

Chapter XII.Towards the End.

Mercifully for the royal children, the Countess of Leicester, of whom they saw more than of the Earl, proved a most kind and compassionate guardian. So concerned was she for their welfare that she actually succeeded in having some of the plenishings sent from St. James' for their additional comfort.

Elizabeth, for her brother's sake, made every effort to be cheerful, but by this time she was so sickly and her body so frail that she herself could go about but little with him. So she was relieved that he found more vigorous companionship amongst some of the younger members of their custodians' enormous family. With them, he was never tired of ranging the lovely park; and amongst its magnificent oaks, he was shewn with pride the gigantic Bear Oak, which was known to have flourished before Queen Mary came to the Throne. Although, secretly, he felt a longing for the more exciting denizens of St. James' Park, yet he took an interest in the pheasants and partridges which abounded in the grounds, and found a real fascination in watching the fish kept for food in the ponds. But he had no fancy to eat either when they were served at table, the carp, because he had seen how tame many were, and the pike because they were so voracious. He took an aversion to these fish when one day he saw one rise out of the water, and seize a moor-hen to devour it.

Yet with these many interests available, so devoted was Henry, young as he was, to his sister, and so conscious of what he owed her, that he would never leave her overlong by herself, but did all he could to help her through days that were to her but weariness of the flesh. He was specially attracted by the herony where the huge untidy nests in the treetops fascinated him, though he was disappointed to find them all deserted when he had looked to see the young birds. In view of the lack of this interest, his disappointment was the less that the herony was too far afield for his sister to reach. Indeed, Elizabeth could get no further than the formal gardens immediately round the house, but when the days were sufficiently warm, she would sit out by the fountain at play, and here Henry would always bear her company for part of the time.

Soon after their arrival when they were once thus together, Henry asked:-

"Bess, will you tell me about Sir Philip Sidney? The boys shewed me his portrait, and they all seem so proud of him, I did not like to ask why".

So the Princess told her brother that he was one of the brightest gems of Queen Elizabeth's court; a poet, a statesman, and a most heroic soldier, though she never knew that some words of his were repeated by their Father shortly before his execution. She concluded by saying:-

"Sir Philip, when he was only 32, was wounded at the battle of Zutphen in Holland, and on being offered water to quench his thirst as he lay on the ground, he would have it passed on to a soldier whose want, he said, was greater than his own. He died twenty-five days afterwards, and was buried with great pomp in St. Paul's Cathedral".

The royal pair had their meals in the fine old baronial hall, with its huge fire-hearth in the centre, the smoke from which escaped through the open louvre in the roof. But evidently, as the following extract from a Royalist newspaper suggests, against all the Parliament's orders, they sat alone at the table on the raised dias, and not with the family and household at one of the long oak tables running down the hall. The inquisitor mentioned by the paper, Mercurius Pragmaticus, was the notorious Speaker of the House of Commons.

"There is special care taken the two royal prisoners shall be degraded of all princely honour, and for that purpose that profound hypocrite Lenthall went to the Countess of Leicester's, that he might observe in what manner the royal babes were attended, and whether the noble countess was careful to observe the order of Parliament, whereby she is authorized to take them to her own table as part of her household.

"But the pale-faced rebel was frustrated of his expectation; for he found the two princes served as befits their state, sitting at a table alone, without any company save their waiters. This made the rebel to rage exceedingly; and he began to profess that she should be sure of a great check from the Parliament. To which, like a noble lady, she answered, she did not fear any check, but withal desired to be excused in what she did, saying, "She did conceive a difference and distinction ought to be made betwixt her and her household, and the children of her sovereign".

To which the traitorous rogue answered, that they were no more than the children of other noblemen, since their Father had lost his life as a traitor and tyrant, and the wisdom of the Parliament had thought fit to null kingship for the future; and further, that they should have no other attendants, nor would the Parliament (he knew) suffer such ceremonies, so much scenting of monarchy, to be used, lest people's hearts shall chance to be corrupted, and again incline to their ancient government.

"This and a great deal more being spoken in a very malicious manner, he took leave of the Countess, saying it should be mended; therefore it is feared a devouring Junto vote will sweep the royal sprigs away from that gallant countess into the hands of some Coridon of state, who will use them as his masters please. Thus these royal infants are likely to be tossed about as their father of happy memory was in his life time, until these devils have an opportunity to murder them as they did his majesty".

In the meanwhile, Queen Henrietta Maria, who mourned her husband most truly, and realised what his execution meant to the Princess, was greatly distressed on account of her "poor Elizabeth" and did all she could to urge her son Charles to procure her rescue, but, unhappily, he was powerless to do so.

Life passed very monotonously for the royal orphans, in the seclusion of Penshurst, forbidden the access of any of their Father's friends; but Lady Leicester, in her thoughtful solicitude, had provided for them in her kinsman, Mr. Lovel, an excellent tutor and a kindly friend.

So widespread was the feeling for the poor little Princess, to whose reputation for learning and all virtues, was now added admiration for her spirit of resignation, that, once more as formerly, many tributes were paid to her. When it was adversity that called these forth, they must surely be accounted genuine indeed. One of them came from the pen of the son of Francis Quarles, who, in the year of the Princess' birth, had published his "Emblems". John Quarles' work, "A Kingly Bed of Misery: a Dream with an Elegy upon the late King Charles", was dedicated to :

"That patroness of Virtue, and most illustrious Princess Elizabeth, the sorrowful daughter of our late martyred Charles, King of England".

One may be sure that the subject of this book made an infinitely greater appeal to the Princess than ever the most glowing of dedications could have done.

The Princess' health, increasingly undermined by the intensity of her sorrow, all the more harmful because largely suppressed, was now very bad; and another act of cruelty on the part of Parliament had actually denied her the attendance of Sir Theodore Mayerne, the doctor who had known her from birth. But the tender-hearted Countess of Leicester did all she could to remedy this deprivation; and such was the extent of her kindness that, on this account Parliament felt the royal children's removal to some sterner custody was essential. Actually, according to Royalist journals, the family of the regicide Usurper himself was contemplated, but nothing was done at this time.

For years past now, the Princess had yearned to receive the Holy Sacrament, but being denied the ministrations of a priest, of course this was impossible. So she regularly resorted to making Acts of Spiritual Communion, as instructed by the rubric at the end of the Office for the Communion of the Sick, and as her Father had told her was his practice in the same circumstances.

^ but In continuance of her old habit, for which Henry begged, she would tell him some ancient story the last thing at night, ^ his old delight in the tales of Robin Hood and his merry men was superseded by a devotion to King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table.

8 "Tell me, Bess", he would request, "of the King's charge to his knights", a recital he had often heard but of which he never ~~was~~ tired. So once again the Princess repeated it.

"The King rose and spoke to all at the Round Table, charging them ever to be true and noble knights, to commit no sort of outrage nor unjust onslaught, nor ever to be cruel; but to shew mercy to every one that sought it upon pain of forfeiting the company of his court. Always, at all times, too, must they succour ladies and young damsels on pain of death. To all this he swore them, knight by knight, and so with prayer and blessing, he instituted the most noble Order of the Round Table".

"I will keep troth with King Arthur", avowed the young Duke, "and I will strive to be as Sir Galahad".

As he said this his sister kissed him fondly, and answered:

"Already you are young Sir Galahad to me, my Harry".

But best of the Arthurian legends, Elizabeth herself loved to tell him of the Vision of the Holy Grail, the Chalice in which the Saviour gave His Blood to drink at the last Supper. And this is how she told it to her brother.

"It was one night at Camelot when they were at supper, after Evensong in the great minster, that they heard the clash and clangour of peals of thunder. Then, made glorious in the rays of a golden sunbeam, there came into the hall, borne aloft without hands, the Sangrail, covered with white samite that no eyes might behold it. And the hall was filled with the smoke and sweet perfume of incense, but when the holy vessel had been thus borne through the hall, it was suddenly taken out of sight, no one saw whither".

When she had finished this recital, Henry said:-

"Methinks, Bess, that by reason of your great longing for the Holy Sacrament, you, too, have seen this sacred Vision".

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