

Chapter XI.

"Woe & Woe, & Lamentation
 What a piteous cry was there!" W.E. Ayton.

After his elder brother's escape, the Duke of Gloucester loomed largely in the eyes of many. There were those in Parliament who, little knowing the constant nature and strong character of the Prince, thought that he, being in their hands, could be moulded as they wished, to replace his Father on the Throne. But all unconscious of these designs upon him, the little Duke did all in his power to make up to his sister for the loss of the companionship of her elder brother.

One day, when they were at Syon House, Sir Thomas Herbert, the King's faithful servant, was announced, and was granted an interview with the Princess. Elizabeth received him with fluttering heart and gave him her hand to kiss.

"I come, your Royal Highness, with a letter for you from His Majesty your Father".

"You could bring me nothing, good Sir Thomas, short of my beloved Father himself, that I would count more precious". Then she added, as she gently and with hand trembling with joy took the letter from him: "How fares my Father?" and Herbert gave her the latest news of him.

After she had read the precious letter, she sent her Father a reply by Sir Thomas, but neither it, nor any transcript of it, is known to exist. Her Father wrote as follows:-

"Newport,
 14th October, 1648.

"Dear daughter,

"It is not want of affection that makes me write so seldom, but want of matter such as I could wish, and indeed I am loth to write to those I love when I am out of humour (as I have been these days bypast) lest my letter should trouble those I desire to please; but having this opportunity I would not lose it, though at this time I have nothing to say but God bless you. So I rest,

Your loving father,

Charles R."

"Give your brother my blessing, with a kiss, and commend me kindly to my Lady Northumberland by the same token".

Despite Northumberland's efforts, it was impossible to keep all news of Charles' condition from his children. It was probably owing to some instructions from her Father, conveyed to her secretly, that on January 22nd, 1649, Elizabeth wrote to Parliament requesting permission to join her sister, the Princess of Orange, in Holland. But so absorbed were both Houses by their illegal proceedings in Westminster Hall, that Elizabeth's letter was not even given to them.

Meanwhile the King, his concern ever for his children despite his own sorry plight, on January 25th, asked one who had been at Syon House "how his young Princess did", and heard that she was very melancholy.

"Well, she may be", he replied, "when she hears what death her old father is coming unto".

For by now, Charles was well assured the sentence of death would be passed upon him, as indeed it was two days later. Then he made earnest request that he might be permitted to take farewell of his two imprisoned children - a request only grudgingly accorded, and with ill-grace. The day appointed was that before his execution.

When the Princess received the dreadful news, her agony was such that she was reported to be dead. But when she heard her Father desired to see them both once again, she summoned all her fortitude to face an ordeal which she dreaded despite her longing to see her Father once more.

The fateful Monday arrived: the little pair were driven to St. James', and there shewn into the room in which the King, attended only by Bishop Juxon and Sir Thomas Herbert, awaited their coming. The children were startled to notice the change that had come over him since they had last seen him fifteen months ago. His hair was now almost grey, and both it and his beard were neglected, whilst his dress, also most unlike him, was pitiful in its uncared-for condition.

Elizabeth and Henry, as usual, had fallen on their knees to ask their Father's blessing when they entered the room; but at the forlorn spectacle Charles presented, the Princess, unable any longer to control her feelings, burst into a passion of tears; and Henry, in sympathy, also wept. The King at once raised them from their knees, kissed them, and gave them his blessing, then set them upon his knees. This is the account, just over 300 years ago; of the King's last admonitions to them.

"Munday, 29th January, 1649. His children being come to meet him, He first gave his Blessing to the Lady Elizabeth; and bad her remember to tell her brother James, whenever she should see him, that it was his father's last desire that he should no more look upon Charles as his eldest brother only, but be obedient unto him as his sovereign; and that they should love one another and forgive their father's enemies. Then said the King to her: 'Sweetheart, you'll forget this'. 'No', said she, 'I shall never forget it while I live'. And pouring forth abundance of tears, promised him to write downe the particulars. Then the King, taking the Duke of Gloucester upon his knee, said: 'Sweetheart, now they will cut off thy father's head', upon which words the childe looked very steadfastly on him. 'Mark, childe, what I say: They will cut off my head, and perhaps make thee a King; but marke what I say. You must not be a King so long as your brothers, Charles and James do live; for they will cut off your brothers' heads (when they can catch them), and cut off thy head, too, at the last; and, therefore I charge you do not be made a King by them'. At which the childe, sighing, said — 'I will be torn to pieces first', which falling so unexpectedly from one so young, it mayde the King rejoyce exceedingly".

To this account Herbert adds that the King spoke to them "concerning their duty and loyal observance to the Queen their Mother". He also shared between them the poor contents of a small box of jewels, mostly broken Garters and Georges, valuable only for the precious stones with which they were set, but all that he had to leave them. The Princess received in addition, two seals decorated with diamonds, which he was wont to wear. Then the bitter moment of parting come, and anxious to end a scene, the poignancy of which was so heartrending, the King was retreating to his bed chamber, when his little daughter, tried to breaking-point, again burst forth into anguished sobs. Instantly coming back, Charles once more took her in his arms, pressed her to his bosom, and, kissing her pale wet cheeks, experienced the climax of his sorrow, as he turned finally to wrench himself from her.

As the poor little pair, already bereaved, left the Palace, even the flinty hearts of some bystanders who had witnessed the King's trial unmoved, were softened to mark such sorrow.

This is the account that the Princess wrote of the saddest experience of all her sad little life.

"What the King said to me January 29th, 1648-9, being the last time I had the happiness to see him. He told me he was glad I was come, and although he had not time to say much, yet somewhat he had to say to me, which he could not to another, or leave in writing, because he feared their cruelty was such, as they would not have permitted him to write to me. He wished me not to grieve and torment myself for him; for that would be a glorious death that he should dye; it being for the Lawes and Liberties of this Land, and for maintaining the true Protestant religion. He bids me read Bishop Andrewe's sermons, Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, and Bishop Laud's book against Fisher, which would ground me against Popery. He told me he had forgiven all his enemies, and hoped God would forgive them also; and commanded us and all the rest of my brothers and sisters to forgive them. He bid me tell my mother that his thoughts had never strayed from her, and that his love should be the same to the last. Withall, he commanded me and my brother to be obedient to her, and bid me send his blessing to the rest of my brothers and sisters, with commendation to all his friends. So, after he had given me his blessing, I took my leave.

"Further, he commended us all to forgive those people, but never to trust them; for they had been most false to him and to those that gave them power, and he feared also to their own souls; and he desired me not to grieve for him, for he should die a martyr, and that he doubted not but the Lord would settle his Throne upon his son, and that we should be all happier than we could have expected to have been if he had lived; with many other things, which at present I cannot remember".

Elizabeth".

The Princess also wrote :—

"The King said to the Duke of Gloucester, that he would say nothing to him, but what was for the good of his soul; he told him that he heard the Army intended to make him King: but it was a thing not for him to take upon him, if he regarded the welfare of his soul, for he had two brothers before him, and therefore commanded him upon his blessing, never to accept of it unless it redounded lawfully upon him: And commanded him to fear the Lord, and He would provide for him".

Before they parted, the King had given his daughter his pocket Bible, and afterwards the books, of which he had spoken, were sent to her.

There is no record, nor could there be, of the hours of anguished torment passed by the Princess on her return with Henry to Syon House. One may be sure that the boy, sufficiently miserable himself, did what he could dumbly to comfort his sister; and that Northumberland and his wife shewed the poor children every thoughtful kindness that deep feeling for them could suggest. Doubtless Elizabeth passed that dire January 30th in ceaseless prayer for her Father - that he might yet be rescued from the block by a Royalist uprising; or, if it were God's will that he should die as a martyr for the Church of England, that he might receive heavenly support in his last hours. With what dread and trembling she awaited news from London on that fatal Tuesday may be imagined - hope alternating with fear. When the terrible tidings from London were broken to her, with infinite pity, as one may be assured, by the Earl of Northumberland, she, in the words of Sir Theodore Mayerne, who again attended her, "fell into great sorrow", which increased the many bodily ailments, amongst which was a tumour, from which she suffered.

Never from that day onward did the Princess wear anything but deep black, which truly symbolised the profundity of her grief. But little consideration did Elizabeth's sufferings receive from Parliament. The Earl had been obliged to notify the self-constituted Council of State that since Parliament had not made the payments voted to him for the maintenance of the royal captives, he was now destitute of means, not only to provide for them, but for his own family. He also informed them that he could not "upon any terms", be any longer answerable for the safe-keeping of the Duke of Gloucester in view of his "apprehension of practices upon him".

In consequence of this letter and of the Earl's defection from the Parliament, on the question of the King's so-called trial and execution, the usurping powers had seriously to reconsider the situation.

The Princess, greatly distressed at the idea of losing their kind and understanding Governor, repeated her former request to be allowed to join her sister in Holland. But the Council were divided on the subject; some being in favour of granting her plea, on the ground of saving the cost of her maintenance; others opposing it. On a vote being taken, Elizabeth's request was refused by five votes.

Now Parliament had to consider who should be made custodian of the royal children, and after having met with refusals from two quarters, the House heard read to them from Sir Henry Vane a letter which Northumberland had written to him. So concerned was he that the orphan pair should be treated with all kindness, that the Earl had been in communication with his sister, the Countess of Leicester, who had expressed herself as willing to take charge of them. This letter had been reinforced by one from Elizabeth herself, trusting that Northumberland's proposal would be favourably received.

As a result of the two letters, she and her brother were committed to the charge of the Earl and Countess of Leicester, and were driven by coach through the lovely county of Kent, to the Earl's county seat of Penshurst Place, where they arrived on June 14th.

The regicides had now abolished Royalty in England, hence the Countess received strictest commands to forbear in future from shewing any deference to which the children heretofore had been accustomed. They were no longer to receive their titles, nor to be given their meals at a separate table. Their attendants were reduced to a minimum, and all else was done that vengeful minds could conceive to hurt and humiliate the innocent children, and to add, were it possible, to the misery of their lives - or at least to that of the supersensitive Princess.
