YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

UNKNOWN TO HISTORY: A STORY OF THE CAPTIVITY OF MARY OF SCOTLAND

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Yonge C.

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Charlotte M. Yonge
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PREFACE

In p. 58 of vol. ii. of the second edition of Miss Strickland's Life of Mary Queen of Scots, or p. 100, vol. v. of Burton's History of Scotland, will be found the report on which this tale is founded.

If circumstances regarding the Queen's captivity and Babington's plot have been found to be omitted, as well as many interesting personages in the suite of the captive Queen, it must be remembered that the art of the story-teller makes it needful to curtail some of the incidents which would render the narrative too complicated to be interesting to those who wish more for a view of noted characters in remarkable situations, than for a minute and accurate sifting of facts and evidence.

C. M. YONGE.

February 27, 1882.

Poor scape-goat of crimes, where,—her part what it may,
So tortured, so hunted to die,
Foul age of deceit and of hate,—on her head
Least stains of gore-guiltiness lie;
To the hearts of the just her blood from the dust
Not in vain for mercy will cry.

Poor scape-goat of nations and faiths in their strife
So cruel,—and thou so fair!
Poor girl!—so, best, in her misery named,—
Discrown'd of two kingdoms, and bare;
Not first nor last on this one was cast
The burden that others should share.

Visions of England, by F. T. Palgrave

CHAPTER I
THE LITTLE WAIF

On a spring day, in the year 1568, Mistress Talbot sat in her lodging at Hull, an upper chamber, with a large latticed window, glazed with the circle and diamond leading perpetuated in Dutch pictures, and opening on a carved balcony, whence, had she been so minded, she could have shaken hands with her opposite neighbour. There was a richly carved mantel-piece, with a sea-coal fire burning in it, for though it was May, the sea winds blew cold, and there was a fishy odour about the town, such as it was well to counteract. The floor was of slippery polished oak, the walls hung with leather, gilded in some places and depending from cornices, whose ornaments proved to an initiated eye, that this had once been the refectory of a small priory, or cell, broken up at the Reformation.

Of furniture there was not much, only an open cupboard, displaying two silver cups and tankards, a sauce-pan of the same metal, a few tall, slender, Venetian glasses, a little pewter, and some rare shells. A few high-backed chairs were ranged against the wall; there was a tall "armory," i.e. a linen-press of dark oak, guarded on each side by the twisted weapons of the sea unicorn, and in the middle of the room stood a large, solid-looking table, adorned with a brown earthenware beau-pot, containing a stiff posy of roses, southernwood, gillyflowers, pinks and pansies, of small dimensions. On hooks, against the wall, hung a pair of spurs, a shield, a breastplate, and other pieces of armour, with an open helmet bearing the dog, the well-known crest of the Talbots of the Shrewsbury line.

On the polished floor, near the window, were a child's cart, a little boat, some whelks and limpets. Their owner, a stout boy of three years old, in a tight, borderless, round cap, and home-spun, madder-dyed frock, lay fast asleep in a big wooden cradle, scarcely large enough, however, to contain him, as he lay curled up, sucking his thumb, and hugging to his breast the soft fragment of a sea-bird's downy breast. If he stirred, his mother's foot was on the rocker, as she sat spinning, but her spindle danced languidly on the floor, as if "feeble was her hand, and silly her thread;" while she listened anxiously, for every sound in the street below. She wore a dark blue dress, with a small lace ruff opening in front, deep cuffs to match, and a white apron likewise edged with lace, and a coif, bent down in the centre, over a sweet countenance, matronly, though youthful, and now full of wistful expectancy; not untinged with anxiety and sorrow.

Susan Hardwicke was a distant kinswoman of the famous Bess of Hardwicke, and had formed one of the little court of gentlewomen with whom great ladies were wont to surround themselves. There she met Richard Talbot, the second son of a relative of the Earl of Shrewsbury, a young man who, with the indifference of those days to service by land or sea, had been at one time a gentleman pensioner of Queen Mary; at another had sailed under some of the great mariners of the western main. There he had acquired substance enough to make the offer of his hand to the dowerless Susan no great imprudence; and as neither could be a subject for ambitious plans, no obstacle was raised to their wedding.

He took his wife home to his old father's house in the precincts of Sheffield Park, where she was kindly welcomed; but wealth did not so abound in the family but that, when opportunity offered, he was thankful to accept the command of the Mastiff, a vessel commissioned by Queen Elizabeth, but built, manned, and maintained at the expense of the Earl of Shrewsbury. It formed part of a small squadron which was cruising on the eastern coast to watch over the intercourse between France and Scotland, whether in the interest of the imprisoned Mary, or of the Lords of the Congregation. He had obtained lodgings for Mistress Susan at Hull, so that he might be with her when he put into harbour, and she was expecting him for the first time since the loss of their second child, a daughter whom he had scarcely seen during her little life of a few months.

Moreover, there had been a sharp storm a few days previously, and experience had not hardened her to the anxieties of a sailor's wife. She had been down once already to the quay, and learnt all that the old sailors could tell her of chances and conjectures; and when her boy began to fret from hunger and weariness, she had left her serving-man, Gervas, to watch for further tidings. Yet, so does one trouble drive out another, that whereas she had a few days ago dreaded the sorrow of his return, she would now have given worlds to hear his step.

Hark, what is that in the street? Oh, folly! If the Mastiff were in, would not Gervas have long ago brought her the tidings? Should she look over the balcony only to be disappointed again? Ah! she had been prudent, for the sounds were dying away. Nay, there was a foot at the door! Gervas with ill news! No, no, it bounded as never did Gervas's step! It was coming up. She started from the chair, quivering with eagerness, as the door opened and in hurried her suntanned sailor! She was in his arms in a trance of joy. That was all she knew for a moment, and then, it was as if something else were given back to her. No, it was not a dream! It was substance. In her arms was a little swaddled baby, in her ears its feeble wail, mingled with the glad shout of little Humfrey, as he scrambled from the cradle to be uplifted in his father's arms.

"What is this?" she asked, gazing at the infant between terror and tenderness, as its weak cry and exhausted state forcibly recalled the last hours of her own child.

"It is the only thing we could save from a wreck off the Spurn," said her husband. "Scottish as I take it. The rogues seem to have taken to their boats, leaving behind them a poor woman and her child. I trust they met their deserts and were swamped. We saw the fluttering of her coats as we made for the Humber, and I sent Goatley and Jaques in the boat to see if anything lived. The poor wench was gone before they could lift her up, but the little one cried lustily, though it has waxen weaker since. We had no milk on board, and could only give it bits of soft bread soaked in beer, and I misdoubt me whether it did not all run out at the corners of its mouth."

This was interspersed with little Humfrey's eager outcries that little sister was come again, and Mrs. Talbot, the tears running down her cheeks, hastened to summon her one woman-servant, Colet, to bring the porringer of milk.

Captain Talbot had only hurried ashore to bring the infant, and show himself to his wife. He was forced instantly to return to the wharf, but he promised to come back as soon as he should have taken order for his men, and for the Mastiff, which had suffered considerably in the storm, and would need to be refitted.

Colet hastily put a manchet of fresh bread, a pasty, and a stoup of wine into a basket, and sent it by her husband, Gervas, after their master; and then eagerly assisted her mistress in coaxing the infant to swallow food, and in removing the soaked swaddling clothes which the captain and his crew had not dared to meddle with.

When Captain Talbot returned, as the rays of the setting sun glanced high on the roofs and chimneys, little Humfrey stood peeping through the tracery of the balcony, watching for him, and shrieking with joy at the first glimpse of the sea-bird's feather in his cap. The spotless home-spun cloth and the trenchers were laid for supper, a festive capon was prepared by the choicest skill of Mistress Susan, and the little shipwrecked stranger lay fast asleep in the cradle.

All was well with it now, Mrs. Talbot said. Nothing had ailed it but cold and hunger, and when it had been fed, warmed, and dressed, it had fallen sweetly asleep in her arms, appeasing her heartache for her own little Sue, while Humfrey fully believed that father had brought his little sister back again.

The child was in truth a girl, apparently three or four months old. She had been rolled up in Mrs. Talbot's baby's clothes, and her own long swaddling bands hung over the back of a chair, where they had been dried before the fire. They were of the finest woollen below, and cambric above, and the outermost were edged with lace, whose quality Mrs. Talbot estimated very highly.

"See," she added, "what we found within. A Popish relic, is it not? Colet and Mistress Gale were for making away with it at once, but it seemed to me that it was a token whereby the poor babe's friends may know her again, if she have any kindred not lost at sea."

The token was a small gold cross, of peculiar workmanship, with a crystal in the middle, through which might be seen some mysterious object neither husband nor wife could make out, but which they agreed must be carefully preserved for the identification of their little waif. Mrs. Talbot also produced a strip of writing which she had found sewn to the inmost band wrapped round the little body, but it had no superscription, and she believed it to be either French, Latin, or High Dutch, for she could make nothing of it. Indeed, the good lady's education had only included reading, writing, needlework and cookery, and she knew no language but her own. Her husband had been taught Latin, but his acquaintance with modern tongues was of the nautical order, and entirely oral and vernacular. However, it enabled him to aver that the letter—if such it were—was neither Scottish, French, Spanish, nor High or Low Dutch. He looked at it in all directions, and shook his head over it.

"Who can read it, for us?" asked Mrs. Talbot. "Shall we ask Master Heatherthwayte? he is a scholar, and he said he would look in to see how you fared."

"At supper-time, I trow," said Richard, rather grimly, "the smell of thy stew will bring him down in good time."

"Nay, dear sir, I thought you would be fain to see the good man, and he lives but poorly in his garret."

"Scarce while he hath good wives like thee to boil his pot for him," said Richard, smiling. "Tell me, hath he heard aught of this gear? thou hast not laid this scroll before him?"

"No, Colet brought it to me only now, having found it when washing the swaddling-bands, stitched into one of them."

"Then hark thee, good wife, not one word to him of the writing."

"Might he not interpret it?"

"Not he! I must know more about it ere I let it pass forth from mine hands, or any strange eye fall upon it— Ha, in good time! I hear his step on the stair."

The captain hastily rolled up the scroll and put it into his pouch, while Mistress Susan felt as if she had made a mistake in her hospitality, yet almost as if her husband were unjust towards the good man who had been such a comfort to her in her sorrow; but there was no lack of cordiality or courtesy in Richard's manner when, after a short, quick knock, there entered a figure in hat, cassock, gown, and bands, with a pleasant, though grave countenance, the complexion showing that it had been tanned and sunburnt in early youth, although it wore later traces of a sedentary student life, and, it might be, of less genial living than had nourished the up-growth of that sturdily-built frame.

Master Joseph Heatherthwayte was the greatly underpaid curate of a small parish on the outskirts of Hull. He contrived to live on some (pounds)10 per annum in the attic of the house where the Talbots lodged,—and not only to live, but to be full of charitable deeds, mostly at the expense of his own appetite. The square cut of his bands, and the uncompromising roundness of the hat which he doffed on his entrance, marked him as inclined to the Puritan party, which, being that of apparent progress, attracted most of the ardent spirits of the time.

Captain Talbot's inclinations did not lie that way, but he respected and liked his fellow-lodger, and his vexation had been merely the momentary disinclination of a man to be interrupted, especially on his first evening at home. He responded heartily to Master Heatherthwayte's warm pressure of the hand and piously expressed congratulation on his safety, mixed with condolence on the grief that had befallen him.

"And you have been a good friend to my poor wife in her sorrow," said Richard, "for the which I thank you heartily, sir."

"Truly, sir, I could have been her scholar, with such edifying resignation did she submit to the dispensation," returned the clergyman, uttering these long words in a broad northern accent which had

nothing incongruous in it to Richard's ears, and taking advantage of the lady's absence on "hospitable tasks intent" to speak in her praise.

Little Humfrey, on his father's knee, comprehending that they were speaking of the recent sorrow, put in his piece of information that "father had brought little sister back from the sea."

"Ah, child!" said Master Heatherthwayte, in the ponderous tone of one unused to children, "thou hast yet to learn the words of the holy David, 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'"

"Bring not that thought forward, Master Heatherthwayte," said Richard, "I am well pleased that my poor wife and this little lad can take the poor little one as a solace sent them by God, as she assuredly is."

"Mean you, then, to adopt her into your family?" asked the minister.

"We know not if she hath any kin," said Richard, and at that moment Susan entered, followed by the man and maid, each bearing a portion of the meal, which was consumed by the captain and the clergyman as thoroughly hungry men eat; and there was silence till the capon's bones were bare and two large tankards had been filled with Xeres sack, captured in a Spanish ship, "the only good thing that ever came from Spain," quoth the sailor.

Then he began to tell how he had weathered the storm on the Berwickshire coast; but he was interrupted by another knock, followed by the entrance of a small, pale, spare man, with the lightest possible hair, very short, and almost invisible eyebrows; he had a round ruff round his neck, and a black, scholarly gown, belted round his waist with a girdle, in which he carried writing tools.

"Ha, Cuthbert Langston, art thou there?" said the captain, rising. "Thou art kindly welcome. Sit down and crush a cup of sack with Master Heatherthwayte and me."

"Thanks, cousin," returned the visitor, "I heard that the Mastiff was come in, and I came to see whether all was well."

"It was kindly done, lad," said Richard, while the others did their part of the welcome, though scarcely so willingly. Cuthbert Langston was a distant relation on the mother's side of Richard, a young scholar, who, after his education at Oxford, had gone abroad with a nobleman's son as his pupil, and on his return, instead of taking Holy Orders, as was expected, had obtained employment in a merchant's counting-house at Hull, for which his knowledge of languages eminently fitted him. Though he possessed none of the noble blood of the Talbots, the employment was thought by Mistress Susan somewhat derogatory to the family dignity, and there was a strong suspicion both in her mind and that of Master Heatherthwayte that his change of purpose was due to the change of religion in England, although he was a perfectly regular church-goer. Captain Talbot, however, laughed at all this, and, though he had not much in common with his kinsman, always treated him in a cousinly fashion. He too had heard a rumour of the foundling, and made inquiry for it, upon which Richard told his story in greater detail, and his wife asked what the poor mother was like.

"I saw her not," he answered, "but Goatley thought the poor woman to whom she was bound more like to be nurse than mother, judging by her years and her garments."

"The mother may have been washed off before," said Susan, lifting the little one from the cradle, and hushing it. "Weep not, poor babe, thou hast found a mother here."

"Saw you no sign of the crew?" asked Master Heatherthwayte.

"None at all. The vessel I knew of old as the brig Bride of Dunbar, one of the craft that ply between Dunbar and the French ports."

"And how think you? Were none like to be saved?"

"I mean to ride along the coast to-morrow, to see whether aught can be heard of them, but even if their boats could live in such a sea, they would have evil hap among the wreckers if they came ashore. I would not desire to be a shipwrecked man in these parts, and if I had a Scottish or a French tongue in my head so much the worse for me."

"Ah, Master Heatherthwayte," said Susan, "should not a man give up the sea when he is a husband and father?"

"Tush, dame! With God's blessing the good ship Mastiff will ride out many another such gale. Tell thy mother, little Numpy, that an English sailor is worth a dozen French or Scottish lubbers."

"Sir," said Master Heatherthwayte, "the pious trust of the former part of your discourse is contradicted by the boast of the latter end."

"Nay, Sir Minister, what doth a sailor put his trust in but his God foremost, and then his good ship and his brave men?"

It should be observed that all the three men wore their hats, and each made a reverent gesture of touching them. The clergyman seemed satisfied by the answer, and presently added that it would be well, if Master and Mistress Talbot meant to adopt the child, that she should be baptized.

"How now?" said Richard, "we are not so near any coast of Turks or Infidels that we should deem her sprung of heathen folk."

"Assuredly not," said Cuthbert Langston, whose quick, light-coloured eyes had spied the reliquary in Mistress Susan's work-basket, "if this belongs to her. By your leave, kinswoman," and he lifted it in his hand with evident veneration, and began examining it.

"It is Babylonish gold, an accursed thing!" exclaimed Master Heatherthwayte. "Beware, Master Talbot, and cast it from thee."

"Nay," said Richard, "that shall I not do. It may lead to the discovery of the child's kindred. Why, my master, what harm think you it will do to us in my dame's casket? Or what right have we to make away with the little one's property?"

His common sense was equally far removed from the horror of the one visitor as from the reverence of the other, and so it pleased neither. Master Langston was the first to speak, observing that the relic made it evident that the child must have been baptized.

"A Popish baptism," said Master Heatherthwayte, "with chrism and taper and words and gestures to destroy the pure simplicity of the sacrament."

Controversy here seemed to be setting in, and the infant cause of it here setting up a cry, Susan escaped under pretext of putting Humfrey to bed in the next room, and carried off both the little ones. The conversation then fell upon the voyage, and the captain described the impregnable aspect of the castle of Dumbarton, which was held for Queen Mary by her faithful partisan, Lord Flemyng. On this, Cuthbert Langston asked whether he had heard any tidings of the imprisoned Queen, and he answered that it was reported at Leith that she had well-nigh escaped from Lochleven, in the disguise of a lavender or washerwoman. She was actually in the boat, and about to cross the lake, when a rude oarsman attempted to pull aside her muffler, and the whiteness of the hand she raised in self-protection betrayed her, so that she was carried back. "If she had reached Dumbarton," he said, "she might have mocked at the Lords of the Congregation. Nay, she might have been in that very brig, whose wreck I beheld."

"And well would it have been for Scotland and England had it been the will of Heaven that so it should fall out," observed the Puritan.

"Or it may be," said the merchant, "that the poor lady's escape was frustrated by Providence, that she might be saved from the rocks of the Spurn."

"The poor lady, truly! Say rather the murtheress," quoth Heatherthwayte.

"Say rather the victim and scapegoat of other men's plots," protested Langston.

"Come, come, sirs," says Talbot, "we'll have no high words here on what Heaven only knoweth. Poor lady she is, in all sooth, if sackless; poorer still if guilty; so I know not what matter there is for falling out about. In any sort, I will not have it at my table." He spoke with the authority of the captain of a ship, and the two visitors, scarce knowing it, submitted to his decision of manner, but the harmony of the evening seemed ended. Cuthbert Langston soon rose to bid good-night, first asking his cousin at what hour he proposed to set forth for the Spurn, to which Richard briefly replied that it depended on what had to be done as to the repairs of the ship.

The clergyman tarried behind him to say, "Master Talbot, I marvel that so godly a man as you have ever been should be willing to harbour one so popishly affected, and whom many suspect of being a seminary priest."

"Master Heatherthwayte," returned the captain, "my kinsman is my kinsman, and my house is my house. No offence, sir, but I brook not meddling."

The clergyman protested that no offence was intended, only caution, and betook himself to his own bare chamber, high above. No sooner was he gone than Captain Talbot again became absorbed in the endeavour to spell out the mystery of the scroll, with his elbows on the table and his hands over his ears, nor did he look up till he was touched by his wife, when he uttered an impatient demand what she wanted now.

She had the little waif in her arms undressed, and with only a woollen coverlet loosely wrapped round her, and without speaking she pointed to the little shoulder-blades, where two marks had been indelibly made—on one side the crowned monogram of the Blessed Virgin, on the other a device like the Labarum, only that the upright was surmounted by a fleur-de-lis.

Richard Talbot gave a sort of perplexed grunt of annoyance to acknowledge that he saw them.

"Poor little maid! how could they be so cruel? They have been branded with a hot iron," said the lady.

"They that parted from her meant to know her again," returned Talbot.

"Surely they are Popish marks," added Mistress Susan.

"Look you here, Dame Sue, I know you for a discreet woman. Keep this gear to yourself, both the letter and the marks. Who hath seen them?"

"I doubt me whether even Colet has seen this mark."

"That is well. Keep all out of sight. Many a man has been brought into trouble for a less matter swelled by prating tongues."

"Have you made it out?"

"Not I. It may be only the child's horoscope, or some old wife's charm that is here sewn up, and these marks may be naught but some sailor's freak; but, on the other hand, they may be concerned with perilous matter, so the less said the better."

"Should they not be shown to my lord, or to her Grace's Council?"

"I'm not going to run my head into trouble for making a coil about what may be naught. That's what befell honest Mark Walton. He thought he had seized matter of State, and went up to Master Walsingham, swelling like an Indian turkey-cock, with his secret letters, and behold they turned out to be a Dutch fishwife's charm to bring the herrings. I can tell you he has rued the work he made about it ever since. On the other hand, let it get abroad through yonder prating fellow, Heatherthwayte, or any other, that Master Richard Talbot had in his house a child with, I know not what Popish tokens, and a scroll in an unknown tongue, and I should be had up in gyves for suspicion of treason, or may be harbouring the Prince of Scotland himself, when it is only some poor Scottish archer's babe."

"You would not have me part with the poor little one?"

"Am I a Turk or a Pagan? No. Only hold thy peace, as I shall hold mine, until such time as I can meet some one whom I can trust to read this riddle. Tell me—what like is the child? Wouldst guess it to be of gentle, or of clownish blood, if women can tell such things?"

"Of gentle blood, assuredly," cried the lady, so that he smiled and said, "I might have known that so thou wouldst answer."

"Nay, but see her little hands and fingers, and the mould of her dainty limbs. No Scottish fisher clown was her father, I dare be sworn. Her skin is as fair and fine as my Humfrey's, and moreover she has always been in hands that knew how a babe should be tended. Any woman can tell you that!"

"And what like is she in your woman's eyes? What complexion doth she promise?"

"Her hair, what she has of it, is dark; her eyes—bless them—are of a deep blue, or purple, such as most babes have till they take their true tint. There is no guessing. Humfrey's eyes were once like to be brown, now are they as blue as thine own."

"I understand all that," said Captain Talbot, smiling. "If she have kindred, they will know her better by the sign manual on her tender flesh than by her face."

"And who are they?"

"Who are they?" echoed the captain, rolling up the scroll in despair. "Here, take it, Susan, and keep it safe from all eyes. Whatever it may be, it may serve thereafter to prove her true name. And above all, not a word or breath to Heatherthwayte, or any of thy gossips, wear they coif or bands."

"Ah, sir! that you will mistrust the good man."

"I said not I mistrust any one; only that I will have no word of all this go forth! Not one! Thou heedest me, wife?"

"Verily I do, sir; I will be mute."

CHAPTER II
EVIL TIDINGS

After giving orders for the repairs of the Mastiff, and the disposal of her crew, Master Richard Talbot purveyed himself of a horse at the hostel, and set forth for Spurn Head to make inquiries along the coast respecting the wreck of the Bride of Dunbar, and he was joined by Cuthbert Langston, who said his house had had dealings with her owners, and that he must ascertain the fate of her wares. His good lady remained in charge of the mysterious little waif, over whom her tender heart yearned more and more, while her little boy hovered about in serene contemplation of the treasure he thought he had recovered. To him the babe seemed really his little sister; to his mother, if she sometimes awakened pangs of keen regret, yet she filled up much of the dreary void of the last few weeks.

Mrs. Talbot was a quiet, reserved woman, not prone to gadding abroad, and she had made few acquaintances during her sojourn at Hull; but every creature she knew, or might have known, seemed to her to drop in that day, and bring at least two friends to inspect the orphan of the wreck, and demand all particulars.

The little girl was clad in the swaddling garments of Mrs. Talbot's own children, and the mysterious marks were suspected by no one, far less the letter which Susan, for security's sake, had locked up in her nearly empty, steel-bound, money casket. The opinions of the gossips varied, some thinking the babe might belong to some of the Queen of Scotland's party fleeing to France, others fathering her on the refugees from the persecutions in Flanders, a third party believing her a mere fisherman's child, and one lean, lantern-jawed old crone, Mistress Rotherford, observing, "Take my word, Mrs. Talbot, and keep her not with you. They that are cast up by the sea never bring good with them."

The court of female inquiry was still sitting when a heavy tread was heard, and Colet announced "a serving-man from Bridgefield had ridden post haste to speak with madam," and the messenger, booted and spurred, with the mastiff badge on his sleeve, and the hat he held in his hand, followed closely.

"What news, Nathanael?" she asked, as she responded to his greeting.

"Ill enough news, mistress," was the answer. "Master Richard's ship be in, they tell me."

"Yes, but he is rid out to make inquiry for a wreck," said the lady. "Is all well with my good father-in-law?"

"He ails less in body than in mind, so please you. Being that Master Humfrey was thrown by Blackfoot, the beast being scared by a flash of lightning, and never spoke again."

"Master Humfrey!"

"Ay, mistress. Pitched on his head against the south gate-post. I saw how it was with him when we took him up, and he never so much as lifted an eyelid, but died at the turn of the night. Heaven rest his soul!'

"Heaven rest his soul!" echoed Susan, and the ladies around chimed in. They had come for one excitement, and here was another.

"There! See but what I said!" quoth Mrs. Rotherford, uplifting a skinny finger to emphasise that the poor little flotsome had already brought evil.

"Nay," said the portly wife of a merchant, "begging your pardon, this may be a fat instead of a lean sorrow. Leaves the poor gentleman heirs, Mrs. Talbot?"

"Oh no!" said Susan, with tears in her eyes. "His wife died two years back, and her chrisom babe with her. He loved her too well to turn his mind to wed again, and now he is with her for aye." And she covered her face and sobbed, regardless of the congratulations of the merchant's wife, and exclaiming, "Oh! the poor old lady!"

"In sooth, mistress," said Nathanael, who had stood all this time as if he had by no means emptied his budget of ill news, "poor old madam fell down all of a heap on the floor, and when the wenches lifted her, they found she was stricken with the dead palsy, and she has not spoken, and there's no one knows what to do, for the poor old squire is like one distraught, sitting by her bed like an image on a monument, with the tears flowing down his old cheeks. 'But,' says he to me, 'get you to Hull, Nat, and take madam's palfrey and a couple of sumpter beasts, and bring my good daughter Talbot back with you as fast as she and the babes may brook.' I made bold to say, 'And Master Richard, your worship?' then he groaned somewhat, and said, 'If my son's ship be come in, he must do as her Grace's service permits, but meantime he must spare us his wife, for she is sorely needed here.' And he looked at the bed so as it would break your heart to see, for since old Nurse Took hath been doited, there's not been a wench about the house that can do a hand's turn for a sick body."

Susan knew this was true, for her mother-in-law had been one of those bustling, managing housewives, who prefer doing everything themselves to training others, and she was appalled at the idea of the probable desolation and helplessness of the bereaved household.

It was far too late to start that day, even had her husband been at home, for the horses sent for her had to rest. The visitors would fain have extracted some more particulars about the old squire's age, his kindred to the great Earl, and the amount of estate to which her husband had become heir. There were those among them who could not understand Susan's genuine grief, and there were others whose consolations were no less distressing to one of her reserved character. She made brief answer that the squire was threescore and fifteen years old, his wife nigh about his age; that her husband was now their only child; that he was descended from a son of the great Earl John, killed at the Bridge of Chatillon, that he held the estate of Bridgefield in fief on tenure of military service to the head of his family. She did not know how much it was worth by the year, but she must pray the good ladies to excuse her, as she had many preparations to make. Volunteers to assist her in packing her mails were made, but she declined them all, and rejoiced when left alone with Colet to arrange for what would be probably her final departure from Hull.

It was a blow to find that she must part from her servant-woman, who, as well as her husband Gervas, was a native of Hull. Not only were they both unwilling to leave, but the inland country was to their imagination a wild unexplored desert. Indeed, Colet had only entered Mrs. Talbot's service to supply the place of a maid who bad sickened with fever and ague, and had to be sent back to her native Hallamshire.

Ere long Mr. Heatherthwayte came down to offer his consolation, and still more his advice, that the little foundling should be at once baptized—conditionally, if the lady preferred it.

The Reformed of imperfect theological training, and as such Joseph Heatherthwayte must be classed, were apt to view the ceremonial of the old baptismal form, symbolical and beautiful as it was, as almost destroying the efficacy of the rite. Moreover, there was a further impression that the Church by which the child was baptized, had a right to bring it up, and thus the clergyman was urgent with the lady that she should seize this opportunity for the little one's baptism.

"Not without my husband's consent and knowledge," she said resolutely.

"Master Talbot is a good man, but somewhat careless of sound doctrine, as be the most of seafaring men."

Susan had been a little nettled by her husband's implied belief that she was influenced by the minister, so there was double resolution, as well as some offence in her reply, that she knew her duty as a wife too well to consent to such a thing without him. As to his being careless, he was a true and God-fearing man, and Mr. Heatherthwayte should know better than to speak thus of him to his wife.

Mr. Heatherthwayte's real piety and goodness had made him a great comfort to Susan in her lonely grief, but he had not the delicate tact of gentle blood, and had not known where to stop, and as he stood half apologising and half exhorting, she felt that her Richard was quite right, and that he could be both meddling and presuming. He was exceedingly in the way of her packing too, and she

was at her wit's end to get rid of him, when suddenly Humfrey managed to pinch his fingers in a box, and set up such a yell, as, seconded by the frightened baby, was more than any masculine ears could endure, and drove Master Heatherthwayte to beat a retreat.

Mistress Susan was well on in her work when her husband returned, and as she expected, was greatly overcome by the tidings of his brother's death. He closely questioned Nathanael on every detail, and could think of nothing but the happy days he had shared with his brother, and of the grief of his parents. He approved of all that his wife had done; and as the damage sustained by the Mastiff could not be repaired under a month, he had no doubt about leaving his crew in the charge of his lieutenant while he took his family home.

So busy were both, and so full of needful cares, the one in giving up her lodging, the other in leaving his men, that it was impossible to inquire into the result of his researches, for the captain was in that mood of suppressed grief and vehement haste in which irrelevant inquiry is perfectly unbearable.

It was not till late in the evening that Richard told his wife of his want of success in his investigations. He had found witnesses of the destruction of the ship, but he did not give them full credit. "The fellows say the ship drove on the rock, and that they saw her boats go down with every soul on board, and that they would not lie to an officer of her Grace. Heaven pardon me if I do them injustice in believing they would lie to him sooner than to any one else. They are rogues enough to take good care that no poor wretch should survive even if he did chance to come to land."

"Then if there be no one to claim her, we may bring up as our own the sweet babe whom Heaven hath sent us."

"Not so fast, dame. Thou wert wont to be more discreet. I said not so, but for the nonce, till I can come by the rights of that scroll, there's no need to make a coil. Let no one know of it, or of the trinket—Thou hast them safe?"

"Laid up with the Indian gold chain, thy wedding gift, dear sir."

"'Tis well. My mother!—ah me," he added, catching himself up; "little like is she to ask questions, poor soul."

Then Susan diffidently told of Master Heatherthwayte's earnest wish to christen the child, and, what certainly biased her a good deal, the suggestion that this would secure her to their own religion.

"There is something in that," said Richard, "specially after what Cuthbert said as to the golden toy yonder. If times changed again—which Heaven forfend—that fellow might give us trouble about the matter."

"You doubt him then, sir!" she asked.

"I relished not his ways on our ride to-day," said Richard. "Sure I am that he had some secret cause for being so curious about the wreck. I suspect him of some secret commerce with the Queen of Scots' folk."

"Yet you were on his side against Mr. Heatherthwayte," said Susan.

"I would not have my kinsman browbeaten at mine own table by the self-conceited son of a dalesman, even if he have got a round hat and Geneva band! Ah, well! one good thing is we shall leave both of them well behind us, though I would it were for another cause."

Something in the remonstrance had, however, so worked on Richard Talbot, that before morning be declared that, hap what hap, if he and his wife were to bring up the child, she should be made a good Protestant Christian before they left the house, and there should be no more ado about it.

It was altogether illogical and untheological; but Master Heatherthwayte was delighted when in the very early morning his devotions were interrupted, and he was summoned by the captain himself to christen the child.

Richard and his wife were sponsors, but the question of name had never occurred to any one. However, in the pause of perplexity, when the response lagged to "Name this child," little Humfrey, a delighted spectator, broke out again with "Little Sis."

And forthwith, "Cicely, if thou art not already baptized," was uttered over the child, and Cicely became her name. It cost Susan a pang, as it had been that of her own little daughter, but it was too late to object, and she uttered no regret, but took the child to her heart, as sent instead of her who had been taken from her.

Master Heatherthwayte bade them good speed, and Master Langston stood at the door of his office and waved them a farewell, both alike unconscious of the rejoicing with which they were left behind. Mistress Talbot rode on the palfrey sent for her use, with the little stranger slung to her neck for security's sake. Her boy rode "a cock-horse" before his father, but a resting-place was provided for him on a sort of pannier on one of the sumpter beasts. What these animals could not carry of the household stuff was left in Colet's charge to be despatched by carriers; and the travellers jogged slowly on through deep Yorkshire lanes, often halting to refresh the horses and supply the wants of the little children at homely wayside inns, their entrance usually garnished with an archway formed of the jawbones of whales, which often served for gate-posts in that eastern part of Yorkshire. And thus they journeyed, with frequent halts, until they came to the Derbyshire borders.

Bridgefield House stood on the top of a steep slope leading to the river Dun, with a high arched bridge and a mill below it. From the bridge proceeded one of the magnificent avenues of oak-trees which led up to the lordly lodge, full four miles off, right across Sheffield Park.

The Bridgefield estate had been a younger son's portion, and its owners had always been regarded as gentlemen retainers of the head of their name, the Earl of Shrewsbury. Tudor jealousy had forbidden the marshalling of such a meine as the old feudal lords had loved to assemble, and each generation of the Bridgefield Talbots had become more independent than the former one. The father had spent his younger days as esquire to the late Earl, but had since become a justice of the peace, and took rank with the substantial landowners of the country. Humfrey, his eldest son, had been a gentleman pensioner of the Queen till his marriage, and Richard, though beginning his career as page to the present Earl's first wife, had likewise entered the service of her Majesty, though still it was understood that the head of their name had a claim to their immediate service, and had he been called to take up arms, they would have been the first to follow his banner. Indeed, a pair of spurs was all the annual rent they paid for their estate, which they held on this tenure, as well as on paying the heriard horse on the death of the head of the family, and other contributions to their lord's splendour when he knighted his son or married his daughter. In fact, they stood on the borderland of that feudal retainership which was being rapidly extinguished. The estate, carved out of the great Sheffield property, was sufficient to maintain the owner in the dignities of an English gentleman, and to portion off the daughters, provided that the superfluous sons shifted for themselves, as Richard had hitherto done. The house had been ruined in the time of the Wars of the Roses, and rebuilt in the later fashion, with a friendly-looking front, containing two large windows, and a porch projecting between them. The hall reached to the top of the house, and had a waggon ceiling, with mastiffs alternating with roses on portcullises at the intersections of the timbers. This was the family sitting and dining room, and had a huge chimney never devoid of a wood fire. One end had a buttery-hatch communicating with the kitchen and offices; at the other was a small room, sacred to the master of the house, niched under the broad staircase that led to the upper rooms, which opened on a gallery running round three sides of the hall.

Outside, on the southern side of the house, was a garden of potherbs, with the green walks edged by a few bright flowers for beau-pots and posies. This had stone walls separating it from the paddock, which sloped down to the river, and was a good deal broken by ivy-covered rocks. Adjoining the stables were farm buildings and barns, for there were several fields for tillage along the river-side, and the mill and two more farms were the property of the Bridgefield squire, so that the inheritance was a very fair one, wedged in, as it were, between the river and the great Chase of Sheffield, up whose stately avenue the riding party looked as they crossed the bridge, Richard having become more silent than ever as he came among the familiar rocks and trees of his boyhood, and knew he should

not meet that hearty welcome from his brother which had never hitherto failed to greet his return. The house had that strange air of forlornness which seems to proclaim sorrow within. The great court doors stood open, and a big, rough deer-hound, at the sound of the approaching hoofs, rose slowly up, and began a series of long, deep-mouthed barks, with pauses between, sounding like a knell. One or two men and maids ran out at the sound, and as the travellers rode up to the horse-block, an old gray-bearded serving-man came stumbling forth with "Oh! Master Diccon, woe worth the day!"

"How does my mother?" asked Richard, as he sprang off and set his boy on his feet.

"No worse, sir, but she hath not yet spoken a word—back, Thunder—ah! sir, the poor dog knows you."

For the great hound had sprung up to Richard in eager greeting, but then, as soon as he heard his voice, the creature drooped his ears and tail, and instead of continuing his demonstrations of joy, stood quietly by, only now and then poking his long, rough nose into Richard's hand, knowing as well as possible that though not his dear lost master, he was the next thing!

Mistress Susan and the infant were lifted down—a hurried question and answer assured them that the funeral was over yesterday. My Lady Countess had come down and would have it so; my lord was at Court, and Sir Gilbert and his brothers had been present, but the old servants thought it hard that none nearer in blood should be there to lay their young squire in his grave, nor to support his father, who, poor old man, had tottered, and been so like to swoon as he passed the hall door, that Sir Gilbert and old Diggory could but, help him back again, fearing lest he, too, might have a stroke.

It was a great grief to Richard, who had longed to look on his brother's face again, but he could say nothing, only he gave one hand to his wife and the other to his son, and led them into the hall, which was in an indescribable state of confusion. The trestles which had supported the coffin were still at one end of the room, the long tables were still covered with cloths, trenchers, knives, cups, and the remains of the funeral baked meats, and there were overthrown tankards and stains of wine on the cloth, as though, whatever else were lacking, the Talbot retainers had not missed their revel.

One of the dishevelled rough-looking maidens began some hurried muttering about being so distraught, and not looking for madam so early, but Susan could not listen to her, and merely putting the babe into her arms, came with her husband up the stairs, leaving little Humfrey with Nathanael.

Richard knocked at the bedroom door, and, receiving no answer, opened it. There in the tapestry-hung chamber was the huge old bedstead with its solid posts. In it lay something motionless, but the first thing the husband and wife saw was the bent head which was lifted up by the burly but broken figure in the chair beside it.

The two knotted old hands clasped the arms of the chair, and the squire prepared to rise, his lip trembling under his white beard, and emotion working in his dejected features. They were beforehand with him. Ere he could rise both were on their knees before him, while Richard in a broken voice cried, "Father, O father!"

"Thank God that thou art come, my son," said the old man, laying his hands on his shoulders, with a gleam of joy, for as they afterwards knew, he had sorely feared for Richard's ship in the storm that had caused Humfrey's death. "I looked for thee, my daughter," he added, stretching out one hand to Susan, who kissed it. "Now it may go better with her! Speak to thy mother, Richard, she may know thy voice."

Alas! no; the recently active, ready old lady was utterly stricken, and as yet held in the deadly grasp of paralysis, unconscious of all that passed around her.

Susan found herself obliged at once to take up the reins, and become head nurse and housekeeper. The old squire trusted implicitly to her, and helplessly put the keys into her hands, and the serving-men and maids, in some shame at the condition in which the hall had been found, bestirred themselves to set it in order, so that there was a chance of the ordinary appearance of things being restored by supper-time, when Richard hoped to persuade his father to come down to his usual place.

Long before this, however, a trampling had been heard in the court, and a shrill voice, well known to Richard and Susan, was heard demanding, "Come home, is she—Master Diccon too? More shame for you, you sluttish queans and lazy lubbers, never to have let me know; but none of you have any respect—"

A visit from my Lady Countess was a greater favour to such a household as that of Bridgefield than it would be to a cottage of the present day; Richard was hurrying downstairs, and Susan only tarried to throw off the housewifely apron in which she had been compounding a cooling drink for the poor old lady, and to wash her hands, while Humfrey, rushing up to her, exclaimed "Mother, mother, is it the Queen?"

Queen Elizabeth herself was not inaptly represented by her namesake of Hardwicke, the Queen of Hallamshire, sitting on her great white mule at the door, sideways, with her feet on a board, as little children now ride, and attended by a whole troop of gentlemen ushers, maidens, prickers, and running footmen. She was a woman of the same type as the Queen, which was of course enough to stamp her as a celebrated beauty, and though she had reached middle age, her pale, clear complexion and delicate features were well preserved. Her chin was too sharp, and there was something too thin and keen about her nose and lips to promise good temper. She was small of stature, but she made up for it in dignity of presence, and as she sat there, with her rich embroidered green satin farthingale spreading out over the mule, her tall ruff standing up fanlike on her shoulders, her riding-rod in her hand, and her master of the horse standing at her rein, while a gentleman usher wielded an enormous, long-handled, green fan, to keep the sun from incommoding her, she was, perhaps, even more magnificent than the maiden queen herself might have been in her more private expeditions. Indeed, she was new to her dignity as Countess, having been only a few weeks married to the Earl, her fourth husband. Captain Talbot did not feel it derogatory to his dignity as a gentleman to advance with his hat in his hand to kiss her hand, and put a knee to the ground as he invited her to alight, an invitation his wife heard with dismay as she reached the door, for things were by no means yet as they should be in the hall. She curtsied low, and advanced with her son holding her hand, but shrinking behind her.

"Ha, kinswoman, is it thou!" was her greeting, as she, too, kissed the small, shapely, white, but exceedingly strong hand that was extended to her; "So thou art come, and high time too. Thou shouldst never have gone a-gadding to Hull, living in lodgings; awaiting thine husband, forsooth. Thou art over young a matron for such gear, and so I told Diccon Talbot long ago."

"Yea, madam," said Richard, somewhat hotly, "and I made answer that my Susan was to be trusted, and truly no harm has come thereof."

"Ho! and you reckon it no harm that thy father and mother were left to a set of feckless, brainless, idle serving-men and maids in their trouble? Why, none would so much as have seen to thy brother's poor body being laid in a decent grave had not I been at hand to take order for it as became a distant kinsman of my lord. I tell thee, Richard, there must be no more of these vagabond seafaring ways. Thou must serve my lord, as a true retainer and kinsman is bound—Nay," in reply to a gesture, "I will not come in, I know too well in what ill order the house is like to be. I did but take my ride this way to ask how it fared with the mistress, and try if I could shake the squire from his lethargy, if Mrs. Susan had not had the grace yet to be here. How do they?" Then in answer, "Thou must waken him, Diccon—rouse him, and tell him that I and my lord expect it of him that he should bear his loss as a true and honest Christian man, and not pule and moan, since he has a son left—ay, and a grandson. You should breed your boy up to know his manners, Susan Talbot," as Humfrey resisted an attempt to make him do his reverence to my lady; "that stout knave of yours wants the rod. Methought I heard you'd borne another, Susan! Ay! as I said it would be," as her eye fell on the swaddled babe in a maid's arms. "No lack of fools to eat up the poor old squire's substance. A maid, is it? Beshrew me, if your voyages will find portions for all your wenches! Has the leech let blood to thy good-mother, Susan? There! not one amongst you all bears any brains. Knew you not how to send up to the castle for Master Drewitt? Farewell! Thou wilt be at the lodge to-morrow to let me

know how it fares with thy mother, when her brain is cleared by further blood-letting. And for the squire, let him know that I expect it of him that he shall eat, and show himself a man!"

So saying, the great lady departed, escorted as far as the avenue gate by Richard Talbot, and leaving the family gratified by her condescension, and not allowing to themselves how much their feelings were chafed.

CHAPTER III
THE CAPTIVE

Death and sorrow seemed to have marked the house of Bridgefield, for the old lady never rallied after the blood-letting enjoined by the Countess's medical science, and her husband, though for some months able to creep about the house, and even sometimes to visit the fields, had lost his memory, and became more childish week by week.

Richard Talbot was obliged to return to his ship at the end of the month, but as soon as she was laid up for the winter he resigned his command, and returned home, where he was needed to assume the part of master. In truth he became actually master before the next spring, for his father took to his bed with the first winter frosts, and in spite of the duteous cares lavished upon him by his son and daughter-in-law, passed from his bed to his grave at the Christmas feast. Richard Talbot inherited house and lands, with the undefined sense of feudal obligation to the head of his name, and ere long he was called upon to fulfil those obligations by service to his lord.

There had been another act in the great Scottish tragedy. Queen Mary had effected her escape from Lochleven, but only to be at once defeated, and then to cross the Solway and throw herself into the hands of the English Queen.

Bolton Castle had been proved to be too perilously near the Border to serve as her residence, and the inquiry at York, and afterwards at Westminster, having proved unsatisfactory, Elizabeth had decided on detaining her in the kingdom, and committed her to the charge of the Earl of Shrewsbury.

To go into the history of that ill-managed investigation is not the purpose of this tale. It is probable that Elizabeth believed her cousin guilty, and wished to shield that guilt from being proclaimed, while her councillors, in their dread of the captive, wished to enhance the crime in Elizabeth's eyes, and were by no means scrupulous as to the kind of evidence they adduced. However, this lies outside our story; all that concerns it is that Lord Shrewsbury sent a summons to his trusty and well-beloved cousin, Richard Talbot of Bridgefield, to come and form part of the guard of honour which was to escort the Queen of Scots to Tutbury Castle, and there attend upon her.

All this time no hint had been given that the little Cicely was of alien blood. The old squire and his lady had been in no state to hear of the death of their own grandchild, or of the adoption of the orphan and Susan was too reserved a woman to speak needlessly of her griefs to one so unsympathising as the Countess or so flighty as the daughters at the great house. The men who had brought the summons to Hull had not been lodged in the house, but at an inn, where they either had heard nothing of Master Richard's adventure or had drowned their memory in ale, for they said nothing; and thus, without any formed intention of secrecy, the child's parentage had never come into question.

Indeed, though without doubt Mrs. Talbot was very loyal in heart to her noble kinsfolk, it is not to be denied that she was a good deal more at peace when they were not at the lodge. She tried devoutly to follow out the directions of my Lady Countess, and thought herself in fault when things went amiss, but she prospered far more when free from such dictation.

She had nothing to wish except that her husband could be more often at home, but it was better to have him only a few hours' ride from her, at Chatsworth or Tutbury, than to know him exposed to the perils of the sea. He rode over as often as he could be spared, to see his family and look after his property; but his attendance was close, and my Lord and my Lady were exacting with one whom they could thoroughly trust, and it was well that in her quiet way Mistress Susan proved capable of ruling men and maids, farm and stable as well as house, servants and children, to whom another boy was added in the course of the year after her return to Bridgefield.

In the autumn, notice was sent that the Queen of Scots was to be lodged at Sheffield, and long trains of waggons and sumpter horses and mules began to arrive, bringing her plenishing and household stuff in advance. Servants without number were sent on, both by her and by the Earl, to make preparations, and on a November day, tidings came that the arrival might be expected in the afternoon. Commands were sent that the inhabitants of the little town at the park gate should keep within doors, and not come forth to give any show of welcome to their lord and lady, lest it should be taken as homage to the captive queen; but at the Manor-house there was a little family gathering to hail the Earl and Countess. It chiefly consisted of ladies with their children, the husbands of most being in the suite of the Earl acting as escort or guard to the Queen. Susan Talbot, being akin to the family on both sides, was there with the two elder children; Humfrey, both that he might greet his father the sooner, and that he might be able to remember the memorable arrival of the captive queen, and Cicely, because he had clamoured loudly for her company. Lady Talbot, of the Herbert blood, wife to the heir, was present with two young sisters-in-law, Lady Grace, daughter to the Earl, and Mary, daughter to the Countess, who had been respectively married to Sir Henry Cavendish and Sir Gilbert Talbot, a few weeks before their respective parents were wedded, when the brides were only twelve and fourteen years old. There, too, was Mrs. Babington of Dethick, the recent widow of a kinsman of Lord Shrewsbury, to whom had been granted the wardship of her son, and the little party waiting in the hall also numbered Elizabeth and William Cavendish, the Countess's youngest children, and many dependants mustered in the background, ready for the reception. Indeed, the castle and manor-house, with their offices, lodges, and outbuildings, were an absolute little city in themselves. The castle was still kept in perfect repair, for the battle of Bosworth was not quite beyond the memory of living men's fathers; and besides, who could tell whether any day England might not have to be contested inch by inch with the Spaniard? So the gray walls stood on the tongue of land in the valley, formed by the junction of the rivers Sheaf and Dun, with towers at all the gateways, enclosing a space of no less than eight acres, and with the actual fortress, crisp, strong, hard, and unmouldered in the midst, its tallest square tower serving as a look-out place for those who watched to give the first intimation of the arrival.

The castle had its population, but chiefly of grooms, warders, and their families. The state-rooms high up in that square tower were so exceedingly confined, so stern and grim, that the grandfather of the present earl had built a manor-house for his family residence on the sloping ground on the farther side of the Dun.

This house, built of stone, timber, and brick, with two large courts, two gardens, and three yards, covered nearly as much space as the castle itself. A pleasant, smooth, grass lawn lay in front, and on it converged the avenues of oaks and walnuts, stretching towards the gates of the park, narrowing to the eye into single lines, then going absolutely out of sight, and the sea of foliage presenting the utmost variety of beautiful tints of orange, yellow, brown, and red. There was a great gateway between two new octagon towers of red brick, with battlements and dressings of stone, and from this porch a staircase led upwards to the great stone-paved hall, with a huge fire burning on the open hearth. Around it had gathered the ladies of the Talbot family waiting for the reception. The warder on the tower had blown his horn as a signal that the master and his royal guest were within the park, and the banner of the Talbots had been raised to announce their coming, but nearly half an hour must pass while the party came along the avenue from the drawbridge over the Sheaf ere they could arrive at the lodge.

So the ladies, in full state dresses, hovered over the fire, while the children played in the window seat near at hand.

Gilbert Talbot's wife, a thin, yellow-haired, young creature, promising to be like her mother, the Countess, had a tongue which loved to run, and with the precocity and importance of wifehood at sixteen, she dilated to her companions on her mother's constant attendance on the Queen, and the perpetual plots for that lady's escape. "She is as shifty and active as any cat-a-mount; and at

Chatsworth she had a scheme for being off out of her bedchamber window to meet a traitor fellow named Boll; but my husband smelt it out in good time, and had the guard beneath my lady's window, and the fellows are in gyves, and to see the lady the day it was found out! Not a wry face did she make. Oh no! 'Twas all my good lord, and my sweet sir with her. I promise you butter would not melt in her mouth, for my Lord Treasurer Cecil hath been to see her, and he has promised to bring her to speech of her Majesty. May I be there to see. I promise you 'twill be diamond cut diamond between them."

"How did she and my Lord Treasurer fare together?" asked Mrs. Babington.

"Well, you know there's not a man of them all that is proof against her blandishments. Her Majesty should have women warders for her. 'Twas good sport to see the furrows in his old brow smoothing out against his will as it were, while she plied him with her tongue. I never saw the Queen herself win such a smile as came on his lips, but then he is always a sort of master, or tutor, as it were, to the Queen. Ay," on some exclamation from Lady Talbot, "she heeds him like no one else. She may fling out, and run counter to him for the very pleasure of feeling that she has the power, but she will come round at last, and 'tis his will that is done in the long run. If this lady could beguile him indeed, she might be a free woman in the end."

"And think you that she did?"

"Not she! The Lord Treasurer is too long-headed, and has too strong a hate to all Papistry, to be beguiled more than for the very moment he was before her. He cannot help the being a man, you see, and they are all alike when once in her presence—your lord and father, like the rest of them, sister Grace. Mark me if there be not tempests brewing, an we be not the sooner rid of this guest of ours. My mother is not the woman to bear it long."

Dame Mary's tongue was apt to run on too fast, and Lady Talbot interrupted its career with an amused gesture towards the children.

For the little Cis, babe as she was, had all the three boys at her service. Humfrey, with a paternal air, was holding her on the window-seat; Antony Babington was standing to receive the ball that was being tossed to and fro between them, but as she never caught it, Will Cavendish was content to pick it up every time and return it to her, appearing amply rewarded by her laugh of delight.

The two mothers could not but laugh, and Mrs. Babington said the brave lads were learning their knightly courtesy early, while Mary Talbot began observing on the want of likeness between Cis and either the Talbot or Hardwicke race. The little girl was much darker in colouring than any of the boys, and had a pair of black, dark, heavy brows, that prevented her from being a pretty child. Her adopted mother shrank from such observations, and was rejoiced that a winding of horns, and a shout from the boys, announced that the expected arrival was about to take place. The ladies darted to the window, and beholding the avenue full of horsemen and horsewomen, their accoutrements and those of their escort gleaming in the sun, each mother gathered her own chicks to herself, smoothed the plumage somewhat ruffled by sport, and advanced to the head of the stone steps, William Cavendish, the eldest of the boys, being sent down to take his stepfather's rein and hold his stirrup, page fashion.

Clattering and jingling the troop arrived. The Earl, a stout, square man, with a long narrow face, lengthened out farther by a light-coloured, silky beard, which fell below his ruff, descended from his steed, gave his hat to Richard Talbot, and handed from her horse a hooded and veiled lady of slender proportions, who leant on his arm as she ascended the steps.

The ladies knelt, whether in respect to the heads of the family, or to the royal guest, may be doubtful.

The Queen came up the stairs with rheumatic steps, declaring, however, as she did so, that she felt the better for her ride, and was less fatigued than when she set forth. She had the soft, low, sweet Scottish voice, and a thorough Scottish accent and language, tempered, however, by French tones, and as, coming into the warmer air of the hall, she withdrew her veil, her countenance was seen. Mary Stuart was only thirty-one at this time, and her face was still youthful, though worn and wearied, and bearing tokens of illness. The features were far from being regularly beautiful; there was

a decided cast in one of the eyes, and in spite of all that Mary Talbot's detracting tongue had said, Susan's first impression was disappointment. But, as the Queen greeted the lady whom she already knew, and the Earl presented his daughter, Lady Grace, his stepdaughter, Elizabeth Cavendish, and his kinswoman, Mistress Susan Talbot, the extraordinary magic of her eye and lip beamed on them, the queenly grace and dignity joined with a wonderful sweetness impressed them all, and each in measure felt the fascination.

The Earl led the Queen to the fire to obtain a little warmth before mounting the stairs to her own apartments, and likewise while Lady Shrewsbury was dismounting, and being handed up the stairs by her second stepson, Gilbert. The ladies likewise knelt on one knee to greet this mighty dame, and the children should have done so too, but little Cis, catching sight of Captain Richard, who had come up bearing the Earl's hat, in immediate attendance on him, broke out with an exulting cry of "Father! father! father!" trotted with outspread arms right in front of the royal lady, embraced the booted leg in ecstasy, and then stretching out, exclaimed "Up! up!"

"How now, malapert poppet!" exclaimed the Countess, and though at some distance, uplifted her riding-rod. Susan was ready to sink into the earth with confusion at the great lady's displeasure, but Richard had stooped and lifted the little maid in his arms, while Queen Mary turned, her face lit up as by a sunbeam, and said, "Ah, bonnibell, art thou fain to see thy father? Wilt thou give me one of thy kisses, sweet bairnie?" and as Richard held her up to the kind face, "A goodly child, brave sir. Thou must let me have her at times for a playfellow. Wilt come and comfort a poor prisoner, little sweeting?"

The child responded with "Poor poor," stroking the soft delicate cheek, but the Countess interfered, still wrathful. "Master Richard, I marvel that you should let her Grace be beset by a child, who, if she cannot demean herself decorously, should have been left at home. Susan Hardwicke, I thought I had schooled you better."

"Nay, madam, may not a babe's gentle deed of pity be pardoned?" said Mary.

"Oh! if it pleasures you, madam, so be it," said Lady Shrewsbury, deferentially; "but there be children here more worthy of your notice than yonder little black-browed wench, who hath been allowed to thrust herself forward, while others have been kept back from importuning your Grace."

"No child can importune a mother who is cut off from her own," said Mary, eager to make up for the jealousy she had excited. "Is this bonnie laddie yours, madam? Ah! I should have known it by the resemblance."

She held her white hand to receive the kisses of the boys: William Cavendish, under his mother's eye, knelt obediently; Antony Babington, a fair, pretty lad, of eight or nine, of a beautiful pink and white complexion, pressed forward with an eager devotion which made the Queen smile and press her delicate hand on his curled locks; as for Humfrey, he retreated behind the shelter of his mother's farthingale, where his presence was forgotten by every one else, and, after the rebuff just administered to Cicely, there was no inclination to bring him to light, or combat with his bashfulness.

The introductions over, Mary gave her hand to the Earl to be conducted from the hall up the broad staircase, and along the great western gallery to the south front, where for many days her properties had been in course of being arranged.

Lady Shrewsbury followed as mistress of the house, and behind, in order of precedence, came the Scottish Queen's household, in which the dark, keen features of the French, and the rufous hues of the Scots, were nearly equally divided. Lady Livingstone and Mistress Seaton, two of the Queen's Maries of the same age with herself, came next, the one led by Lord Talbot, the other by Lord Livingstone. There was also the faithful French Marie de Courcelles, paired with Master Beatoun, comptroller of the household, and Jean Kennedy, a stiff Scotswoman, whose hard outlines did not do justice to her tenderness and fidelity, and with her was a tall, active, keen-faced stripling, looked on with special suspicion by the English, as Willie Douglas, the contriver of the Queen's flight from Lochleven. Two secretaries, French and Scottish, were shrewdly suspected of being priests, and there

were besides, a physician, surgeon, apothecary, with perfumers, cooks, pantlers, scullions, lacqueys, to the number of thirty, besides their wives and attendants, these last being "permitted of my lord's benevolence."

They were all eyed askance by the sturdy, north country English, who naturally hated all strangers, above all French and Scotch, and viewed the band of captives much like a caged herd of wild beasts.

When on the way home Mistress Susan asked her little boy why he would not make his obeisance to the pretty lady, he sturdily answered, "She is no pretty lady of mine. She is an evil woman who slew her husband."

"Poor lady! tongues have been busy with her," said his father.

"How, sir?" asked Susan, amazed, "do you think her guiltless in the matter?"

"I cannot tell," returned Richard. "All I know is that many who have no mercy on her would change their minds if they beheld her patient and kindly demeanour to all."

This was a sort of shock to Susan, as it seemed to her to prove the truth of little Lady Talbot's words, that no one was proof against Queen Mary's wiles; but she was happy in having her husband at home once more, though, as he told her, he would be occupied most of each alternate day at Sheffield, he and another relation having been appointed "gentlemen porters," which meant that they were to wait in a chamber at the foot of the stairs, and keep watch over whatever went in or out of the apartments of the captive and her suite.

"And," said Richard, "who think you came to see me at Wingfield? None other than Cuthbert Langston."

"Hath he left his merchandise at Hull?"

"Ay, so he saith. He would fain have had my good word to my lord for a post in the household, as comptroller of accounts, clerk, or the like. It seemed as though there were no office he would not take so that he might hang about the neighbourhood of this queen."

"Then you would not grant him your recommendation?"

"Nay, truly. I could not answer for him, and his very anxiety made me the more bent on not bringing him hither. I'd fain serve in no ship where I know not the honesty of all the crew, and Cuthbert hath ever had a hankering after the old profession."

"Verily then it were not well to bring him hither."

"Moreover, he is a lover of mysteries and schemes," said Richard. "He would never be content to let alone the question of our little wench's birth, and would be fretting us for ever about the matter."

"Did he speak of it?"

"Yes. He would have me to wit that a nurse and babe had been put on board at Dumbarton. Well, said I, and so they must have been, since on board they were. Is that all thou hast to tell me? And mighty as was the work he would have made of it, this was all he seemed to know. I asked, in my turn, how he came to know thus much about a vessel sailing from a port in arms against the Lords of the Congregation, the allies of her Majesty?"

"What said he?"

"That his house had dealings with the owners of the Bride of Dunbar. I like not such dealings, and so long as this lady and her train are near us, I would by no means have him whispering here and there that she is a Scottish orphan."

"It would chafe my Lady Countess!" said Susan, to whom this was a serious matter. "Yet doth it not behove us to endeavour to find out her parentage?"

"I tell you I proved to myself that he knew nothing, and all that we have to do is to hinder him from making mischief out of that little," returned Richard impatiently.

The honest captain could scarcely have told the cause of his distrust or of his secrecy, but he had a general feeling that to let an intriguer like Cuthbert Langston rake up any tale that could be connected with the party of the captive queen, could only lead to danger and trouble.

CHAPTER IV
THE OAK AND THE OAKEN HALL

The oaks of Sheffield Park were one of the greatest glories of the place. Giants of the forest stretched their huge arms over the turf, kept smooth and velvety by the creatures, wild and tame, that browsed on it, and made their covert in the deep glades of fern and copse wood that formed the background.

There were not a few whose huge trunks, of such girth that two men together could not encompass them with outstretched arms, rose to a height of more than sixty feet before throwing out a horizontal branch, and these branches, almost trees in themselves, spread forty-eight feet on each side of the bole, lifting a mountain of rich verdure above them, and casting a delicious shade upon the ground beneath them. Beneath one of these noble trees, some years after the arrival of the hapless Mary Stuart, a party of children were playing, much to the amusement of an audience of which they were utterly unaware, namely, of sundry members of a deer-hunting party; a lady and gentleman who, having become separated from the rest, were standing in the deep bracken, which rose nearly as high as their heads, and were further sheltered by a rock, looking and listening.

"Now then, Cis, bravely done! Show how she treats her ladies—"

"Who will be her lady? Thou must, Humfrey!"

"No, no, I'll never be a lady," said Humfrey gruffly.

"Thou then, Diccon."

"No, no," and the little fellow shrank back, "thou wilt hurt me, Cis."

"Come then, do thou, Tony! I'll not strike too hard!"

"As if a wench could strike too hard."

"He might have turned that more chivalrously," whispered the lady to her companion. "What are they about to represent? Mort de ma vie, the profane little imps! I, believe it is my sacred cousin, the Majesty of England herself! Truly the little maid hath a bearing that might serve a queen, though she be all too black and beetle-browed for Queen Elizabeth. Who is she, Master Gilbert?"

"She is Cicely Talbot, daughter to the gentleman porter of your Majesty's lodge."

"See to her—mark her little dignity with her heather and bluebell crown as she sits on the rock, as stately as jewels could make her! See her gesture with her hands, to mark where the standing ruff ought to be. She hath the true spirit of the Comedy—ah! and here cometh young Antony with mincing pace, with a dock-leaf for a fan, and a mantle for a farthingale! She speaks! now hark!"

"Good morrow to you, my young mistress," began a voice pitched two notes higher than its actual childlike key. "Thou hast a new farthingale, I see! O Antony, that's not the way to curtsey—do it like this. No no! thou clumsy fellow—back and knees together."

"Never mind, Cis," interposed one of the boys—"we shall lose all our play time if you try to make him do it with a grace. Curtsies are women's work—go on."

"Where was I? O—" (resuming her dignity after these asides) "Thou hast a new farthingale, I see."

"To do my poor honour to your Grace's birthday."

"Oh ho! Is it so? Methought it had been to do honour to my fair mistress's own taper waist. And pray how much an ell was yonder broidered stuff?"

"Two crowns, an't please your Grace," returned the supposed lady, making a wild conjecture.

"Two crowns! thou foolish Antony!" Then recollecting herself, "two crowns! what, when mine costs but half! Thou presumptuous, lavish varlet—no, no, wench! what right hast thou to wear gowns finer than thy liege?—I'll teach you." Wherewith, erecting all her talons, and clawing frightfully with them in the air, the supposed Queen Bess leapt at the unfortunate maid of honour, appeared to tear

the imaginary robe, and drove her victim on the stage with a great air of violence, amid peals of laughter from the other children, loud enough to drown those of the elders, who could hardly restrain their merriment.

Gilbert Talbot, however, had been looking about him anxiously all the time, and would fain have moved away; but a sign from Queen Mary withheld him, as one of the children cried,

"Now! show us how she serves her lords."

The play seemed well understood between them, for the mimic queen again settled herself on her throne, while Will Cavendish, calling out, "Now I'm Master Hatton," began to tread a stately measure on the grass, while the queen exclaimed, "Who is this new star of my court? What stalwart limbs, what graceful tread! Who art thou, sir?"

"Madam, I am—I am. What is it? An ef—ef—"

"A daddy-long-legs," mischievously suggested another of the group.

"No, it's Latin. Is it Ephraim? No; it's a fly, something like a gnat" (then at an impatient gesture from her Majesty) "disporting itself in the beams of the noontide sun."

"Blood-sucking," whispered the real Queen behind the fern. "He is not so far out there. See! see! with what a grace the child holds out her little hand for him to kiss. I doubt me if Elizabeth herself could be more stately. But who comes here?"

"I'm Sir Philip Sydney."

"No, no," shouted Humfrey, "Sir Philip shall not come into this fooling. My father says he's the best knight in England."

"He is as bad as the rest in flattery to the Queen," returned young Cavendish.

"I'll not have it, I say. You may be Lord Leicester an you will! He's but Robin Dudley."

"Ah!" began the lad, now advancing and shading his eyes. "What burnished splendour dazzles my weak sight? Is it a second Juno that I behold, or lovely Venus herself? Nay, there is a wisdom in her that can only belong to the great Minerva herself! So youthful too. Is it Hebe descended to this earth?"

Cis smirked, and held out a hand, saying in an affected tone, "Lord Earl, are thy wits astray?"

"Whose wits would not be perturbed at the mere sight of such exquisite beauty?"

"Come and sit at our feet, and we will try to restore them," said the stage queen; but here little Diccon, the youngest of the party, eager for more action, called out, "Show us how she treats her lords and ladies together."

On which young Babington, as the lady, and Humfrey, made demonstrations of love-making and betrothal, upon which their sovereign lady descended on them with furious tokens of indignation, abusing them right and left, until in the midst the great castle bell pealed forth, and caused a flight general, being, in fact, the summons to the school kept in one of the castle chambers by one Master Snigg, or Sniggius, for the children of the numerous colony who peopled the castle. Girls, as well as boys, were taught there, and thus Cis accompanied Humfrey and Diccon, and consorted with their companions.

Queen Mary was allowed to hunt and take out-of-door exercise in the park whenever she pleased, but Lord Shrewsbury, or one of his sons, Gilbert and Francis, never was absent from her for a moment when she went beyond the door of the lesser lodge, which the Earl had erected for her, with a flat, leaded, and parapeted roof, where she could take the air, and with only one entrance, where was stationed a "gentleman porter," with two subordinates, whose business it was to keep a close watch over every person or thing that went in or out. If she had any purpose of losing herself in the thickets of fern, or copsewood, in the park, or holding unperceived conference under shelter of the chase, these plans were rendered impossible by the pertinacious presence of one or other of the Talbots, who acted completely up to their name.

Thus it was that the Queen, with Gilbert in close attendance, had found herself an unseen spectator of the children's performance, which she watched with the keen enjoyment that sometimes made her forget her troubles for the moment.

"How got the imps such knowledge?" mused Gilbert Talbot, as he led the Queen out on the sward which had been the theatre of their mimicry.

"Do *you* ask that, Sir Gilbert?" said the Queen with emphasis, for indeed it was his wife who had been the chief retailer of scandal about Queen Elizabeth, to the not unwilling ears of herself and his mother; and Antony Babington, as my lady's page, had but used his opportunities.

"They are insolent varlets and deserve the rod," continued Gilbert.

"You are too ready with the rod, you English," returned Mary. "You flog all that is clever and spirited out of your poor children!"

"That is the question, madam. Have the English been found so deficient in spirit compared with other nations?"

"Ah! we all know what you English can say for yourselves," returned the Queen. "See what Master John Coke hath made of the herald's argument before Dame Renown, in his translation. He hath twisted all the other way."

"Yea, madam, but the French herald had it all his own way before. So it was but just we should have our turn."

Here a cry from the other hunters greeted them, and they found Lord Shrewsbury, some of the ladies, and a number of prickers, looking anxiously for them.

"Here we are, good my lord," said the Queen, who, when free from rheumatism, was a most active walker. "We have only been stalking my sister Queen's court in small, the prettiest and drollest pastime I have seen for many a long day."

Much had happened in the course of the past years. The intrigues with Northumberland and Norfolk, and the secret efforts of the unfortunate Queen to obtain friends, and stir up enemies against Elizabeth, had resulted in her bonds being drawn closer and closer. The Rising of the North had taken place, and Cuthbert Langston had been heard of as taking a prominent part beneath the sacred banner, but he had been wounded and not since heard of, and his kindred knew not whether he were among the unnamed dead who loaded the trees in the rear of the army of Sussex, or whether he had escaped beyond seas. Richard Talbot still remained as one of the trusted kinsmen of Lord Shrewsbury, on whom that nobleman depended for the execution of the charge which yearly became more wearisome and onerous, as hope decayed and plots thickened.

Though resident in the new lodge with her train, it was greatly diminished by the dismissal from time to time of persons who were regarded as suspicious; Mary still continued on intimate terms with Lady Shrewsbury and her daughters, specially distinguishing with her favour Bessie Pierrepoint, the eldest grandchild of the Countess, who slept with her, and was her plaything and her pupil in French and needlework. The fiction of her being guest and not prisoner had not entirely passed away; visitors were admitted, and she went in and out of the lodge, walked or rode at will, only under pretext of courtesy. She never was unaccompanied by the Earl or one of his sons, and they endeavoured to make all private conversation with strangers, or persons unauthorised from Court, impossible to her.

The invitation given to little Cicely on the arrival had not been followed up. The Countess wished to reserve to her own family all the favours of one who might at any moment become the Queen of England, and she kept Susan Talbot and her children in what she called their meet place, in which that good lady thoroughly acquiesced, having her hands much too full of household affairs to run after queens.

There was a good deal of talk about this child's play, a thing which had much better have been left where it was; but in a seclusion like that of Sheffield subjects of conversation were not over numerous, and every topic which occurred was apt to be worried to shreds. So Lady Shrewsbury and her daughters heard the Queen's arch description of the children's mimicry, and instantly conceived a desire to see the scene repeated. The gentlemen did not like it at all: their loyalty was offended at the insult to her gracious Majesty, and besides, what might not happen if such sports ever came to her ears? However, the Countess ruled Sheffield; and Mary Talbot and Bessie Cavendish ruled the

Countess, and they were bent on their own way. So the representation was to take place in the great hall of the manor-house, and the actors were to be dressed in character from my lady's stores.

"They will ruin it, these clumsy English, after their own fashion," said Queen Mary, among her ladies. "It was the unpremeditated grace and innocent audacity of the little ones that gave the charm. Now it will be a mere broad farce, worthy of Bess of Hardwicke. Mais que voulez vous?"

The performance was, however, laid under a great disadvantage by the absolute refusal of Richard and Susan Talbot to allow their Cicely to assume the part of Queen Elizabeth. They had been dismayed at her doing so in child's play, and since she could read fluently, write pretty well, and cipher a little, the good mother had decided to put a stop to this free association with the boys at the castle, and to keep her at home to study needlework and housewifery. As to her acting with boys before the assembled households, the proposal seemed to them absolutely insulting to any daughter of the Talbot line, and they had by this time forgotten that she was no such thing. Bess Cavendish, the special spoilt child of the house, even rode down, armed with her mother's commands, but her feudal feeling did not here sway Mistress Susan.

Public acting was esteemed an indignity for women, and, though Cis was a mere child, all Susan's womanhood awoke, and she made answer firmly that she could not obey my lady Countess in this.

Bess flounced out of the house, indignantly telling her she should rue the day, and Cis herself cried passionately, longing after the fine robes and jewels, and the presentation of herself as a queen before the whole company of the castle. The harsh system of the time made the good mother think it her duty to requite this rebellion with the rod, and to set the child down to her seam in the corner, and there sat Cis, pouting and brooding over what Antony Babington had told her of what he had picked up when in his page's capacity, attending his lady, of Queen Mary's admiration of the pretty ways and airs of the little mimic Queen Bess, till she felt as if she were defrauded of her due. The captive Queen was her dream, and to hear her commendations, perhaps be kissed by her, would be supreme bliss. Nay, she still hoped that there would be an interference of the higher powers on her behalf, which would give her a triumph.

No! Captain Talbot came home, saying, "So, Mistress Sue, thou art a steadfast woman, to have resisted my lady's will!"

"I knew, my good husband, that thou wouldst never see our Cis even in sport a player!"

"Assuredly not, and thou hadst the best of it, for when Mistress Bess came in as full of wrath as a petard of powder, and made your refusal known, my lord himself cried out, 'And she's in the right o't! What a child may do in sport is not fit for a gentlewoman in earnest.'"

"Then, hath not my lord put a stop to the whole?"

"Fain would he do so, but the Countess and her daughters are set on carrying out the sport. They have set Master Sniggius to indite the speeches, and the boys of the school are to take the parts for their autumn interlude."

"Surely that is perilous, should it come to the knowledge of those at Court."

"Oh, I promise you, Sniggius hath a device for disguising all that could give offence. The Queen will become Semiramis or Zenobia, I know not which, and my Lord of Leicester, Master Hatton, and the others, will be called Ninus or Longinus, or some such heathenish long-tailed terms, and speak speeches of mighty length. Are they to be in Latin, Humfrey?"

"Oh no, sir," said Humfrey, with a shudder. "Master Sniggius would have had them so, but the young ladies said they would have nothing to do with the affair if there were one word of Latin uttered. It is bad enough as it is. I am to be Philidaspes, an Assyrian knight, and have some speeches to learn, at least one is twenty-five lines, and not one is less than five!"

"A right requital for thy presumptuous and treasonable game, my son," said his father, teasing him.

"And who is to be the Queen?" asked the mother.

"Antony Babington," said Humfrey, "because he can amble and mince more like a wench than any of us. The worse luck for him. He will have more speeches than any one of us to learn."

The report of the number of speeches to be learnt took off the sting of Cis's disappointment, though she would not allow that it did so, declaring with truth that she could learn by hearing faster than any of the boys. Indeed, she did learn all Humfrey's speeches, and Antony's to boot, and assisted both of them with all her might in committing them to memory.

As Captain Talbot had foretold, the boys' sport was quite sufficiently punished by being made into earnest. Master Sniggius was far from merciful as to length, and his satire was so extremely remote that Queen Elizabeth herself could hardly have found out that Zenobia's fine moral lecture on the vanities of too aspiring ruffs was founded on the box on the ear which rewarded poor Lady Mary Howard's display of her rich petticoat, nor would her cheeks have tingled when the Queen of the East—by a bold adaptation—played the part of Lion in interrupting the interview of our old friends Pyramus and Thisbe, who, by an awful anachronism, were carried to Palmyra. It was no plagiarism from "Midsummer Night's Dream," only drawn from the common stock of playwrights.

So, shorn of all that was perilous, and only understood by the initiated, the play took place in the Castle Hall, the largest available place, with Queen Mary seated upon the dais, with a canopy of State over her head, Lady Shrewsbury on a chair nearly as high, the Earl, the gentlemen and ladies of their suites drawn up in a circle, the servants where they could, the Earl's musicians thundering with drums, tooting with fifes, twanging on fiddles, overhead in a gallery. Cis and Diccon, on either side of Susan Talbot, gazing on the stage, where, much encumbered by hoop and farthingale, and arrayed in a yellow curled wig, strutted forth Antony Babington, declaiming—

"Great Queen Zenobia am I,
The Roman Power I defy.
At my Palmyra, in the East,
I rule o'er every man and beast"

Here was an allusion couched in the Roman power, which Master Antony had missed, or he would hardly have uttered it, since he was of a Roman Catholic family, though, while in the Earl's household, he had to conform outwardly.

A slender, scholarly lad, with a pretty, innocent face, and a voice that could "speak small, like a woman," came in and announced himself thus—

"I'm Thisbe, an Assyrian maid,
My robe's with jewels overlaid."

The stiff colloquy between the two boys, encumbered with their dresses, shy and awkward, and rehearsing their lines like a task, was no small contrast to the merry impromptu under the oak, and the gay, free grace of the children.

Poor Philidaspes acquitted himself worst of all, for when done up in a glittering suit of sham armour, with a sword and dagger of lath, his entire speech, though well conned, deserted him, and he stood red-faced, hesitating, and ready to cry, when suddenly from the midst of the spectators there issued a childish voice, "Go on, Humfrey!

"Philidaspes am I, most valorous knight,
Ever ready for Church and Queen to fight.

"Go on, I say!" and she gave a little stamp of impatience, to the extreme confusion of the mother and the great amusement of the assembled company. Humfrey, once started, delivered himself of

the rest of his oration in a glum and droning voice, occasioning fits of laughter, such as by no means added to his self-possession.

The excellent Sniggius and his company of boys had certainly, whether intentionally or not, deprived the performance of all its personal sting, and most likewise of its interest. Such diversion as the spectators derived was such as Hippolyta seems to have found in listening to Wall, Lion, Moonshine and Co.; but, like Theseus, Lord Shrewsbury was very courteous, and complimented both playwright and actors, relieved and thankful, no doubt, that Queen Zenobia was so unlike his royal mistress.

There was nothing so much enforced by Queen Elizabeth as that strangers should not have resort to Sheffield Castle. No spectators, except those attached to the household, and actually forming part of the colony within the park, were therefore supposed to be admitted, and all of them were carefully kept at a distant part of the hall, where they could have no access to the now much reduced train of the Scottish Queen, with whom all intercourse was forbidden.

Humfrey was therefore surprised when, just as he had come out of the tiring-room, glad to divest himself of his encumbering and gaudy equipments, a man touched him on the arm and humbly said, "Sir, I have a humble entreaty to make of you. If you would convey my petition to the Queen of Scots!"

"I have nothing to do with the Queen of Scots," said the ex-Philidaspes, glancing suspiciously at the man's sleeve, where, however, he saw the silver dog, the family badge.

"She is a charitable lady," continued the man, who looked like a groom, "and if she only knew that my poor old aunt is lying famishing, she would aid her. Pray you, good my lord, help me to let this scroll reach to her."

"I'm no lord, and I have naught to do with the Queen," repeated Humfrey, while at the same moment Antony, who had been rather longer in getting out of his female attire, presented himself; and Humfrey, pitying the man's distress, said, "This young gentleman is the Countess's page. He sometimes sees the Queen."

The man eagerly told his story, how his aunt, the widow of a huckster, had gone on with the trade till she had been cruelly robbed and beaten, and now was utterly destitute, needing aid to set herself up again. The Queen of Scots was noted for her beneficent almsgiving, and a few silver pieces from her would be quite sufficient to replenish her basket.

Neither boy doubted a moment. Antony had the entree to the presence chamber, where on this festival night the Earl and Countess were sure to be with the Queen. He went straightway thither, and trained as he was in the usages of the place, told his business to the Earl, who was seated near the Queen. Lord Shrewsbury took the petition from him, glanced it over, and asked, "Who knew the Guy Norman who sent it?" Frank Talbot answered for him, that he was a yeoman pricker, and the Earl permitted the paper to be carried to Mary, watching her carefully as she read it, when Antony had presented it on one knee.

"Poor woman!" she said, "it is a piteous case. Master Beatoun, hast thou my purse? Here, Master Babington, wilt thou be the bearer of this angel for me, since I know that the delight of being the bearer will be a reward to thy kind heart."

Antony gracefully kissed the fair hand, and ran off joyously with the Queen's bounty. Little did any one guess what the career thus begun would bring that fair boy.

CHAPTER V
THE HUCKSTERING WOMAN

The huckstering woman, Tibbott by name, was tended by Queen Mary's apothecary, and in due time was sent off well provided, to the great fair of York, whence she returned with a basket of needles, pins (such as they were), bodkins, and the like articles, wherewith to circulate about Hallamshire, but the gate-wards would not relax their rules so far as to admit her into the park. She was permitted, however, to bring her wares to the town of Sheffield, and to Bridgefield, but she might come no farther.

Thither Antony Babington came down to lay out the crown which had been given to him on his birthday, and indeed half Master Sniggius's scholars discovered needs, and came down either to spend, or to give advice to the happy owners of groats and testers. So far so good; but the huckster-woman soon made Bridgefield part of her regular rounds, and took little commissions which she executed for the household of Sheffield, who were, as the Cavendish sisters often said in their spleen, almost as much prisoners as the Queen of Scots. Antony Babington was always her special patron, and being Humfrey's great companion and playfellow, he was allowed to come in and out of the gates unquestioned, to play with him and with Cis, who no longer went to school, but was trained at home in needlework and housewifery.

Match-making began at so early an age, that when Mistress Susan had twice found her and Antony Babington with their heads together over the lamentable ballad of the cold fish that had been a lady, and which sang its own history "forty thousand fathom above water," she began to question whether the girl were the attraction. He was now an orphan, and his wardship and marriage had been granted to the Earl, who, having disposed of all his daughters and stepdaughters, except Bessie Cavendish, might very fairly bestow on the daughter of his kinsman so good a match as the young squire of Dethick.

"Then should we have to consider of her parentage," said Richard, when his wife had propounded her views.

"I never can bear in mind that the dear wench is none of ours," said Susan. "Thou didst say thou wouldst portion her as if she were our own little maid, and I have nine webs ready for her household linen. Must we speak of her as a stranger?"

"It would scarce be just towards another family to let them deem her of true Talbot blood, if she were to enter among them," said Richard; "though I look on the little merry maid as if she were mine own child. But there is no need yet to begin upon any such coil; and, indeed, I would wager that my lady hath other views for young Babington."

After all, parents often know very little of what passes in children's minds, and Cis never hinted to her mother that the bond of union between her and Antony was devotion to the captive Queen. Cis had only had a glimpse or two of her, riding by when hunting or hawking, or when, on festive occasions, all who were privileged to enter the park were mustered together, among whom the Talbots ranked high as kindred to both Earl and Countess; but those glimpses had been enough to fill the young heart with romance, such as the matter-of-fact elders never guessed at. Antony Babington, who was often actually in the gracious presence, and received occasional smiles, and even greetings, was immeasurably devoted to the Queen, and maintained Cicely's admiration by his vivid descriptions of the kindness, the grace, the charms of the royal captive, in contrast with the innate vulgarity of their own Countess.

Willie Douglas (the real Roland Graeme of the escape from Lochleven) had long ago been dismissed from Mary's train, with all the other servants who were deemed superfluous; but Antony

had heard the details of the story from Jean Kennedy (Mrs. Kennett, as the English were pleased to call her), and Willie was the hero of his emulative imagination.

"What would I not do to be like him!" he fervently exclaimed when he had narrated the story to Humfrey and Cis, as they lay on a nest in the fern one fine autumn day, resting after an expedition to gather blackberries for the mother's preserving.

"I would not be him for anything," said Humfrey.

"Fie, Humfrey," cried Cis; "would not you dare exile or anything else in a good cause?"

"For a good cause, ay," said Humfrey in his stolid way.

"And what can be a better cause than that of the fairest of captive queens?" exclaimed Antony, hotly.

"I would not be a traitor," returned Humfrey, as he lay on his back, looking up through the chequerwork of the branches of the trees towards the sky.

"Who dares link the word traitor with my name?" said Babington, feeling for the imaginary handle of a sword.

"Not I; but you'll get it linked if you go on in this sort."

"For shame, Humfrey," again cried Cis, passionately. "Why, delivering imprisoned princesses always was the work of a true knight."

"Yea; but they first defied the giant openly," said Humfrey.

"What of that?" said Antony.

"They did not do it under trust," said Humfrey.

"I am not under trust," said Antony. "Your father may be a sworn servant of the Earl and, the Queen—Queen Elizabeth, I mean; but I have taken no oaths—nobody asked me if I would come here."

"No," said Humfrey, knitting his brows, "but you see we are all trusted to go in and out as we please, on the understanding that we do nought that can be unfaithful to the Earl; and I suppose it was thus with this same Willie Douglas."

"She was his own true and lawful Queen," cried Cis. "His first duty was to her."

Humfrey sat up and looked perplexed, but with a sudden thought exclaimed, "No Scots are we, thanks be to Heaven! and what might be loyalty in him would be rank treason in us."

"How know you that?" said Antony. "I have heard those who say that our lawful Queen is there," and he pointed towards the walls that rose in the distance above the woods.

Humfrey rose wrathful. "Then truly you are no better than a traitor, and a Spaniard, and a Papist," and fists were clenched on both aides, while Cis flew between, pulling down Humfrey's uplifted hand, and crying, "No, no; he did not say he thought so, only he had heard it."

"Let him say it again!" growled Antony, his arm bared.

"No, don't, Humfrey!" as if she saw it between his clenched teeth. "You know you only meant if Tony thought so, and he didn't. Now how can you two be so foolish and unkind to me, to bring me out for a holiday to eat blackberries and make heather crowns, and then go and spoil it all with folly about Papists, and Spaniards, and grown-up people's nonsense that nobody cares about!"

Cis had a rare power over both her comrades, and her piteous appeal actually disarmed them, since there was no one present to make them ashamed of their own placability. Grown-up people's follies were avoided by mutual consent through the rest of the walk, and the three children parted amicably when Antony had to return to fulfil his page's duties at my lord's supper, and Humfrey and Cis carried home their big basket of blackberries.

When they entered their own hall they found their mother engaged in conversation with a tall, stout, and weather-beaten man, whom she announced—"See here, my children, here is a good friend of your father's, Master Goatley, who was his chief mate in all his voyages, and hath now come over all the way from Hull to see him! He will be here anon, sir, so soon as the guard is changed at the Queen's lodge. Meantime, here are the elder children."

Diccon, who had been kept at home by some temporary damage to his foot, and little Edward were devouring the sailor with their eyes; and Humfrey and Cis were equally delighted with the introduction, especially as Master Goatley was just returned from the Western Main, and from a curious grass-woven basket which he carried slung to his side, produced sundry curiosities in the way of beads, shell-work, feather-work, and a hatchet of stone, and even a curious armlet of soft, dull gold, with pearls set in it. This he had, with great difficulty, obtained on purpose for Mistress Talbot, who had once cured him of a bad festering hurt received on board ship.

The children clustered round in ecstasies of admiration and wonder as they heard of the dark brown atives, the curious expedients by which barter was carried on; also of cruel Spaniards, and of savage fishes, with all the marvels of flying-fish, corals, palm-trees, humming birds—all that is lesson work to our modern youth, but was the most brilliant of living fairy tales at this Elizabethan period. Humfrey and Diccon were ready to rush off to voyage that instant, and even little Ned cried imitatively in his imperfect language that he would be "a tailor."

Then their father came home, and joyfully welcomed and clasped hands with his faithful mate, declaring that the sight did him good; and they sat down to supper and talked of voyages, till the boys' eyes glowed, and they beat upon their own knees with the enthusiasm that their strict manners bade them repress; while their mother kept back her sighs as she saw them becoming infected with that sea fever so dreaded by parents. Nay, she saw it in her husband himself. She knew him to be grievously weary of a charge most monotonously dull, and only varied by suspicions and petty detections; and that he was hungering and thirsting for his good ship and to be facing winds and waves. She could hear his longing in the very sound of the "Ays?" and brief inquiries by which he encouraged Goatley to proceed in the story of voyages and adventures, and she could not wonder when Goatley said, "Your heart is in it still, sir. Not one of us all but says it is a pity such a noble captain should be lost as a landsman, with nothing to do but to lock the door on a lady."

"Speak not of it, my good Goatley," said Richard, hastily, "or you will set me dreaming and make me mad."

"Then it is indeed so," returned Goatley. "Wherefore then come you not, sir, where a crew is waiting for you of as good fellows as ever stepped on a deck, and who, one and all, are longing after such a captain as you are, sir? Wherefore hold back while still in your prime?"

"Ask the mistress, there," said Richard, as he saw his Susan's white face and trembling fingers, though she kept her eyes on her work to prevent them from betraying their tears and their wistfulness.

"O sweet father," burst forth Humfrey, "do but go, and take me. I am quite old enough."

"Nay, Humfrey, 'tis no matter of liking," said his father, not wishing to prolong his wife's suspense. "Look you here, boy, my Lord Earl is captain of all of his name by right of birth, and so long as he needs my services, I have no right to take them from him. Dost see, my boy?"

Humfrey reluctantly did see. It was a great favour to be thus argued with, and admitted of no reply.

Mrs. Talbot's heart rejoiced, but she was not sorry that it was time for her to carry off Diccon and Ned to their beds, away from the fascinating narrative, and she would give no respite, though Diccon pleaded hard. In fact, the danger might be the greatest to him, since Humfrey, though born within the smell of the sea, might be retained by the call of duty like his father. To Cis, at least, she thought the sailor's conversation could do no harm, little foreboding the words that presently ensued. "And, sir, what befell the babe we found in our last voyage off the Spurn? It would methinks be about the age of this pretty mistress."

Richard Talbot endeavoured to telegraph a look both of assent and warning, but though Master Goatley would have been sharp to detect the least token of a Spanish galleon on the most distant horizon, the signal fell utterly short. "Ay, sir. What, is it so? Bless me! The very maiden! And you have bred her up for your own."

"Sir! Father!" cried Cis, looking from one to the other, with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Soh!" cried the sailor, "what have I done? I beg your pardon, sir, if I have overhauled what should have been let alone. But," continued the honest, but tactless man, "who could have thought of the like of that, and that the pretty maid never knew it? Ay, ay, dear heart. Never fear but that the captain will be good father to you all the same."

For Richard Talbot had held out his arm, and, as Cis ran up to him, he had seated her on his knee, and held her close to him. Humfrey likewise started up with an impulse to contradict, which was suddenly cut short by a strange flash of memory, so all he did was to come up to his father, and grasp one of the girl's hands as fast as he could. She trembled and shivered, but there was something in the presence of this strange man which choked back all inquiry, and the silence, the vehement grasp, and the shuddering, alarmed the captain, lest she might suddenly go off into a fit upon his hands.

"This is gear for mother," said he, and taking her up like a baby, carried her off, followed closely by Humfrey. He met Susan coming down, asking anxiously, "Is she sick?"

"I hope not, mother," he said, "but honest Goatley, thinking no harm, hath blurted out that which we had never meant her to know, at least not yet awhile, and it hath wrought strangely with her."

"Then it is true, father?" said Humfrey, in rather an awe-stricken voice, while Cis still buried her face on the captain's breast.

"Yes," he said, "yea, my children, it is true that God sent us a daughter from the sea and the wreck when He had taken our own little maid to His rest. But we have ever loved our Cis as well, and hope ever to do so while she is our good child. Take her, mother, and tell the children how it befell; if I go not down, the fellow will spread it all over the house, and happily none were present save Humfrey and the little maiden."

Susan put the child down on her own bed, and there, with Humfrey standing by, told the history of the father carrying in the little shipwrecked babe. They both listened with eyes devouring her, but they were as yet too young to ask questions about evidences, and Susan did not volunteer these, only when the girl asked, "Then, have I no name?" she answered, "A godly minister, Master Heatherthwayte, gave thee the name of Cicely when he christened thee."

"I marvel who I am?" said Cis, gazing round her, as if the world were all new to her.

"It does not matter," said Humfrey, "you are just the same to us, is she not, mother?"

"She is our dear Heaven-sent child," said the mother tenderly.

"But thou art not my true mother, nor Humfrey nor Diccon my brethren," she said, stretching out her hands like one in the dark.

"If I'm not your brother, Cis, I'll be your husband, and then you will have a real right to be called Talbot. That's better than if you were my sister, for then you would go away, I don't know where, and now you will always be mine—mine—mine very own."

And as he gave Cis a hug in assurance of his intentions, his father, who was uneasy about the matter, looked in again, and as Susan, with tears in her eyes, pointed to the children, the good man said, "By my faith, the boy has found the way to cut the knot—or rather to tie it. What say you, dame? If we do not get a portion for him, we do not have to give one with her, so it is as broad as it is long, and she remains our dear child. Only listen, children, you are both old enough to keep a secret. Not one word of all this matter is to be breathed to any soul till I bid you."

"Not to Diccon," said Humfrey decidedly.

"Nor to Antony?" asked Cis wistfully.

"To Antony? No, indeed! What has he to do with it? Now, to your beds, children, and forget all about this tale."

"There, Humfrey," broke out Cis, as soon as they were alone together, "Huckstress Tibbott *is* a wise woman, whatever thou mayest say."

"How?" said Humfrey.

"Mindst thou not the day when I crossed her hand with the tester father gave me?"

"When mother whipped thee for listening to fortune-tellers and wasting thy substance. Ay, I mind it well," said Humfrey, "and how thou didst stand simpering at her pack of lies, ere mother made thee sing another tune."

"Nay, Humfrey, they were no lies, though I thought them so then. She said I was not what I seemed, and that the Talbots' kennel would not always hold one of the noble northern eagles. So Humfrey, sweet Humfrey, thou must not make too sure of wedding me."

"I'll wed thee though all the lying old gipsy-wives in England wore their false throats out in screeching out that I shall not," cried Humfrey.

"But she must have known," said Cis, in an awestruck voice; "the spirits must have spoken with her, and said that I am none of the Talbots."

"Hath mother heard this?" asked Humfrey, recoiling a little, but never thinking of the more plausible explanation.

"Oh no, no! tell her not, Humfrey, tell her not. She said she would whip me again if ever I talked again of the follies that the fortune-telling woman had gulled me with, for if they were not deceits, they were worse. And, thou seest, they are worse, Humfrey!"

With which awe-stricken conclusion the children went off to bed.

CHAPTER VI
THE BEWITCHED WHISTLE

A child's point of view is so different from that of a grown person, that the discovery did not make half so much difference to Cis as her adopted parents expected. In fact it was like a dream to her. She found her daily life and her surroundings the same, and her chief interest was—at least apparently—how soon she could escape from psalter and seam, to play with little Ned, and look out for the elder boys returning, or watch for the Scottish Queen taking her daily ride. Once, prompted by Antony, Cis had made a beautiful nosegay of lilies and held it up to the Queen when she rode in at the gate on her return from Buxton. She had been rewarded by the sweetest of smiles, but Captain Talbot had said it must never happen again, or he should be accused of letting billets pass in posies. The whole place was pervaded, in fact, by an atmosphere of suspicion, and the vigilance, which might have been endurable for a few months, was wearing the spirits and temper of all concerned, now that it had already lasted for seven or eight years, and there seemed no end to it. Moreover, in spite of all care, it every now and then became apparent that Queen Mary had some communication with the outer world which no one could trace, though the effects endangered the life of Queen Elizabeth, the peace of the kingdom, and the existence of the English Church. The blame always fell upon Lord Shrewsbury; and who could wonder that he was becoming captiously suspicious, and soured in temper, so that even such faithful kinsmen as Richard Talbot could sometimes hardly bear with him, and became punctiliously anxious that there should not be the smallest loophole for censure of the conduct of himself and his family?

The person on whom Master Goatley's visit had left the most impression seemed to be Humfrey. On the one hand, his father's words had made him enter into his situation of trust and loyalty, and perceive something of the constant sacrifice of self to duty that it required, and, on the other hand, he had assumed a position towards Cis of which he in some degree felt the force. There was nothing in the opinions of the time to render their semi-betrothal ridiculous. At the Manor house itself, Gilbert Talbot and Mary Cavendish had been married when no older than he was; half their contemporaries were already plighted, and the only difference was that in the present harassing state of surveillance in which every one lived, the parents thought that to avow the secret so long kept might bring about inquiry and suspicion, and they therefore wished it to be guarded till the marriage could be contracted. As Cis developed, she had looks and tones which so curiously harmonised, now with the Scotch, now with the French element in the royal captive's suite, and which made Captain Richard believe that she must belong to some of the families who seemed amphibious between the two courts; and her identification as a Seaton, a Flemyng, a Beatoun, or as a member of any of the families attached to the losing cause, would only involve her in exile and disgrace. Besides, there was every reason to think her an orphan, and a distant kinsman was scarcely likely to give her such a home as she had at Bridgefield, where she had always been looked on as a daughter, and was now regarded as doubly their own in right of their son. So Humfrey was permitted to consider her as peculiarly his own, and he exerted this right of property by a certain jealousy of Antony Babington which amused his parents, and teased the young lady. Nor was he wholly actuated by the jealousy of proprietorship, for he knew the devotion with which Antony regarded Queen Mary, and did not wholly trust him. His sense of honour and duty to his father's trust was one thing, Antony's knight-errantry to the beautiful captive was another; each boy thought himself strictly honourable, while they moved in parallel lines and could not understand one another; yet, with the reserve of childhood, all that passed between them was a secret, till one afternoon when loud angry sounds and suppressed sobs attracted Mistress Susan to the garden, where she found Cis crying bitterly, and little Diccon staring eagerly, while a pitched

battle was going on between her eldest son and young Antony Babington, who were pommelling each other too furiously to perceive her approach.

"Boys! boys! fie for shame," she cried, with a hand on the shoulder of each, and they stood apart at her touch, though still fiercely looking at one another.

"See what spectacles you have made of yourselves!" she continued. "Is this your treatment of your guest, Humfrey? How is my Lord's page to show himself at Chatsworth to-morrow with such an eye? What is it all about?"

Both combatants eyed each other in sullen silence.

"Tell me, Cis. Tell me, Diccon. I will know, or you shall have the rod as well as Humfrey."

Diccon, who was still in the era of timidity, instead of secretiveness, spoke out. "He," indicating his brother, "wanted the packet."

"What packet?" exclaimed the mother, alarmed.

"The packet that *he* (another nod towards Antony) wanted Cis to give that witch in case she came while he is at Chatsworth."

"It was the dog-whistle," said Cis. "It hath no sound in it, and Antony would have me change it for him, because Huckster Tibbott may not come within the gates. I did not want to do so; I fear Tibbott, and when Humfrey found me crying he fell on Antony. So blame him not, mother."

"If Humfrey is a jealous churl, and Cis a little fool, there's no help for it," said Antony, disdainfully turning his back on his late adversary.

"Then let me take charge of this whistle," returned the lady, moved by the universal habit of caution, but Antony sprang hastily to intercept her as she was taking from the little girl a small paper packet tied round with coloured yarn, but he was not in time, and could only exclaim, "Nay, nay, madam, I will not trouble you. It is nothing."

"Master Babington," said Susan firmly, "you know as well as I do that no packet may pass out of the park unopened. If you wished to have the whistle changed you should have brought it uncovered. I am sorry for the discourtesy, and ask your pardon, but this parcel may not pass."

"Then," said Antony, with difficulty repressing something much more passionate and disrespectful, "let me have it again."

"Nay, Master Babington, that would not suit with my duty."

The boy altogether lost his temper. "Duty! duty!" he cried. "I am sick of the word. All it means is a mere feigned excuse for prying and spying, and besetting the most beautiful and unhappy princess in the world for her true faith and true right!"

"Master Antony Babington," said Susan gravely, "you had better take care what you are about. If those words of yours had been spoken in my Lord's hearing, they would bring you worse than the rod or bread and water."

"What care I what I suffer for such a Queen?" exclaimed Antony.

"Suffering is a different matter from saying 'What care I,'" returned the lady, "as I fear you will learn, Master Antony."

"O mother! sweet mother," said Cis, "you will not tell of him!"—but mother shook her head.

"Prithee, dear mother," added Humfrey, seeing no relenting in her countenance, "I did but mean to hinder Cis from being maltreated and a go-between in this traffic with an old witch, not to bring Tony into trouble."

"His face is a tell-tale, Humfrey," said Susan. "I meant ere now to have put a piece of beef on it. Come in, Antony, and let me wash it."

"Thank you, madam, I need nothing here," said Antony, stalking proudly off; while Humfrey, exclaiming "Don't be an ass, Tony!—Mother, no one would care to ask what we had given one another black eyes for in a friendly way," tried to hold him back, and he did linger when Cis added her persuasions to him not to return the spectacle he was at present.

"If this lady will promise not to betray an unfortunate Queen," he said, as if permission to deal with his bruises were a great reward.

"Oh! you foolish boy!" exclaimed Mistress Talbot, "you were never meant for a plotter! you have yourself betrayed that you are her messenger."

"And I am not ashamed of it," said Antony, holding his head high. "Madam, madam, if you have surprised this from me, you are the more bound not to betray her. Think, lady, if you were shut up from your children and friends, would you not seek to send tidings to them?"

"Child, child! Heaven knows I am not blaming the poor lady within there. I am only thinking what is right."

"Well," said Antony, somewhat hopefully, "if that be all, give me back the packet, or tear it up, if you will, and there can be no harm done."

"Oh, do so, sweet mother," entreated Cis, earnestly; "he will never bid me go to Tibbott again."

"Ay," said Humfrey, "then no tales will be told."

For even he, with all his trustworthiness, or indeed because of it, could not bear to bring a comrade to disgrace; but the dilemma was put an end to by the sudden appearance on the scene of Captain Richard himself, demanding the cause of the disturbance, and whether his sons had been misbehaving to their guest.

"Dear sir, sweet father, do not ask," entreated Cis, springing to him, and taking his hand, as she was privileged to do; "mother has come, and it is all made up and over now."

Richard Talbot, however, had seen the packet which his wife was holding, and her anxious, perplexed countenance, and the perilous atmosphere of suspicion around him made it incumbent on him to turn to her and say, "What means this, mother? Is it as Cis would have me believe, a mere childish quarrel that I may pass over? or what is this packet?"

"Master Babington saith it is a dog-whistle which he was leaving in charge with Cis to exchange for another with Huckstress Tibbott," she answered.

"Feel,—nay, open it, and see if it be not, sir," cried Antony.

"I doubt not that so it is," said the captain; "but you know, Master Babington, that it is the duty of all here in charge to let no packet pass the gate which has not been viewed by my lord's officers."

"Then, sir, I will take it back again," said Antony, with a vain attempt at making his brow frank and clear.

Instead of answering. Captain Talbot took the knife from his girdle, and cut in twain the yarn that bound the packet. There was no doubt about the whistle being there, nor was there anything written on the wrapper; but perhaps the anxiety in Antony's eye, or even the old association with boatswains, incited Mr. Talbot to put the whistle to his lips. Not a sound would come forth. He looked in, and saw what led him to blow with all his force, when a white roll of paper protruded, and on another blast fell out into his hand.

He held it up as he found it, and looked full at Antony, who exclaimed in much agitation, "To keep out the dust. Only to keep out the dust. It is all gibberish—from my old writing-books."

"That will we see," said Richard very gravely.

"Mistress, be pleased to give this young gentleman some water to wash his face, and attend to his bruises, keeping him in the guest-chamber without speech from any one until I return. Master Babington, I counsel you to submit quietly. I wish, and my Lord will wish, to spare his ward as much scandal as possible, and if this be what you say it is, mere gibberish from your exercise-books, you will be quit for chastisement for a forbidden act, which has brought you into suspicion. If not, it must be as my Lord thinks good."

Antony made no entreaties. Perhaps he trusted that what was unintelligible to himself might pass for gibberish with others; perhaps the headache caused by Humfrey's fists was assisting to produce a state of sullen indifference after his burst of eager chivalry; at any rate he let Mistress Talbot lead him away without resistance. The other children would have followed, but their father detained

them to hear the particulars of the commission and the capture. Richard desired to know from his son whether he had any reason for suspecting underhand measures; and when Humfrey looked down and hesitated, added, "On your obedience, boy; this is no slight matter."

"You will not beat Cis, father?" said Humfrey.

"Wherefore should I beat her, save for doing errands that yonder lad should have known better than to thrust on her?"

"Nay, sir, 'tis not for that; but my mother said she should be beaten if ever she spake of the fortune yonder Tibbott told her, and we are sure that she—Tibbott I mean—is a witch, and knows more than she ought."

"What mean'st thou? Tell me, children;" and Cis, nothing loath, since she was secured from the beating, related the augury which had left so deep an impression on her, Humfrey bearing witness that it was before they knew themselves of Cicely's history.

"But that is not all," added Cicely, seeing Mr. Talbot less impressed than she expected by these supernatural powers of divination. "She can change from a woman to a man!"

"In sooth!" exclaimed Richard, startled enough by this information.

"Yea, father," said Cicely, "Faithful Ekins, the carrier's boy, saw her, in doublet and hose, and a tawny cloak, going along the road to Chesterfield. He knew her by the halt in her left leg."

"Ha!" said Richard, "and how long hast thou known this?"

"Only yestermorn," said Cis; "it was that which made me so much afraid to have any dealings with her."

"She shall trouble thee no more, my little wench," said Richard in a tone that made Humfrey cry out joyously,

"O father! sweet father! wilt thou duck her for a witch? Sink or swim! that will be rare!"

"Hush, hush! foolish lad," said Richard, "and thou, Cicely, take good heed that not a word of all this gets abroad. Go to thy mother, child,—nay, I am not wroth with thee, little one. Thou hast not done amiss, but bear in mind that nought is ever taken out of the park without knowledge of me or of thy mother."

CHAPTER VII
THE BLAST OF THE WHISTLE

Richard Talbot was of course convinced that witchcraft was not likely to be the most serious part of the misdeeds of Tibbott the huckstress. Committing Antony Babington to the custody of his wife, he sped on his way back to the Manor-house, where Lord Shrewsbury was at present residing, the Countess being gone to view her buildings at Chatsworth, taking her daughter Bessie with her. He sent in a message desiring to speak to my lord in his privy chamber.

Francis Talbot came to him. "Is it matter of great moment, Dick?" he said, "for my father is so fretted and chafed, I would fain not vex him further to-night.—What! know you not? Here are tidings that my lady hath married Bess—yes, Bess Cavendish, in secret to my young Lord Lennox, the brother of this Queen's unlucky husband! How he is to clear himself before her Grace of being concerned in it, I know not, for though Heaven wots that he is as innocent as the child unborn, she will suspect him!"

"I knew she flew high for Mistress Bess," returned Richard.

"High! nothing would serve her save royal blood! My poor father says as sure as the lions and fleur-de-lis have come into a family, the headsman's axe has come after them."

"However it is not our family."

"So I tell him, but it gives him small comfort," said Frank, "looking as he doth on the Cavendish brood as his own, and knowing that there will be a mighty coil at once with my lady and these two queens. He is sore vexed to-night, and saith that never was Earl, not to say man, so baited by woman as he, and he bade me see whether yours be a matter of such moment that it may not wait till morning or be despatched by me."

"That is for you to say, Master Francis. What think you of this for a toy?" as he produced the parcel with the whistle and its contents. "I went home betimes to-day, as you know, and found my boy Humfrey had just made young Master Babington taste of his fists for trying to make our little wench pass this packet to yonder huckster-woman who was succoured some months back by the Queen of Scots."

Francis Talbot silently took the whistle and unrolled the long narrow strip of paper. "This is the cipher," said he, "the cipher used in corresponding with her French kin; Phillipps the decipherer showed me the trick of it when he was at Tutbury in the time of the Duke of Norfolk's business. Soh! your son hath done good service, Richard. That lad hath been tampered with then, I thought he was over thick with the lady in the lodge. Where is he, the young traitor?"

"At Bridgefield, under my wife's ward, having his bruises attended to. I would not bring him up here till I knew what my Lord would have done with him. He is but a child, and no doubt was wrought with by sweet looks, and I trust my Lord will not be hard with him."

"If my father had hearkened to me, he should never have been here," said Francis. "His father was an honest man, but his mother was, I find, a secret recusant, and when she died, young Antony was quite old enough to have sucked in the poison. You did well to keep him, Richard; he ought not to return hither again, either in ward or at liberty."

"If he were mine, I would send him to school," said Richard, "where the masters and the lads would soon drive out of him all dreams about captive princesses and seminary priests to boot. For, Cousin Francis, I would have you to know that my children say there is a rumour that this woman Tibbott the huckstress hath been seen in a doublet and hose near Chesterfield."

"The villain! When is she looked for here again?"

"Anon, I should suppose, judging by the boy leaving this charge with Cis in case she should come while he is gone to Chatsworth."

"We will take order as to that," said Francis, compressing his lips; "I know you will take heed, cousin, that she, or he, gets no breath of warning. I should not wonder if it were Parsons himself!" and he unfolded the scroll with the air of a man seeking to confirm his triumph.

"Can you make anything of it?" asked Richard, struck by its resemblance to another scroll laid up among his wife's treasures.

"I cannot tell, they are not matters to be read in an hour," said Francis Talbot, "moreover, there is one in use for the English traitors, her friends, and another for the French. This looks like the French sort. Let me see, they are read by taking the third letter in each second word." Francis Talbot, somewhat proud of his proficiency, and perfectly certain of the trustworthiness of his cousin Richard, went on puzzling out the ciphered letters, making Richard set each letter down as he picked it out, and trying whether they would make sense in French or English. Both understood French, having learned it in their page days, and kept it up by intercourse with the French suite. Francis, however, had to try two or three methods, which, being a young man, perhaps he was pleased to display, and at last he hit upon the right, which interpreted the apparent gibberish of the scroll—excepting that the names of persons were concealed under soubriquets which Francis Talbot could not always understand—but the following sentence by and by became clear:—"Quand le matelot vient des marais, un feu peut eclater dans la meute et dans la melee"—"When the sailor lands from the fens, a fire might easily break out in the dog-kennel, and in the confusion" (name could not be read) "could carry off the tercel gentle."

"La meute," said Francis, "that is their term for the home of us Talbots, and the sailor in the fens is this Don John of Austria, who means, after conquering the Dutchmen, to come and set free this tercel gentle, as she calls herself, and play the inquisitor upon us. On my honour, Dick, your boy has played the man in making this discovery. Keep the young traitor fast, and take down a couple of yeomen to lay hands on this same Tibbott as she calls herself."

"If I remember right," said Richard, "she was said to be the sister or aunt to one of the grooms or prickers."

"So it was, Guy Norman, methinks. Belike he was the very fellow to set fire to our kennel. Yea, we must secure him. I'll see to that, and you shall lay this scroll before my father meantime, Dick. Why, to fall on such a trail will restore his spirits, and win back her Grace to believe in his honesty, if my lady's tricks should have made her doubtful."

Off went Francis with great alacrity, and ere long the Earl was present with Richard. The long light beard was now tinged with gray, and there were deep lines round the mouth and temples, betraying how the long anxiety was telling on him, and rendering him suspicious and querulous. "Soh! Richard Talbot," was his salutation, "what's the coil now? Can a man never be left in peace in his own house, between queens and ladies, plots and follies, but his own kinsfolk and retainers must come to him on every petty broil among the lads! I should have thought your boy and young Babington might fight out their quarrels alone without vexing a man that is near driven distracted as it is."

"I grieve to vex your lordship," said Richard, standing bareheaded, "but Master Francis thought this scroll worthy of your attention. This is the manner in which he deciphered it."

"Scrolls, I am sick of scrolls," said the Earl testily. "What! is it some order for saying mass, —or to get some new Popish image or a skein of silk? I wear my eyes out reading such as that, and racking my brains for some hidden meaning!"

And falling on Francis's first attempt at copying, he was scornful of the whole, and had nearly thrown the matter aside, but when he lit at last on the sentence about burning the meute and carrying off the tercel gentle, his brow grew dark indeed, and his inquiries came thickly one upon the other, both as to Antony Babington and the huckstering woman.

In the midst, Frank Talbot returned with the tidings that the pricker Guy Norman was nowhere to be found. He had last been seen by his comrades about the time that Captain Richard had returned to the Manor-house. Probably he had taken alarm on seeing him come back at that unusual hour,

and had gone to carry the warning to his supposed aunt. This last intelligence made the Earl decide on going down at once to Bridgefield to examine young Babington before there was time to miss his presence at the lodge, or to hold any communication with him. Frank caused horses to be brought round, and the Earl rode down with Richard by a shaded alley in an ordinary cloak and hat.

My Lord's appearance at Bridgefield was a rarer and more awful event than was my Lady's, and if Mistress Susan had been warned beforehand, there is no saying how at the head of her men and maids she would have scrubbed and polished the floors, and brushed the hangings and cushions. What then were her feelings when the rider, who dismounted from his little hackney as unpretendingly as did her husband in the twilight court, proved to have my Lord's long beard and narrow face!

Curtseying her lowest and with a feeling of consternation and pity, as she thought of the orphan boy, she accepted his greeting with duteous welcome as he said, "Kinswoman, I am come to cumber you, whilst I inquire into this matter. I give your son thanks for the honesty and faithfulness he hath shown in the matter, as befitted his father's son. I should wish myself to examine the springald."

Humfrey was accordingly called, and, privately admonished by his father that he must not allow any scruples about bringing his playmate into trouble to lead him to withhold his evidence, or shrink from telling the whole truth as he knew it, Humfrey accordingly stood before the Earl and made his replies a little sullenly but quite straightforwardly. He had prevented the whistle from being given to his sister for the huckstress because the woman was a witch, who frightened her, and moreover he knew it was against rules. Did he suspect that the whistle came from the Queen of Scots?

He looked startled, and asked if it were so indeed, and when again commanded to say why he had thought it possible, he replied that he knew Antony thought the Queen of Scots a fair and gracious lady.

Did he believe that Antony ever had communication with her or her people unheard by others?

"Assuredly! Wherefore not, when he carried my Lady Countess's messages?"

Lord Shrewsbury bent his brow, but did not further pursue this branch of the subject, but demanded of Humfrey a description of Tibbott, huckster or witch, man or woman.

"She wears a big black hood and muffler," said Humfrey, "and hath a long hooked stick."

"I asked thee not of her muffler, boy, but of her person."

"She hath pouncet boxes and hawks' bells, and dog-whistles in her basket," proceeded Humfrey, but as the Earl waxed impatient, and demanded whether no one could give him a clearer account, Richard bade Humfrey call his mother.

She, however, could say nothing as to the woman's appearance. She had gone to Norman's cottage to offer her services after the supposed accident, but had been told that the potticary of the Queen of Scots had undertaken her cure, and had only seen her huddled up in a heap of rags, asleep. Since her recovery the woman had been several times at Bridgefield, but it had struck the mistress of the house that there was a certain avoidance of direct communication with her, and a preference for the servants and children. This Susan had ascribed to fear that she should be warned off for her fortune-telling propensities, or the children's little bargains interfered with. All she could answer for was that she had once seen a huge pair of grizzled eyebrows, with light eyes under them, and that the woman, if woman she were, was tall, and bent a good deal upon a hooked stick, which supported her limping steps. Cicely could say little more, except that the witch had a deep awesome voice, like a man, and a long nose terrible to look at. Indeed, there seemed to have been a sort of awful fascination about her to all the children, who feared her yet ran after her.

Antony was then sent for. It was not easy to judge of the expression of his disfigured countenance, but when thus brought to bay he threw off all tokens of compunction, and stood boldly before the Earl.

"So, Master Babington, I find you have been betraying the trust I placed in you—"

"What, trust, my Lord?" said Antony, his bright blue eyes looking back into those of the nobleman.

"The cockerel crows loud," said the Earl. "What trust, quotha! Is there no trust implied in the coming and going of one of my household, when such a charge is committed to me and mine?"

"No one ever gave me any charge," said Antony.

"Dost thou bandy words, thou froward imp?" said the Earl. "Thou hast not the conscience to deny that there was no honesty in smuggling forth a letter thus hidden. Deny it not. The treasonable cipher hath been read!"

"I knew nought of what was in it," said the boy.

"I believe thee there, but thou didst know that it was foully disloyal to me and to her Majesty to bear forth secret letters to disguised traitors. I am willing to believe that the smooth tongue which hath deluded many a better man than thou hath led thee astray, and I am willing to deal as lightly with thee as may be, so thou wilt tell me openly all thou knowest of this infamous plot."

"I know of no plot, sir."

"They would scarce commit the knowledge to the like of him," said Richard Talbot.

"May be not," said Lord Shrewsbury, looking at him with a glance that Antony thought contemptuous, and which prompted him to exclaim, "And if I did know of one, you may be assured I would never betray it were I torn with wild horses."

"Betray, sayest thou!" returned the Earl. "Thou hast betrayed my confidence, Antony, and hast gone as far as in thee lies to betray thy Queen."

"My Queen is Mary, the lawful Queen of us all," replied Antony, boldly.

"Ho! Sayest thou so? It is then as thou didst trow, cousin, the foolish lad hath been tampered with by the honeyed tongue. I need not ask thee from whom thou hadst this letter, boy. We have read it and know the foul treason therein. Thou wilt never return to the castle again, but for thy father's sake thou shalt be dealt with less sternly, if thou wilt tell who this woman is, and how many of these toys thou hast given to her, if thou knowest who she is."

But Antony closed his lips resolutely. In fact, Richard suspected him of being somewhat flattered by being the cause of such a commotion, and actually accused of so grand and manly a crime as high treason. The Earl could extract no word, and finally sentenced him to remain at Bridgefield, shut up in his own chamber till he could be dealt with. The lad walked away in a dignified manner, and the Earl, holding up his hands, half amused, half vexed, said, "So the spell is on that poor lad likewise. What shall I do with him? An orphan boy too, and mine old friend's son."

"With your favour, my Lord," said Richard, "I should say, send him to a grammar school, where among lads of his own age, the dreams about captive princesses might be driven from him by hard blows and merry games."

"That may scarce serve," said the Earl rather severely, for public schools were then held beneath the dignity of both the nobility and higher gentry. "I may, however, send him to study at Cambridge under some trusty pedagogue. Back at the castle I cannot have him, so must I cumber you with him, my good kinswoman, until his face have recovered your son's lusty chastisement. Also it may be well to keep him here till we can lay hands on this same huckster-woman, since there may be need to confront him with her. It were best if you did scour the country toward Chesterfield for her, while Frank went to York."

Having thus issued his orders, the Earl took a gracious leave of the lady, mounted his horse, and rode back to Sheffield, dispensing with the attendance of his kinsman, who had indeed to prepare for an early start the next morning, when he meant to take Humfrey with him, as not unlikely to recognise the woman, though he could not describe her.

"The boy merits well to go forth with me," said he. "He hath done yeoman's service, and proved himself staunch and faithful."

"Was there matter in that scroll?" asked Susan.

"Only such slight matter as burning down the Talbots' kennel, while Don John of Austria is landing on the coast."

"God forgive them, and defend us!" sighed Susan, turning pale. "Was that in the cipher?"

"Ay, in sooth, but fear not, good wife. Much is purposed that ne'er comes to pass. I doubt me if the ship be built that is to carry the Don hither."

"I trust that Antony knew not of the wickedness?"

"Not he. His is only a dream out of the romances the lads love so well, of beauteous princesses to be freed, and the like."

"But the woman!"

"Yea, that lies deeper. What didst thou say of her? Wherefore do the children call her a witch? Is it only that she is grim and ugly?"

"I trow there is more cause than that," said Susan. "It may be that I should have taken more heed to their babble at first; but I have questioned Cis while you were at the lodge, and I find that even before Mate Goatley spake here, this Tibbott had told the child of her being of lofty race in the north, alien to the Talbots' kennel, holding out to her presages of some princely destiny."

"That bodeth ill!" said Richard, thoughtfully. "Wife, my soul misgives me that the hand of Cuthbert Langston is in this."

Susan started. The idea chimed in with Tibbott's avoidance of her scrutiny, and also with a certain vague sense she had had of having seen those eyes before. So light-complexioned a man would be easily disguised, and the halt was accounted for by a report that he had had a bad fall when riding to join in the Rising in the North. Nor could there now be any doubt that he was an ardent partisan of the imprisoned Mary, while Richard had always known his inclination to intrigue. She could only agree with her husband's opinion, and ask what he would do.

"My duty must be done, kin or no kin," said Richard, "that is if I find him; but I look not to do that, since Norman is no doubt off to warn him."

"I marvel whether he hath really learnt who our Cis can be?"

"Belike not! The hint would only have been thrown out to gain power over her."

"Said you that you read the cipher?"

"Master Frank did so."

"Would it serve you to read our scroll?"

"Ah, woman! woman! Why can thy kind never let well alone? I have sufficient on my hands without reading of scrolls!"

Humfrey's delight was extreme when he found that he was to ride forth with his father, and half-a-dozen of the earl's yeomen, in search of the supposed witch. They traced her as far as Chesterfield; but having met the carrier's waggon on the way, they carefully examined Faithful Ekins on his report, but all the youth was clear about was the halt and the orange tawny cloak, and after entering Chesterfield, no one knew anything of these tokens. There was a large village belonging to a family of recusants, not far off, where the pursuers generally did lose sight of suspicious persons; and, perhaps, Richard was relieved, though his son was greatly chagrined.

The good captain had a sufficient regard for his kinsman to be unwilling to have to unmask him as a traitor, and to be glad that he should have effected an escape, so that, at least, it should be others who should detect him—if Langston indeed it were.

His next charge was to escort young Babington to Cambridge, and deliver him up to a tutor of his lordship's selection, who might draw the Popish fancies out of him.

Meantime, Antony had been kept close to the house and garden, and not allowed any intercourse with any of the young people, save Humfrey, except when the master or mistress of the house was present; but he did not want for occupation, for Master Sniggius came down, and gave him a long chapter of the Book of Proverbs—chiefly upon loyalty, in the Septuagint, to learn by heart, and translate into Latin and English as his Saturday's and Sunday's occupation, under pain of a flogging, which was no light thing from the hands of that redoubted dominie.

Young Babington was half-flattered and half-frightened at the commotion he had excited. "Am I going to the Tower?" he asked, in a low voice, awestricken, yet not without a certain ring of self-importance, when he saw his mails brought down, and was bidden to put on his boots and his travelling dress.

And Captain Talbot had a cruel satisfaction in replying, "No, Master Babington; the Tower is not for refractory boys. You are going to your schoolmaster."

But where the school was to be Richard kept an absolute secret by special desire, in order that no communication should be kept up through any of the household. He was to avoid Chatsworth, and to return as soon as possible to endeavour to trace the supposed huckster-woman at Chesterfield.

When once away from home, he ceased to treat young Babington as a criminal, but rode in a friendly manner with him through lanes and over moors, till the young fellow began to thaw towards him, and even went so far as to volunteer one day that he would not have brought Mistress Cicely into the matter if there had been any other sure way of getting the letter delivered in his absence.

"Ah, boy!" returned Richard, "when once we swerve from the open and direct paths, there is no saying into what tangles we may bring ourselves and others."

Antony winced a little, and said, "Whoever says I lied, lies in his throat."

"No one hath said thou wert false in word, but how as to thy deed?"

"Sir," said Antony, "surely when a high emprise and great right is to be done, there is no need to halt over such petty quibbles."

"Master Babington, no great right was ever done through a little wrong. Depend on it, if you cannot aid without a breach of trust, it is the sure sign that it is not the will of God that you should be the one to do it."

Captain Talbot mused whether he should convince or only weary the lad by an argument he had once heard in a sermon, that the force of Satan's temptation to our blessed Lord, when showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, must have been the absolute and immediate vanishing of all kinds of evil, by a voluntary abdication on the part of the Prince of this world, instead not only of the coming anguish of the strife, but of the long, long, often losing, battle which has been waging ever since. Yet for this great achievement He would not commit the moment's sin. He was just about to begin when Antony broke in, "Then, sir, you do deem it a great wrong?"

"That I leave to wiser heads than mine," returned the sailor. "My duty is to obey my Lord, his duty is to obey her Grace. That is all a plain man needs to see."

"But an if the true Queen be thus mewed up, sir?" asked Antony. Richard was too wise a man to threaten the suggestion down as rank treason, well knowing that thus he should never root it out.

"Look you here, Antony," he said; "who ought to reign is a question of birth, such as neither of us can understand nor judge. But we know thus much, that her Grace, Queen Elizabeth, hath been crowned and anointed and received oaths of fealty as her due, and that is quite enough for any honest man."

"Even when she keeps in durance the Queen, who came as her guest in dire distress?"

"Nay, Master Antony, you are not old enough to remember that the durance began not until the Queen of Scots tried to form a party for herself among the English liegemen. And didst thou know, thou simple lad, what the letter bore, which thou didst carry, and what it would bring on this peaceful land?"

Antony looked a little startled when he heard of the burning of the kennel, but he averred that Don John was a gallant prince.

"I have seen more than one gallant Spaniard under whose power I should grieve to see any friend of mine."

All the rest of the way Richard Talbot entertained the young gentleman with stories of his own voyages and adventures, into which he managed to bring traits of Spanish cruelty and barbarity as shown in the Low Countries, such as, without actually drawing the moral every time, might show

what was to be expected if Mary of Scotland and Don John of Austria were to reign over England, armed with the Inquisition.

Antony asked a good many questions, and when he found that the captain had actually been an eye-witness of the state of a country harried by the Spaniards, he seemed a good deal struck.

"I think if I had the training of him I could make a loyal Englishman of him yet," said Richard Talbot to his wife on his return. "But I fear me there is that in his heart and his conscience which will only grow, while yonder sour-faced doctor, with whom I had to leave him at Cambridge, preaches to him of the perdition of Pope and Papists."

"If his mother were indeed a concealed Papist," said Susan, "such sermons will only revolt the poor child."

"Yea, truly. If my Lord wanted to make a plotter and a Papist of the boy he could scarce find a better means. I myself never could away with yonder lady's blandishments. But when he thinks of her in contrast to yonder divine, it would take a stronger head than his not to be led away. The best chance for him is that the stir of the world about him may put captive princesses out of his head."

CHAPTER VIII
THE KEY OF THE CIPHER

Where is the man who does not persuade himself that when he gratifies his own curiosity he does so for the sake of his womankind? So Richard Talbot, having made his protest, waited two days, but when next he had any leisure moments before him, on a Sunday evening, he said to his wife, "Sue, what hast thou done with that scroll of Cissy's? I trow thou wilt not rest till thou art convinced it is but some lying horoscope or Popish charm."

Susan had in truth been resting in perfect quietness, being extremely busy over her spinning, so as to be ready for the weaver who came round periodically to direct the more artistic portions of domestic work. However, she joyfully produced the scroll from the depths of the casket where she kept her chief treasures, and her spindle often paused in its dance as she watched her husband over it, with his elbows on the table and his hands in his hair, from whence he only removed them now and then to set down a letter or two by way of experiment. She had to be patient, for she heard nothing that night but that he believed it was French, that the father of deceits himself might be puzzled with the thing, and that she might as well ask him for his head at once as propose his consulting Master Francis.

The next night he unfolded it with many a groan, and would say nothing at all; but he sat up late and waked in early dawn to pore over it again, and on the third day of study he uttered a loud exclamation of dismay, but he ordered Susan off to bed in the midst, and did not utter anything but a perplexed groan or two when he followed her much later.

It was not till the next night that she heard anything, and then, in the darkness, he began, "Susan, thou art a good wife and a discreet woman."

Perhaps her heart leapt as she thought to herself, "At last it is coming, I knew it would!" but she only made some innocent note of attention.

"Thou hast asked no questions, nor tried to pry into this unhappy mystery," he went on.

"I knew you would tell me what was fit for me to hear," she replied.

"Fit! It is fit for no one to hear! Yet I needs must take counsel with thee, and thou hast shown thou canst keep a close mouth so far."

"Concerns it our Cissy, husband?"

"Ay does it Our Cissy, indeed! What wouldst say, Sue, to hear she was daughter to the lady yonder."

"To the Queen of Scots?"

"Hush! hush!" fairly grasping her to hinder the words from being uttered above her breath.

"And her father?"

"That villain, Bothwell, of course. Poor lassie, she is ill fathered!"

"You may say so. Is it in the scroll?"

"Ay! so far as I can unravel it; but besides the cipher no doubt much was left for the poor woman to tell that was lost in the wreck."

And he went on to explain that the scroll was a letter to the Abbess of Soissons, who was aunt to Queen Mary, as was well known, since an open correspondence was kept up through the French ambassador. This letter said that "our trusty Alison Hepburn" would tell how in secrecy and distress Queen Mary had given birth to this poor child in Lochleven, and how she had been conveyed across the lake while only a few hours old, after being hastily baptized by the name of Bride, one of the patron saints of Scotland. She had been nursed in a cottage for a few weeks till the Queen had made her first vain attempt to escape, after which Mary had decided on sending her with her nurse to Dumbarton Castle, whence Lord Flemyng would despatch her to France. The Abbess was implored to shelter her, in complete ignorance of her birth, until such time as her mother should resume her

liberty and her throne. "Or if," the poor Queen said, "I perish in the hands of my enemies, you will deal with her as my uncles of Guise and Lorraine think fit, since, should her unhappy little brother die in the rude hands of yonder traitors, she may bring the true faith back to both realms."

"Ah!" cried Susan, with a sudden gasp of dismay, as she bethought her that the child was indeed heiress to both realms after the young King of Scots. "But has there been no quest after her? Do they deem her lost?"

"No doubt they do. Either all hands were lost in the Bride of Dunbar, or if any of the crew escaped, they would report the loss of nurse and child. The few who know that the little one was born believe her to have perished. None will ever ask for her. They deem that she has been at the bottom of the sea these twelve years or more."

"And you would still keep the knowledge to ourselves?" asked his wife, in a tone of relief.

"I would I knew it not myself!" sighed Richard. "Would that I could blot it out of my mind."

"It were far happier for the poor maid herself to remain no one's child but ours," said Susan.

"In sooth it is! A drop of royal blood is in these days a mere drop of poison to them that have the ill luck to inherit it. As my lord said the other day, it brings the headsman's axe after it."

"And our boy Humfrey calls himself contracted to her!"

"So long as we let the secret die with us that can do her no ill. Happily the wench favours not her mother, save sometimes in a certain lordly carriage of the head and shoulders. She is like enough to some of the Scots retinue to make me think she must take her face from her father, the villain, who, someone told me, was beetle-browed and swarthy."

"Lives he still?"

"So 'tis thought, but somewhere in prison in the north. There have been no tidings of his death; but my Lady Queen, you'll remember, treats the marriage as nought, and has made offer of herself for the misfortune of the Duke of Norfolk, ay, and of this Don John, and I know not whom besides."

"She would not have done that had she known that our Cis was alive."

"Mayhap she would, mayhap not. I believe myself she would do anything short of disowning her Popery to get out of prison; but as matters stand I doubt me whether Cis—"

"The Lady Bride Hepburn," suggested Susan.

"Pshaw, poor child, I misdoubt me whether they would own her claim even to that name."

"And they might put her in prison if they did," said Susan.

"They would be sure to do so, sooner or later. Here has my lord been recounting in his trouble about my lady's fine match for her Bess, all that hath come of mating with royal blood, the very least disaster being poor Lady Mary Grey's! Kept in ward for life! It is a cruel matter. I would that I had known the cipher at first. Then she might either have been disposed of at the Queen's will, or have been sent safe to this nunnery at Soissons."

"To be bred a Papist! Oh fie, husband!"

"And to breed dissension in the kingdoms!" added her husband. "It is best so far for the poor maiden herself to have thy tender hand over her than that of any queen or abbess of them all."

"Shall we then keep all things as they are, and lock this knowledge in our own hearts?" asked Susan hopefully.

"To that am I mightily inclined," said Richard. "Were it blazed abroad at once, thou and I might be made out guilty of I know not what for concealing it; and as to the maiden, she would either be put in close ward with her mother, or, what would be more likely, had up to court to be watched, and flouted, and spied upon, as were the two poor ladies—sisters to the Lady Jane—ere they made their lot hopeless by marrying. Nay, I have seen those who told me that poor Lady Katherine was scarce worse bested in the Tower than she was while at court."

"My poor Cis! No, no! The only cause for which I could bear to yield her up would be the thought that she would bring comfort to the heart of the poor captive mother who hath the best right to her."

"Forsooth! I suspect her poor captive mother would scarce be pleased to find this witness to her ill-advised marriage in existence."

"Nor would she be permitted to be with her."

"Assuredly not. Moreover, what could she do with the poor child?"

"Rear her in Popery," exclaimed Susan, to whom the word was terrible.

"Yea, and make her hand secure as the bait to some foreign prince or some English traitor, who would fain overthrow Queen and Church."

Susan shuddered. "Oh yes! let us keep the poor child to ourselves. I *could* not give her up to such a lot as that. And it might imperil you too, my husband. I should like to get up instantly and burn the scroll."

"I doubt me whether that were expedient," said Richard. "Suppose it were in the course of providence that the young King of Scots should not live, then would this maid be the means of uniting the two kingdoms in the true and Reformed faith! Heaven forefend that he should be cut off, but meseemeth that we have no right to destroy the evidence that may one day be a precious thing to the kingdom at large."

"No chance eye could read it even were it discovered?" said Susan.

"No, indeed. Thou knowest how I strove in vain to read it at first, and even now, when Frank Talbot unwittingly gave me the key, it was days before I could fully read it. It will tell no tales, sweet wife, that can prejudice any one, so we will let it be, even with the baby clouts. So now to sleep, with no more thoughts on the matter."

That was easy to say, but Susan lay awake long, pondering over the wonder, and only slept to dream strange dreams of queens and princesses, ay, and worse, for she finally awoke with a scream, thinking her husband was on the scaffold, and that Humfrey and Cis were walking up the ladder, hand in hand with their necks bared, to follow him!

There was no need to bid her hold her tongue. She regarded the secret with dread and horror, and a sense of something amiss which she could not quite define, though she told herself she was only acting in obedience to her husband, and indeed her judgment went along with his.

Often she looked at the unconscious Cis, studying whether the child's parentage could be detected in her features. But she gave promise of being of larger frame than her mother, who had the fine limbs and contour of her Lorraine ancestry, whereas Cis did, as Richard said, seem to have the sturdy outlines of the Borderer race from whom her father came. She was round-faced too, and sunburnt, with deep gray eyes under black straight brows, capable of frowning heavily. She did not look likely ever to be the fascinating beauty which all declared her mother to be—though those who saw the captive at Sheffield, believed the charm to be more in indefinable grace than in actual features, —in a certain wonderful smile and sparkle, a mixed pathos and archness which seldom failed of its momentary effect, even upon those who most rebelled against it. Poor little Cis, a sturdy girl of twelve or thirteen, playing at ball with little Ned on the terrace, and coming with tardy steps to her daily task of spinning, had little of the princess about her; and yet when she sat down, and the management of distaff and thread threw her shoulders back, there was something in the poise of her small head and the gesture of her hand that forcibly recalled the Queen. Moreover, all the boys around were at her beck and call, not only Humfrey and poor Antony Babington, but Cavendishes, Pierrepoints, all the young pages and grandsons who dwelt at castle or lodge, and attended Master Sniggius's school. Nay, the dominie himself, though owning that Mistress Cicely promoted idleness and inattention among his pupils, had actually volunteered to come down to Bridgefield twice a week himself to prevent her from forgetting her Lilly's grammar and her Caesar's Commentaries, an attention with which this young lady would willingly have dispensed.

Stewart, Lorraine, Hepburn, the blood of all combined was a perilous inheritance, and good Susan Talbot's instinct was that the young girl whom she loved truly like her own daughter would need all the more careful and tender watchfulness and training to overcome any tendencies that might

descend to her. Pity increased her affection, and even while in ordinary household life it was easy to forget who and what the girl really was, yet Cis was conscious that she was admitted to the intimacy and privileges of an elder daughter, and made a companion and friend, while her contemporaries at the Manor-house were treated as children, and rated roundly, their fingers tapped with fans, their shoulders even whipped, whenever they transgressed. Cis did indeed live under equal restraint, but it was the wise and gentle restraint of firm influence and constant watchfulness, which took from her the wish to resist.

CHAPTER IX
UNQUIET

Bridgefield was a peaceable household, and the castle and manor beyond might envy its calm.

From the time of the marriage of Elizabeth Cavendish with the young Earl of Lennox all the shreds of comfort which had remained to the unfortunate Earl had vanished. First he had to clear himself before Queen Elizabeth from having been a consenting party, and then he found his wife furious with him at his displeasure at her daughter's aggrandisement. Moreover, whereas she had formerly been on terms of friendly gossiphood with the Scottish Queen, she now went over to the Lennox side because her favourite daughter had married among them; and it was evident that from that moment all amity between her and the prisoner was at an end.

She was enraged that her husband would not at once change his whole treatment of the Queen, and treat her as such guilt deserved; and with the illogical dulness of a passionate woman, she utterly scouted and failed to comprehend the argument that the unhappy Mary was, to say the least of it, no more guilty now than when she came into their keeping, and that to alter their demeanour towards her would be unjust and unreasonable.

"My Lady is altogether beyond reason," said Captain Talbot, returning one evening to his wife; "neither my Lord nor her daughter can do ought with her; so puffed up is she with this marriage! Moreover, she is hotly angered that young Babington should have been sent away from her retinue without notice to her, and demands our Humfrey in his stead as a page."

"He is surely too old for a page!" said his mother, thinking of her tall well-grown son of fifteen.

"So said I," returned Richard. "I had sooner it were Diccon, and so I told his lordship."

Before Richard could speak for them, the two boys came in, eager and breathless. "Father!" cried Humfrey, "who think you is at Hull? Why, none other than your old friend and shipmate, Captain Frobisher!"

"Ha! Martin Frobisher! Who told thee, Humfrey?"

"Faithful Ekins, sir, who had it from the Doncaster carrier, who saw Captain Frobisher himself, and was asked by him if you, sir, were not somewhere in Yorkshire, and if so, to let you know that he will be in Hull till May-day, getting men together for a voyage to the northwards, where there is gold to be had for the picking—and if you had a likely son or two, now was the time to make their fortunes, and show them the world. He said, any way you might ride to see an old comrade."

"A long message for two carriers," said Richard Talbot, smiling, "but Martin never was a scribe!"

"But, sir, you will let me go," cried Humfrey, eagerly. "I mean, I pray you to let me go. Dear mother, say nought against it," entreated the youth. "Cis, think of my bringing thee home a gold bracelet like mother's."

"What," said his father, "when my Lady has just craved thee for a page."

"A page!" said Humfrey, with infinite contempt—"to hear all their tales and bickerings, hold skeins of silk, amble mincingly along galleries, be begged to bear messages that may have more in them than one knows, and be noted for a bear if one refuses."

The father and Cis laughed, the mother looked unhappy.

"So Martin is at Hull, is he?" said Richard, musingly. "If my Lord can give me leave for a week or fortnight, methinks I must ride to see the stout old knave."

"And oh, sweet father! prithee take me with you," entreated Humfrey, "if it be only to come back again. I have not seen the sea since we came here, and yet the sound is in my ears as I fall asleep. I entreat of you to let me come, good my father."

"And, good father, let me come," exclaimed Diccon; "I have never even seen the sea!"

"And dear, sweet father, take me," entreated little Ned.

"Nay," cried Cis, "what should I do? Here is Antony Babington borne off to Cambridge, and you all wanting to leave me."

"I'll come home better worth than he!" muttered Humfrey, who thought he saw consent on his father's brow, and drew her aside into the deep window.

"You'll come back a rude sailor, smelling of pitch and tar, and Antony will be a well-bred, point-device scholar, who will know how to give a lady his hand," said the teasing girl.

"And so the playful war was carried on, while the father, having silenced and dismissed the two younger lads, expressed his intention of obtaining leave of absence, if possible, from the Earl."

"Yea," he added to his wife, "I shall even let Humfrey go with me. It is time he looked beyond the walls of this place, which is little better than a prison."

"And will you let him go on this strange voyage?" she asked wistfully, "he, our first-born, and our heir."

"For that, dame, remember his namesake, my poor brother, was the one who stayed at home, I the one to go forth, and here am I now! The lad's words may have set before thee weightier perils in yonder park than he is like to meet among seals and bears under honest old Martin."

"Yet here he has your guidance," said Susan.

"Who knows how they might play on his honour as to talebearing? Nay, good wife, when thou hast thought it over, thou wilt see that far fouler shoals and straits lie up yonder, than in the free open sea that God Almighty made. Martin is a devout and godly man, who hath matins and evensong on board each day when the weather is not too foul, and looks well that there be no ill-doings in his ship; and if he have a berth for thy lad, it will be a better school for him than where two-thirds of the household are raging against one another, and the third ever striving to corrupt and outwit the rest. I am weary of it all! Would that I could once get into blue water again, and leave it all behind!"

"You will not! Oh! you will not!" implored Susan. "Remember, my dear, good lord, how you said all your duties lay at home."

"I remember, my good housewife. Thou needst not fear for me. But there is little time to spare. If I am to see mine old friend, I must get speech of my Lord to-night, so as to be on horseback to-morrow. Saddle me Brown Dumpling, boys."

And as the boys went off, persuading Cis, who went coyly protesting that the paddock was damp, yet still following after them, he added, "Yea, Sue, considering all, it is better those two were apart for a year or so, till we see better what is this strange nestling that we have reared. Ay, thou art like the mother sparrow that hath bred up a cuckoo and doteth on it, yet it mateth not with her brood."

"It casteth them out," said Susan, "as thou art doing now, by your leave, husband."

"Only for a flight, gentle mother," he answered, "only for a flight, to prove meanwhile whether there be the making of a simple household bird, or of a hawk that might tear her mate to pieces, in yonder nestling."

Susan was too dutiful a wife to say more, though her motherly heart was wrung almost as much at the implied distrust of her adopted daughter as by the sudden parting with her first-born to the dangers of the northern seas. She could better enter into her husband's fears of the temptations of page life at Sheffield, and being altogether a wife, "bonner and boughsome," as her marriage vow held it, she applied herself and Cis to the choosing of the shirts and the crimping of the ruffs that were to appear in Hull, if, for there was this hope at the bottom of her heart, my Lord might refuse leave of absence to his "gentleman porter."

The hope was fallacious; Richard reported that my Lord was so much relieved to find that he had detected no fresh conspiracy, as to be willing to grant him a fortnight's leave, and even had said with a sigh that he was in the right on't about his son, for Sheffield was more of a school for plotting than for chivalry.

It was a point of honour with every good housewife to have a store of linen equal to any emergency, and, indeed, as there were no washing days in the winter, the stock of personal body-linen was at all times nearly a sufficient outfit; so the main of Humfrey's shirts were to be despatched by a carrier, in the trust that they would reach him before the expedition should sail.

There was then little to delay the father and son, after the mother, with fast-gathering tears resolutely forced back, had packed and strapped their mails, with Cis's help, Humfrey standing by, booted and spurred, and talking fast of the wonders he should see, and the gold and ivory he should bring home, to hide the qualms of home-sickness, and mother-sickness, he was already beginning to feel; and maybe to get Cis to pronounce that then she should think more of him than of Antony Babington with his airs and graces. Wistfully did the lad watch for some such tender assurance, but Cis seemed all provoking brilliancy and teasing. "She knew he would be back over soon. Oh no, *he* would never go to sea! She feared not. Mr. Frobisher would have none of such awkward lubbers. More's the pity. There would be some peace to get to do her broidery, and leave to play on the virginals when he was gone."

But when the horsemen had disappeared down the avenue, Cis hid herself in a corner and cried as if her heart would break.

She cried again behind the back of the tall settle when the father came back alone, full of praises of Captain Frobisher, his ship, and his company, and his assurances that he would watch over Humfrey like his own son.

Meantime the domestic storms at the park were such that Master Richard and his wife were not sorry that the boy was not growing up in the midst of them, though the Countess rated Susan severely for her ingratitude.

Queen Elizabeth was of course much angered at the Lennox match, and the Earl had to write letter after letter to clear himself from any participation in bringing it about. Queen Mary also wrote to clear herself of it, and to show that she absolutely regretted it, as she had small esteem for Bess Cavendish. Moreover, though Lady Shrewsbury's friendship might not be a very pleasant thing, it was at least better than her hostility. However, she was not much at Sheffield. Not only was she very angry with her husband, but Queen Elizabeth had strictly forbidden the young Lord Lennox from coming under the same roof with his royal sister-in-law. He was a weakly youth, and his wife's health failed immediately after her marriage, so that Lady Shrewsbury remained almost constantly at Chatsworth with her darling.

Gilbert Talbot, who was the chief peacemaker of the family, went to and fro, wrote letters and did his best, which would have been more effective but for Mary, his wife, who, no doubt, detailed all the gossip of Sheffield at Chatsworth, as she certainly amused Sheffield with stories of her sister Bess as a royal countess full of airs and humours, and her mother treating her, if not as a queen, at least on the high road to become one, and how the haughty dame of Shrewsbury ran willingly to pick up her daughter's kerchief, and stood over the fire stirring the posset, rather than let it fail to tempt the appetite which became more dainty by being cossetted.

The difference made between Lady Lennox and her elder sisters was not a little nettling to Dame Mary Talbot, who held that some consideration was her due, as the proud mother of the only grandson of the house of Shrewsbury, little George, who was just able to be put on horseback in the court, and say he was riding to see "Lady Danmode," and to drink the health of "Lady Danmode" at his meals.

Alas! the little hope of the Talbots suddenly faded. One evening after supper a message came down in haste to beg for the aid of Mistress Susan, who, though much left to the seclusion of Bridgefield in prosperous days, was always a resource in trouble or difficulty. Little George, then two and a half years old, had been taken suddenly ill after a supper on marchpane and plum broth, washed down by Christmas ale. Convulsions had come on, and the skill of Queen Mary's apothecary had only gone so far as to bleed him. Susan arrived only just in time to see the child breathe his

last sigh, and to have his mother, wild with tumultuous clamorous grief, put into her hands for such soothing and comforting as might be possible, and the good and tender woman did her best to turn the mother's thoughts to something higher and better than the bewailing at one moment "her pretty boy," with a sort of animal sense of bereavement, and the next with lamentations over the honours to which he would have succeeded. It was of little use to speak to her of the eternal glories of which he was now secure, for Mary Talbot's sorrow was chiefly selfish, and was connected with the loss of her pre-eminence as parent to the heir-male.

However, the grief of those times was apt to expend itself quickly, and when little George's coffin, smothered under heraldic devices and funeral escutcheons, had been bestowed in the family vault, Dame Mary soon revived enough to take a warm interest in the lords who were next afterwards sent down to hold conferences with the captive; and her criticism of the fashion of their ruffs and doublets was as animated as ever. Another grief, however, soon fell upon the family. Lady Lennox's ailments proved to be no such trifles as her sisters and sisters-in-law had been pleased to suppose, and before the year was out, she had passed away from all her ambitious hopes, leaving a little daughter. The Earl took a brief leave of absence to visit his lady in her affliction at Chatsworth, and to stand godfather to the motherless infant.

"She will soon be fatherless, too," said Richard Talbot on his return to Bridgefield, after attending his lord on this expedition. "My young Lord Lennox, poor youth, is far gone in the wasting sickness, as well as distraught with grief, and he could scarcely stand to receive my Lord."

"Our poor lady!" said Susan, "it pities me to think what hopes she had fixed upon that young couple whom she had mated together."

"I doubt me whether her hopes be ended now," quoth Richard. "What think you she hath fixed on as the name of the poor puling babe yonder? They have called her Arbel or Arabella."

"Arabella, say you? I never heard such a name. It is scarce Christian. Is it out of a romaunt?"

"Better that it were. It is out of a pedigree. They have got the whole genealogy of the house of Lennox blazoned fair, with crowns and coronets and coats of arms hung up in the hall at Chatsworth, going up on the one hand through Sir AEneas of Troy, and on the other hand through Woden to Adam and Eve! Pass for all before the Stewart line became Kings of Scots! Well, it seems that these Lennox Stewarts sprang from one Walter, who was son to King Robert II., and that the mother of this same Walter was called Anhild, or as the Scots here call it Annaple, but the scholars have made it into Arabella, and so my young lady is to be called. They say it was a special fancy of the young Countess's."

"So I should guess. My lady would fill her head with such thoughts, and of this poor youth being next of kin to the young Scottish king, and to our own Queen."

"He is not next heir to Scotland even, barring a little one we wot of, Dame Sue. The Hamiltons stand between, being descended from a daughter of King James I."

"So methought I had heard. Are they not Papists?"

"Yea! Ah ha, sweetheart, there is another of the house of Hardwicke as fain to dreams of greatness for her child as ever was the Countess, though she may be more discreet in the telling of them."

"Ah me, dear sir, I dreamt not of greatness for splendour's sake—'twere scarce for the dear child's happiness. I only thought of what you once said, that she may be the instrument of preserving the true religion."

"And if so, it can only be at a mighty cost!" said her husband.

"Verily," said Susan, "glad am I that you sent our Humfrey from her. Would that nought had ever passed between the children!"

"They were but children," said Richard; "and there was no contract between them."

"I fear me there was what Humfrey will hold to, or know good reason why," said his mother.

"And were the young King of Scots married and father to a goodly heir, there is no reason he should not hold to it," rejoined Richard.

However Richard was still anxious to keep his son engaged at a distance from Sheffield. There was great rejoicing and thankfulness when one of the many messengers constantly passing between London and Sheffield brought a packet from Humfrey, whose ship had put into the Thames instead of the Humber.

The packet contained one of the black stones which the science of the time expected to transmute into gold, also some Esquimaux trinkets made of bone, and a few shells. These were for the mother and Cis, and there were also the tusks of a sea-elephant which Humfrey would lay up at my Lord's London lodgings till his father sent tidings what should be done with them, and whether he should come home at once by sea to Hull, or if, as he much desired to do, he might join an expedition which was fitting out for the Spanish Main, where he was assured that much more both of gold and honour was to be acquired than in the cold northern seas, where nothing was to be seen for the fog at most times, and when it cleared only pigmies, with their dogs, white bears, and seals, also mountains of ice bigger than any church, blue as my lady's best sapphires, green as her emeralds, sparkling as her diamonds, but ready to be the destruction of the ships.

"One there was," wrote Humfrey, "that I could have thought was no other than the City that the blessed St. John saw descending from Heaven, so fair was it to look on, but they cried out that it was rather a City of Destruction, and when we had got out of the current where it was bearing down on us, our noble captain piped all hands up to prayers, and gave thanks for our happy deliverance therefrom."

Susan breathed a thanksgiving as her husband read, and he forbore to tell her of the sharks, the tornadoes, and the fevers which might make the tropical seas more perilous than the Arctic. No Elizabethan mariner had any scruples respecting piracy, and so long as the captain was a godly man who kept up strict discipline on board, Master Richard held the quarterdeck to be a much more wholesome place than the Manor-house, and much preferred the humours of the ship to those of any other feminine creature; for, as to his Susan, he always declared that she was the only woman who had none.

So she accepted his decision, and saw the wisdom of it, though her tender heart deeply felt the disappointment. Tenderly she packed up the shirts which she and Cis had finished, and bestrewed them with lavender, which, as she said, while a tear dropped with the gray blossoms, would bring the scent of home to the boy.

Cis affected to be indifferent and offended. Master Humfrey might do as he chose. She did not care if he did prefer pitch and tar, and whale blubber and grease, to hawks and hounds, and lords and ladies. She was sure she wanted no more great lubberly lads—with a sly cut at Diccon—to tangle her silk, and torment her to bait their hooks. She was well quit of any one of them.

When Diccon proposed that she should write a letter to Humfrey, she declared that she should do no such thing, since he had never attempted to write to her. In truth Diccon may have made the proposal in order to obtain a companion in misfortune, since Master Sniggius, emulous of the success of other tutors, insisted on his writing to his brother in Latin, and the unfortunate epistle of Ricardus to Onofredus was revised and corrected to the last extremity, and as it was allowed to contain no word unknown to Virgilius Maro, it could not have afforded much delectation to the recipient.

But when Mrs. Susan had bestowed all the shirts as neatly as possible, on returning to settle them for the last time before wrapping them up for the messenger, she felt something hard among them. It was a tiny parcel wrapped in a piece of a fine kerchief, tied round with a tress of dark hair, and within, Susan knew by the feeling, a certain chess rook which had been won by Cis when shooting at the butts a week or two before.

CHAPTER X
THE LADY ARBELL

After several weary months of languishing, Charles Stewart was saved from the miseries which seemed the natural inheritance of his name by sinking into his grave. His funeral was conducted with the utmost magnificence, though the Earl of Shrewsbury declined to be present at it, and shortly after, the Countess intimated her purpose of returning to Sheffield, bringing with her the little orphan, Lady Arabella Stewart. Orders came that the best presence chamber in the Manor-house should be prepared, the same indeed where Queen Mary had been quartered before the lodge had been built for her use. The Earl was greatly perturbed. "Whom can she intend to bring?" he went about asking. "If it were the Lady Margaret, it were be much as my head were worth to admit her within the same grounds as this Queen."

"There is no love lost between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law," observed his son Gilbert in a consolatory tone.

"Little good would that do to me, if once it came to the ears of her Grace and the Lord Treasurer that both had been my guests! And if I had to close the gates—though in no other way could I save my life and honour—your mother would never forget it. It would be cast up to me for ever. What think you, daughter Talbot?"

"Mayhap," said Dame Mary, "my lady mother has had a hint to make ready for her Majesty herself, who hath so often spoken of seeing the Queen of Scots, and might think well to take her unawares."

This was a formidable suggestion. "Say you so," cried the poor Earl, with an alarm his eye would never have betrayed had Parma himself been within a march of Sheffield, "then were we fairly spent. I am an impoverished man, eaten out of house and lands as it is, and were the Queen herself to come, I might take at once to the beggar's bowl."

"But think of the honour, good my lord," cried Mary. "Think of all Hallamshire coming to do her homage. Oh, how I should laugh to hear the Mayor stumbling over his address."

"Laugh, ay," growled the Earl; "and how will you laugh when there is not a deer left in the park, nor an ox in the stalls?"

"Nay, my Lord," interposed Gilbert, "there is no fear of her Majesty's coming. That post from M. de la Mauvissiere reported her at Greenwich only five days back, and it would take her Majesty a far longer time to make her progress than yonder fellow, who will tell you himself that she had no thoughts of moving."

"That might only be a feint to be the more sudden with us," said his wife, actuated in part by the diversion of alarming her father-in-law, and in part really fired by the hope of such an effectual enlivenment of the dulness of Sheffield.

They were all in full family conclave drawn up in the hall for the reception, and Mistress Susan, who could not bear to see the Earl so perplexed and anxious, ventured to say that she was quite sure that my Lady Countess would have sent warning forward if indeed she were bringing home such a guest, and at that moment the blare of trumpets announced that the cavalcade was approaching. The start which the Earl gave showed how much his nerves had become affected by his years of custody. Up the long avenue they came, with all the state with which the Earl had conducted Queen Mary to the lodge before she was absolutely termed a prisoner. Halberdiers led the procession, horse and foot seemed to form it. The home party stood on the top of the steps watching with much anxiety. There was a closed litter visible, beside which Lady Shrewsbury, in a mourning dress and hood, could be seen riding her favourite bay palfrey. No doubt it contained the Lady Margaret, Countess of Lennox; and the unfortunate Earl, forgetting all his stately dignity, stood uneasily moving from leg to leg, and

pulling his long beard, torn between the instincts of hospitality and of loyal obedience, between fear of his wife and fear of the Queen.

The litter halted at the foot of the steps, the Earl descended. All he saw was the round face of an infant in its nurse's arms, and he turned to help his wife from the saddle, but she waved him aside. "My son Gilbert will aid me, my Lord," said she, "your devoir is to the princess."

Poor Lord Shrewsbury, his apologies on his tongue, looked into the litter, where he saw the well-known and withered countenance of the family nurse. He also beheld a buxom young female, whose dress marked her as a peasant, but before he had time to seek further for the princess, the tightly rolled chrysalis of a child was thrust into his astonished arms, while the round face puckered up instantly with terror at sight of his bearded countenance, and he was greeted with a loud yell. He looked helplessly round, and his lady was ready at once to relieve him. "My precious! My sweetheart! My jewel! Did he look sour at her and frighten her with his ugsome beard?" and the like endearments common to grandmothers in all ages.

"But where is the princess?"

"Where? Where should she be but here? Her grandame's own precious, royal, queenly little darling!" and as a fresh cry broke out, "Yes, yes; she shall to her presence chamber. Usher her, Gilbert."

"Bess's brat!" muttered Dame Mary, in ineffable disappointment.

Curiosity and the habit of obedience to the Countess carried the entire troop on to the grand apartments on the south side, where Queen Mary had been lodged while the fiction of her guestship had been kept up. Lady Shrewsbury was all the time trying to hush the child, who was quite old enough to be terrified by new faces and new scenes, and who was besides tired and restless in her swaddling bands, for which she was so nearly too old that she had only been kept in them for greater security upon the rough and dangerous roads. Great was my lady's indignation on reaching the state rooms on finding that no nursery preparations had been made, and her daughter Mary, with a giggle hardly repressed by awe of her mother, stood forth and said, "Why, verily, my lady, we expected some great dame, my Lady Margaret or my Lady Hunsdon at the very least, when you spoke of a princess."

"And who should it be but one who has both the royal blood of England and Scotland in her veins? You have not saluted the child to whom you have the honour to be akin, Mary! On your knee, minion; I tell you she hath as good or a better chance of wearing a crown as any woman in England."

"She hath a far better chance of a prison," muttered the Earl, "if all this foolery goes on."

"What! What is that? What are you calling these honours to my orphan princess?" cried the lady, but the princess herself here broke in with the lustiest of squalls, and Susan, who was sorry for the child, contrived to insert an entreaty that my lady would permit her to be taken at once to the nursery chamber that had been made ready for her, and let her there be fed, warmed, and undressed at once.

There was something in the quality of Susan's voice to which people listened, and the present necessity overcame the Countess's desire to assert the dignity of her granddaughter, so she marched out of the room attended by the women, while the Earl and his sons were only too glad to slink away—there is no other word for it, their relief as to the expected visitor having been exchanged for consternation of another description.

There was a blazing fire ready, and all the baby comforts of the time provided, and poor little Lady Arbell was relieved from her swathing bands, and allowed to stretch her little limbs on her nurse's lap, the one rest really precious to babes of all periods and conditions—but the troubles were not yet over, for the grandmother, glancing round, demanded, "Where is the cradle inlaid with pearl? Why was it not provided? Bring it here."

Now this cradle, carved in cedar wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, had been a sponsor's gift to poor little George, the first male heir of the Talbots, and it was regarded as a special treasure

by his mother, who was both wounded and resentful at the demand, and stood pouting and saying, "It was my son's. It is mine."

"It belongs to the family. You," to two of the servants, "fetch it here instantly!"

The ladies of Hardwicke race were not guarded in temper or language, and Mary burst into passionate tears and exclamations that Bess's brat should not have her lost George's cradle, and flounced away to get before the servants and lock it up. Lady Shrewsbury would have sprung after her, and have made no scruple of using her fists and nails even on her married daughter, but that she was impeded by a heavy table, and this gave time for Susan to throw herself before her, and entreat her to pause.

"You, you, Susan Talbot! You should know better than to take the part of an undutiful, foul-tongued vixen like that. Out of my way, I say!" and as Susan, still on her knees, held the riding-dress, she received a stinging box on the ear. But in her maiden days she had known the weight of my lady's hand, and without relaxing her hold, she only entreated: "Hear me, hear me for a little space, my lady. Did you but know how sore her heart is, and how she loved little Master George!"

"That is no reason she should flout and miscall her dead sister, of whom she was always jealous!"

"O madam, she wept with all her heart for poor Lady Lennox. It is not any evil, but she sets such store by that cradle in which her child died—she keeps it by her bed even now, and her woman told me how, for all she seems gay and blithe by day, she weeps over it at night, as if her heart would break."

Lady Shrewsbury was a little softened. "The child died in it?" she asked.

"Yea, madam. He had been on his father's knee, and had seemed a little easier, and as if he might sleep, so Sir Gilbert laid him down, and he did but stretch himself out, shiver all over, draw a long breath, and the pretty lamb was gone to Paradise!"

"You saw him, Susan?"

"Yea, madam. Dame Mary sent for me, but none could be of any aid where it was the will of Heaven to take him."

"If I had been there," said the Countess, "I who have brought up eight children and lost none, I should have saved him! So he died in yonder cedar cradle! Well, e'en let Mary keep it. It may be that there is infection in the smell of the cedar wood, and that the child will sleep better out of it. It is too late to do aught this evening, but to-morrow the child shall be lodged as befits her birth, in the presence chamber."

"Ah, madam!" said Susan, "would it be well for the sweet babe if her Majesty's messengers, who be so often at the castle, were to report her so lodged?"

"I have a right to lodge my grandchild where and how I please in my own house."

"Yea, madam, that is most true, but you wot how the Queen treats all who may have any claim to the throne in future times; and were it reported by any of the spies that are ever about us, how royal honours were paid to the little Lady Arbell, might she not be taken from your ladyship's wardship, and bestowed with those who would not show her such loving care?"

The Countess would not show whether this had any effect on her, or else some sound made by the child attracted her. It was a puny little thing, and she had a true grandmother's affection for it, apart from her absurd pride and ambition, so that she was glad to hold counsel over it with Susan, who had done such justice to her training as to be, in her eyes, a mother who had sense enough not to let her children waste and die; a rare merit in those days, and one that Susan could not disclaim, though she knew that it did not properly belong to her.

Cis had stood by all the time like a little statue, for no one, not even young Lady Talbot, durst sit down uninvited in the presence of Earl or Countess; but her black brows were bent, her gray eyes intent.

"Mother," she said, as they went home on their quiet mules, "are great ladies always so rudely spoken to one another?"

"I have not seen many great ladies, Cis, and my Lady Countess has always been good to me."

"Antony said that the Scots Queen and her ladies never storm at one another like my lady and her daughters."

"Open words do not always go deep, Cis," said the mother. "I had rather know and hear the worst at once." And then her heart smote her as she recollected that she might be implying censure of the girl's true mother, as well as defending wrath and passion, and she added, "Be that as it may, it is a happy thing to learn to refrain the tongue."

CHAPTER XI
QUEEN MARY'S PRESENCE CHAMBER

The storm that followed on the instalment of the Lady Arbell at Sheffield was the precursor of many more. Her grandmother did sufficiently awake to the danger of alarming the jealousy of Queen Elizabeth to submit to leave her in the ordinary chambers of the children of the house, and to exact no extraordinary marks of respect towards the unconscious infant; but there was no abatement in the Countess's firm belief that an English-born, English-bred child, would have more right to the crown than any "foreign princes," as she contemptuously termed the Scottish Queen and her son.

Moreover, in her two years' intercourse with the elder Countess of Lennox, who was a gentle-tempered but commonplace woman, she had adopted to the full that unfortunate princess's entire belief in the guilt of Queen Mary, and entertained no doubt that she had been the murderer of Darnley. Old Lady Lennox had seen no real evidence, and merely believed what she was told by her lord, whose impeachment of Bothwell had been baffled by the Queen in a most suspicious manner. Conversations with this lady had entirely changed Lady Shrewsbury from the friendly hostess of her illustrious captive, to be her enemy and persecutor, partly as being convinced of her guilt, partly as regarding her as an obstacle in the path of little Arbell to the throne. So she not only refused to pay her respects as usual to "that murtheress," but she insisted that her husband should tighten the bonds of restraint, and cut off all indulgences.

The Countess was one of the women to whom argument and reason are impossible, and who was entirely swayed by her predilections, as well as of so imperious a nature as to brook no opposition, and to be almost always able to sweep every one along with her.

Her own sons always were of her mind, and her daughters might fret and chafe, but were sure to take part with her against every one else outside the Cavendish family. The idea of being kinsfolk to the future Queen excited them all, and even Mary forgot her offence about the cradle, and her jealousy of Bess, and ranked herself against her stepfather, influencing her husband, Gilbert, on whom the unfortunate Earl had hitherto leant. On his refusal to persecute his unfortunate captive beyond the orders from the Court, Bess of Hardwicke, emboldened by the support she had gathered from her children, passionately declared that it could only be because he was himself in love with the murtheress. Lord Shrewsbury could not help laughing a little at the absurdity of the idea, whereupon my lady rose up in virtuous indignation, calling her sons and daughters to follow her.

All that night, lights might have been seen flitting about at the Manor-house, and early in the morning bugles sounded to horse. A huge procession, consisting of the Countess herself, and all her sons and daughters then at Sheffield, little Lady Arbell, and the whole of their attendants, swept out of the gates of the park on the way to Hardwicke. When Richard Talbot went up to fulfil his duties as gentleman porter at the lodge the courts seemed well-nigh deserted, and a messenger summoned him at once to the Earl, whom he found in his bed-chamber in his morning gown terribly perturbed.

"For Heaven's sake send for your wife, Richard Talbot!" he said. "It is her Majesty's charge that some of mine household, or I myself, see this unhappy Queen of Scots each day for not less than two hours, as you well know. My lady has broken away, and all her daughters, on this accursed fancy—yea, and Gilbert too, Gilbert whom I always looked to to stand by me; I have no one to send. If I go and attend upon her alone, as I have done a thousand times to my sorrow, it will but give colour to the monstrous tale; but if your good wife, an honourable lady of the Hardwicke kin, against whom none ever breathed a word, will go and give the daily attendance, then can not the Queen herself find fault, and my wife's heated fancy can coin nothing suspicious. You must all come up, and lodge here in the Manor-house till this tempest be overpast. Oh, Richard, Richard! will it last out my life? My very children are turned against me. Go you down and fetch your good Susan, and take

order for bringing up your children and gear. Benthall shall take your turn at the lodge. What are you tarrying for? Do you doubt whether your wife have rank enough to wait on the Queen? She should have been a knight's lady long ago, but that I deemed you would be glad to be quit of herald's fees; your service and estate have merited it, and I will crave license by to-day's courier from her Majesty to lay knighthood on your shoulder."

"That was not what I thought of, my Lord, though I humbly thank you, and would be whatever was best for your Lordship's service, though, if it would serve you as well, I would rather be squire than knight; but I was bethinking me how we should bestow our small family. We have a young damsel at an age not to be left to herself."

"The black-browed maid—I recollect her. Let her e'en follow her mother. Queen Mary likes a young face, and is kindly disposed to little maids. She taught Bess Pierrepoint to speak French and work with her needle, and I cannot see that she did the lass any harm, nay, she is the only one of them all that can rule her tongue to give a soft answer if things go not after her will, and a maid might learn worse things. Besides, your wife will be there to look after the maiden, so you need have no fears. And for your sons, they will be at school, and can eat with us."

Richard's doubts being thus silenced he could not but bring his wife to his lord's rescue, though he well knew that Susan would be greatly disturbed on all accounts, and indeed he found her deep in the ironing that followed the great spring wash, and her housewifely mind was as much exercised as to the effects of her desertion, as was her maternal prudence at the plunge which her unconscious adopted child was about to make. However, there was no denying the request, backed as it was by her husband, looking at her proudly, and declaring she was by general consent the only discreet woman in Sheffield. She was very sorry for the Earl's perplexity, and had a loyal pity for the Countess's vexation and folly, and she was consoled by the assurance that she would have a free time between dinner and supper to go home and attend to her wash, and finish her preparations. Cis, who had been left in a state of great curiosity, to continue compounding pickle while the mother was called away, was summoned, to don her holiday kirtle, for she was to join in attendance on the Queen of Scots while Lady Shrewsbury and her daughters were absent.

It was unmixed delight to the girl, and she was not long in fresh-binding up her hair—black with a little rust-coloured tinge—under her stiff little cap, smoothing down the front, which was alone visible, putting on the well-stiffened ruff with the dainty little lace edge and close-fitting tucker, and then the gray home-spun kirtle, with the puffs at the top of the tight sleeves, and the slashes into which she had persuaded mother to insert some old pink satin, for was not she sixteen now, and almost a woman? There was a pink breast-knot to match, and Humfrey's owch just above it, gray stockings, home-spun and worked with elaborate pink clocks, but knitted by Cis herself; and a pair of shoes with pink roses to match were put into a bag, to be assumed when she arrived at the lodge. Out of this simple finery beamed a face, bright in spite of the straight, almost bushy, black brows. There was a light of youth, joy, and intelligence, about her gray eyes which made them sparkle all the more under their dark setting, and though her complexion had no brilliancy, only the clearness of health, and her features would not endure criticism, there was a wonderful lively sweetness about her fresh, innocent young mouth; and she had a tall lithe figure, surpassing that of her stepmother. She would have been a sonsie Border lass in appearance but for the remarkable carriage of her small head and shoulders, which was assuredly derived from her royal ancestry, and indeed her air and manner of walking were such that Diccon had more than once accused her of sailing about ambling like the Queen of Scots, an accusation which she hotly denied. Her hands bad likewise a slender form and fine texture, such as none of the ladies of the houses of Talbot or Hardwicke could rival, but she was on the whole viewed as far from being a beauty. The taste of the day was altogether for light, sandy-haired, small-featured women, like Queen Elizabeth or her namesake of Hardwicke, so that Cis was looked on as a sort of crow, and her supposed parents were pitied for having so ill-favoured

a daughter, so unlike all their families, except one black-a-vised Talbot grandmother, whose portrait had been discovered on a pedigree.

Much did Susan marvel what impression the daughter would make on the true mother as they jogged up on their sober ponies through the long avenues, whose branches were beginning to wear the purple shades of coming spring.

Lord Shrewsbury himself met them in front of the lodge, where, in spite of all his dignity, he had evidently been impatiently awaiting them. He thanked Susan for coming, as if he had not had a right to order, gave her his ungloved hand when she had dismounted, then at the single doorway of the lodge caused his gentleman to go through the form of requesting admission for himself and Mistress Talbot, his dear kinswoman, to the presence of the Queen. It was a ceremony daily observed as an acknowledgment of Mary's royalty, and the Earl was far too courteous ever to omit it.

Queen Mary's willingness to admit him was notified by Sir Andrew Melville, a tall, worn man, with the typical Scottish countenance and a keen steadfast gray eye. He marshalled the trio up a circular staircase, made as easy as possible, but necessarily narrow, since it wound up through a brick turret at the corner, to the third and uppermost story of the lodge.

There, however, was a very handsome anteroom, with tapestry hangings, a richly moulded ceiling, and wide carved stone chimneypiece, where a bright fire was burning, around which sat several Scottish and French gentlemen, who rose at the Earl's entrance. Another wide doorway with a tapestry curtain over the folding leaves led to the presence chamber, and Sir Andrew announced in as full style as if he had been marshalling an English ambassador to the Court of Holyrood, the most high and mighty Earl of Shrewsbury. The room was full of March sunshine, and a great wood fire blazed on the hearth. Part of the floor was carpeted, and overhung with a canopy, proceeding from the tapestried wall, and here was a cross-legged velvet chair on which sat Queen Mary. This was all that Cis saw at first, while the Earl advanced, knelt on one step of the dais, with bared head, exchanging greetings with the Queen. He then added, that his wife, the Countess, and her daughter, having been called away from Sheffield, he would entreat her Grace to accept for a few days in their stead the attendance of his good kinswoman, Mrs. Talbot, and her daughter, Mistress Cicely.

Mary graciously intimated her consent, and extended her hand for each to kiss as they knelt in turn on the step; Susan either fancied, or really saw a wonderful likeness in that taper hand to the little one whose stitches she had so often guided. Cis, on her part, felt the thrill of girlhood in the actual touch of the subject of her dreams. She stood, scarcely hearing what passed, but taking in, from under her black brows, all the surroundings, and recognising the persons from her former glimpses, and from Antony Babington's descriptions. The presence chamber was ample for the suite of the Queen, which had been reduced on every fresh suspicion. There was in it, besides the Queen's four ladies, an elderly one, with a close black silk hood—Jean Kennedy, or Mrs. Kennett as the English called her; another, a thin slight figure, with a worn face, as if a great sorrow had passed over her, making her look older than her mistress, was the Queen's last remaining Mary, otherwise Mrs. Seaton. The gossip of Sheffield had not failed to tell how the chamberlain, Beatoun, had been her suitor, and she had half consented to accept him when he was sent on a mission to France, and there died. The dark-complexioned bright-eyed little lady, on a smaller scale than the rest, was Marie de Courcelles, who, like the two others, had been the Queen's companion in all her adventures; and the fourth, younger and prettier than the rest, was already known to Cis and her mother, since she was the Barbara Mowbray who was affianced to Gilbert Curll, the Queen's Scottish secretary, recently taken into her service. Both these were Protestants, and, like the Bridgefield family, attended service in the castle chapel. They were all at work, as was likewise their royal lady, to whom the girl, with the youthful coyness that halts in the fulfilment of its dreams, did not at first raise her eyes, having first taken in all the ladies, the several portions of one great coverlet which they were all embroidering in separate pieces, and the gentleman who was reading aloud to them from a large book placed on a desk at which he was standing.

When she did look up, as the Queen was graciously requesting her mother to be seated, and the Earl excusing himself from remaining longer, her first impression was one of disappointment. Either the Queen of Scots was less lovely seen leisurely close at hand than Antony Babington and Cis's own fancy had painted her, or the last two or three years had lessened her charms, as well they might, for she had struggled and suffered much in the interval, had undergone many bitter disappointments, and had besides endured much from rheumatism every winter, indeed, even now she could not ride, and could only go out in a carriage in the park on the finest days, looking forward to her annual visit to Buxton to set her up for the summer. Her face was longer and more pointed than in former days, her complexion had faded, or perhaps in these private moments it had not been worth while to enhance it; though there was no carelessness in the general attire, the black velvet gown, and delicate lace of the cap, and open ruff always characteristic of her. The small curls of hair at her temples had their auburn tint softened by far more white than suited one who was only just over forty, but the delicate pencilling of the eyebrows was as marked as ever; and the eyes, on whose colour no one ever agreed, melted and sparkled as of old. Cis had heard debates as to their hue, and furtively tried to form her own opinion, but could not decide on anything but that they had a dark effect, and a wonderful power of expression, seeming to look at every one at once, and to rebuke, encourage, plead, or smile, from moment to moment. The slight cast in one of them really added to their force of expression rather than detracted from their beauty, and the delicate lips were ready to second the glances with wondrous smiles. Cis had not felt the magic of her mere presence five minutes without being convinced that Antony Babington was right; the Lord Treasurer and all the rest utterly wrong, and that she beheld the most innocent and persecuted of princesses.

Meantime, all due formalities having been gone through, Lord Shrewsbury bowed himself out backwards with a dexterity that Cis breathlessly admired in one so stately and so stiff, forgetting that he had daily practice in the art. Then Queen Mary courteously entreated her visitors to be seated, near herself, asking with a smile if this were not the little maiden who had queened it so prettily in the brake some few years since. Cis blushed and drew back her head with a pretty gesture of dignified shyness as Susan made answer for her that she was the same.

"I should have known it," said the Queen, smiling, "by the port of her head alone. 'Tis strange," she said, musing, "that maiden hath the bearing of head and neck that I have never seen save in my own mother, the saints rest her soul, and in her sisters, and which we always held to be their inheritance from the blood of Charlemagne."

"Your grace does her too much honour," Susan contrived to say, thankful that no less remote resemblance had been detected.

"It was a sad farce when they tried to repeat your pretty comedy with the chief performer omitted," proceeded the Queen, directing her words to the girl, but the mother replied for her.

"Your Grace will pardon me, I could not permit her to play in public, before all the menie of the castle."

"Madame is a discreet and prudent mother," said the Queen. "The mistake was in repeating the representation at all, not in abstaining from appearing in it. I should be very sorry that this young lady should have been concerned in a spectacle a la comtesse."

There was something in the intonation of "this young lady" that won Cis's heart on the spot, something in the concluding words that hurt Susan's faithful loyalty towards her kinswoman, in spite of the compliment to herself. However Mary did not pursue the subject, perceiving with ready tact that it was distasteful, and proceeded to ask Dame Susan's opinion of her work, which was intended as a gift to her good aunt, the Abbess of Soissons. How strangely the name fell upon Susan's ear. It was a pale blue satin coverlet, worked in large separate squares, innumerable shields and heraldic devices of Lorraine, Bourbon, France, Scotland, etc., round the border, and beautiful meandering patterns of branches, with natural flowers and leaves growing from them covering the whole with a fascinating regular irregularity. Cis could not repress an exclamation of delight, which brought the most charming

glance of the winning eyes upon her. There was stitchery here that she did not understand, but when she looked at some of the flowers, she could not help uttering the sentiment that the eyes of the daisies were not as mother could make them.

So, as a great favour, Queen Mary entreated to be shown Mrs. Talbot's mode of dealing with the eyes of the daisies. No, her good Seaton would not learn so well as she should; Madame must come and sit by her and show her. Meantime here was her poor little Bijou whimpering to be taken on her lap. Would not he find a comforter in sweet Mistress—ah, what was her name?

"We named her Cicely, so please your Grace," said Susan, unable to help blushing.

"Cecile, a fair name. Ah! so the poor Antoine called her. I see my Bijou has found a friend in you, Mistress Cecile"—as the girl's idle hands were only too happy to caress the pretty little shivering Italian greyhound rather than to be busy with a needle. "Do you ever hear of that young Babington, your playfellow?" she added.

"No, madam," said Cis, looking up, "he hath never been here!"

"I thought not," said Queen Mary, sighing. "Take heed to manifest no pity for me, maiden, if you should ever chance to be inspired with it for a poor worn-out old prisoner. It is the sure sentence of misfortune and banishment."

"In his sex, madam," here put in Marie de Courcelles. "If it were so in ours, woe to some of us."

"That is true, my dear friends," said Mary, her eyes glistening with dew. "It is the women who are the most fearless, the most faithful, and whom the saints therefore shield."

"Alas, there are some who are faithful but who are not shielded!"

It was merely a soft low murmur, but the tender-hearted Queen had caught it, and rising impulsively, crossed the room and gathered Mary Seaton's hands into hers, no longer the queen but the loving friend of equal years, soothing her in a low fond voice, and presently sending her to the inner chamber to compose herself. Then as the Queen returned slowly to her seat it would be seen how lame she was from rheumatism. Mrs. Kennedy hurried to assist her, with a nurse-like word of remonstrance, to which she replied with a bewitching look of sweetness that she could not but forget her aches and pains when she saw her dear Mary Seaton in trouble.

Most politely she then asked whether her visitors would object to listening to the conclusion of her day's portion of reading. There was no refusing, of course, though, as Susan glanced at the reader and knew him to be strongly suspected of being in Holy Orders conferred abroad, she had her fears for her child's Protestant principles. The book, however, proved to be a translation of St. Austin on the Psalms, and, of course, she could detect nothing that she disapproved, even if Cis had not been far too much absorbed by the little dog and its mistress to have any comprehending ears for theology. Queen Mary confidentially observed as much to her after the reading, having, no doubt, detected her uneasy glance.

"You need not fear for your child, madam," she said; "St. Augustine is respected by your own Queen and her Bishops. At the readings with which my good Mr. Belton favours me, I take care to have nothing you Protestants dispute when I know it." She added, smiling, "Heaven knows that I have endeavoured to understand your faith, and many a minister has argued with me. I have done my best to comprehend them, but they agreed in nothing but in their abuse of the Pope. At least so it seemed to my poor weak mind. But you are satisfied, madam, I see it in your calm eyes and gentle voice. If I see much of you, I shall learn to think well of your religion."

Susan made an obeisance without answering. She had heard Sir Gilbert Talbot say, "If she tries to persuade you that you can convert her, be sure that she means mischief," but she could not bear to believe it anything but a libel while the sweet sad face was gazing into hers.

Queen Mary changed the subject by asking a few questions about the Countess's sudden departure. There was a sort of guarded irony suppressed in her tone—she was evidently feeling her way with the stranger, and when she found that Susan would only own to causes Lord Shrewsbury

had adduced on the spur of the moment, she was much too wary to continue the examination, though Susan could not help thinking that she knew full well the disturbance which had taken place.

A short walk on the roof above followed. The sun was shining brilliantly, and lame as she was, the Queen's strong craving for free air led her to climb her stairs and creep to and fro on Sir Andrew Melville's arm, gazing out over the noble prospect of the park close below, divided by the winding vales of the three rivers, which could be traced up into the woods and the moors beyond, purple with spring freshness and glory. Mary made her visitors point out Bridgefield, and asked questions about all that could be seen of the house and pleasance, which, in truth, was little enough, but she contrived to set Cis off into a girl's chatter about her home occupations, and would not let her be hushed.

"You little know the good it does a captive to take part, only in fancy, in a free harmless life," returned Mary, with the wistful look that made her eyes so pathetic. "There is no refreshment to me like a child's prattle."

Susan's heart smote her as she thought of the true relations in which these two stood to one another, and she forbore from further interference; but she greatly rejoiced when the great bell of the castle gave notice of noon, and of her own release. When Queen Mary's dinner was served, the Talbot ladies in attendance left her and repaired to the general family meal in the hall.

CHAPTER XII
A FURIOUS LETTER

A period now began of daily penance to Mrs. Talbot, of daily excitement and delight to Cis. Two hours or more had to be spent in attendance on Queen Mary. Even on Sundays there was no exemption, the visit only took place later in the day, so as not to interfere with going to church.

Nothing could be more courteous or more friendly than the manner in which the elder lady was always received. She was always made welcome by the Queen herself, who generally entered into conversation with her almost as with an equal. Or when Mary herself was engaged in her privy chamber in dictating to her secretaries, the ladies of the suite showed themselves equally friendly, and told her of their mistress's satisfaction in having a companion free from all the rude and unaccountable humours and caprices of my Lady Countess and her daughters. And if Susan was favoured, Cis was petted. Queen Mary always liked to have young girls about her. Their fresh, spontaneous, enthusiastic homage was pleasant to one who loved above all to attract, and it was a pleasure to a prisoner to have a fresh face about her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.