. Dunstan's church, but a small number of the latter could join the procession; but a certain number were selected, and the order of the melancholy procession was observed in the following manner.

First walked the poor, two and two.
To these succeeded servants with black staves.
The brothers-in-law of the deceased lady.
Her brother.
Her sons.
Then was borne, covered with black velvet, the leaden box containing the head of Sir Thomas More.
Then the corpse borne on a bier, men on either side bearing staves.
William Roper walked at the head of the coffin.
Distant relatives and friends.
Men with staves keeping back the throng.

In this order, chanting the *De Profundis*, the procession wended its short way to the church in which Margaret had, when in life, so loved to hold commune with her God.

Arrived at St. Dunstan's, the foremost part of the procession defiled into the sacred temple, and one of the priests, who served the altar of St. Nicholas in the Roper chancel and had been the confessor of the deceased lady, arrayed in cope of black velvet, embossed with silver, met the corpse at the entrance of the church, and taking a brush from an attendant sprinkled the coffin with holy water, recited the responsory, *Subvenite Sancti Dei*, "Come to her assistance all ye saints of God, meet her all ye angels of the Lord," etc., and continuing the responsory the coffin was borne onwards and deposited before the altar, beneath a stately catafalque raised for the occasion.

Then a solemn dirge was sung, after which commenced the mass of requiem, the inexpressibly solemn strains of the *Dies Iræ* floating through the sacred edifice, now swelling, now dying away, the "*Pie Jesu, Domine, dona eis requiem*" finding a response in every heart.

Then the funeral oration was pronounced, after which the mass proceeded, and when over, the coffin containing the remains of the lamented Margaret was borne in the same order as that in which the procession had entered the church to a large vault beneath the Roper chancel, destined as the place of burial for all the family.

And the anthem *Ego sum resurrectio et vita*, "I am the resurrection and the life," was solemnly chanted, followed by the beautiful *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel." And there was deposited the coffin containing the remains of the gifted and admirable Margaret Roper, and in a small niche made in the wall of the vault was placed the leaden box containing the

head of Sir Thomas More, which with much devotion she had kept in her own house during the nine years in which she survived him, and which she had requested might be placed near her coffin at her death.

This hollow in the vault has an iron grate before it, and therein still remains the skull of Sir Thomas; his body, first buried at St. Peter's in the Tower, was afterwards removed to Chelsea church.*

And with the solemn *Requiescat in pace* the last wailing strains died away; the mourners had departed to their homes, the poor to the adjacent villages, to grieve over the untimely departure of one who was "a staff to the lame, and an eye to the blind." But one there was who still lingered in the Roper chancel. The old church, built in Norman William's time, was still redolent with the fumes of incense, but the solemn wailing chant of the requiem had long ceased; yet still there knelt, just above where Margaret's body was laid, awaiting the resurrection, the penitent Eleanor, her mind busy on one thought, the remembrance of that speech of hers to her late father when she had scoffingly said she knew what the end of Sir Thomas would be and marvelled what effect it would have on Margaret, her bitterly sarcastic words now present to her mind.

Truly, if we thought of the keen pang the memory of a harsh word would cause when those to and of whom we have spoken it have passed away, we should be more thoughtful ere we speak; and so Eleanor thought as she prayed God those terrible words of hers might not stand against her at the latter day. A happy thing it would have been for

* Hasted's History of Kent.

the ease of her troubled mind could she but once again have spoken to Margaret. But it was otherwise decreed; and the lips which had so often breathed words of peace and good-will, the heart which would have exulted with joy at the change in Eleanor's disposition, were for ever at rest in the stillness of death, when she reached by a circuitous route, through her ignorance of the roads, the little farm of Rayham.

And here with *In Memoriam* I would fain lay aside my pen, but that I would say a few words more about Margaret's family. I subjoin the epitaph in St. Dunstan's church, Canterbury:—

"Here lieth interred Thomas Roper, a venerable and worthy man, the son and successor of the late W. Roper and Margaret his wife, daughter of Sir Thomas More, knight, a woman excellently well skilled in the Greek and Latin tongues. The above-mentioned William Roper succeeded his father in the office of Prothonotary of ye Bench; after having discharged the duties of it faithfully for 44 years he left it to his son Thomas. The said William Roper was liberal both in his domestic and public conduct, kind and compassionate in his temper, the support and the preserver of the poor and the oppressed. He had issue by Margaret, his only wife, two sons and three daughters, whose children and grandchildren he lived to see. He lost his wife in the bloom of his years, and lived a chaste widower 33 years. At length his days being finished in peace, he died, lamented by all, in a good old age, on the 4th of January, 1577, and of his age 82."

Mary, one of the daughters of Margaret, was an ornament to her sex; she was maid of honour to Queen Mary

Tudor. She translated into English part of her grandfather's "Exposition of the Passion of our Saviour," which he wrote in Latin; she was a great favourite with the queen.

Hans Sloane pulled down More's house in 1785. The house of an illustrious man should be regarded with the same feelings as his tomb, and pity it is that the destruction of this mansion should rest on the name of Sloane.*

His monument in Chelsea church appears to have been erected about the year 1532. The tablet on which the Latin epitaph he himself wrote is engraved stands under a flat gothic arch, the cornice of which is ornamented with foliage. Over the tomb is the crest of Sir Thomas More, and the arms of himself and his two wives. It is a striking transition to turn from the memories of all that was refined and graceful, and within a stone'sthrow of the site on which once stood the home of Margaret to behold the gardens of Cremorne.†

In the reign of Edward VI., Margaret Clements, *née* Giggs, with her husband and family, removed out of the troubles that beset them in England to the Low Countries, first residing at Bruges, and then at Mechlin.

When seized with her last sickness she declared that those monks of the Charter House whom she had relieved in prison in England were standing round her bed, and were calling on her to come away with them; and so it fell out that as soon as the bell of St. Romuald's began to toll the anthem of Corpus Christi, to which she had said she would not fail to go that day, she gave up her happy soul into the hands of God. Her body was buried in the

* Lysons' "Environs of London."
† Miss Dormer.

cathedral at Mechlin, behind the high altar, before the memory of our blessed Saviour lying in His grave.

But the first words I wrote were of Margaret Roper, and to her shall my last be dedicated. Her name has for more than three centuries been identified with all that is lovable, gentle, and endearing in the character of woman; learned without pride or ostentation, unaffectedly humble, seeking to cultivate by every means in her power the fine natural talents with which God had endowed her, she shines forth in this our day not as one of the strong-minded women of our own time, shouting out complaints through the press and on the platform, but as a quiet and unobtrusive domestic heroine.

May we not with truth apply to Margaret the eulogium pronounced by Holy Scripture on the virtuous woman?

"The heart of her husband trusteth in her; she hath opened her mouth to wisdom; she hath looked well to the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle; her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband, and he praised her. Many daughters have gathered together riches, thou hast surpassed them all."

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.