

Chapter XIV. 'Le Roi est mort--vive le Roi.'

Toward daylight of the same morning, Tom Canty stirred out of a heavy sleep and opened his eyes in the dark. He lay silent a few moments, trying to analyse his confused thoughts and impressions, and get some sort of meaning out of them; then suddenly he burst out in a rapturous but guarded voice--

"I see it all, I see it all! Now God be thanked, I am indeed awake at last! Come, joy! vanish, sorrow! Ho, Nan! Bet! kick off your straw and hie ye hither to my side, till I do pour into your unbelieving ears the wildest madcap dream that ever the spirits of night did conjure up to astonish the soul of man withal! . . . Ho, Nan, I say! Bet!"

A dim form appeared at his side, and a voice said--

"Wilt deign to deliver thy commands?"

"Commands? . . . O, woe is me, I know thy voice! Speak thou--who am I?"

"Thou? In sooth, yesternight wert thou the Prince of Wales; to-day art thou my most gracious liege, Edward, King of England."

Tom buried his head among his pillows, murmuring plaintively--

"Alack, it was no dream! Go to thy rest, sweet sir--leave me to my sorrows."

Tom slept again, and after a time he had this pleasant dream. He thought it was summer, and he was playing, all alone, in the fair meadow called Goodman's Fields, when a dwarf only a foot high, with long red whiskers and a humped back, appeared to him suddenly and said, "Dig by that stump." He did so, and found twelve bright new pennies--wonderful riches! Yet this was not the best of it; for the dwarf said--

"I know thee. Thou art a good lad, and a deserving; thy distresses shall end, for the day of thy reward is come. Dig here every seventh day, and thou shalt find always the same treasure, twelve bright new pennies. Tell none--keep the secret."

Then the dwarf vanished, and Tom flew to Offal Court with his prize, saying to himself, "Every night will I give my father a penny; he will think I begged it, it will glad his heart, and I shall no more be beaten. One penny every week the good priest that teacheth me shall have; mother, Nan, and Bet the other four. We be done with hunger and rags, now, done with fears and frets and savage usage."

In his dream he reached his sordid home all out of breath, but with eyes

dancing with grateful enthusiasm; cast four of his pennies into his mother's lap and cried out--

"They are for thee!--all of them, every one!--for thee and Nan and Bet --and honestly come by, not begged nor stolen!"

The happy and astonished mother strained him to her breast and exclaimed--

"It waxeth late--may it please your Majesty to rise?"

Ah! that was not the answer he was expecting. The dream had snapped asunder--he was awake.

He opened his eyes--the richly clad First Lord of the Bedchamber was kneeling by his couch. The gladness of the lying dream faded away--the poor boy recognised that he was still a captive and a king. The room was filled with courtiers clothed in purple mantles--the mourning colour--and with noble servants of the monarch. Tom sat up in bed and gazed out from the heavy silken curtains upon this fine company.

The weighty business of dressing began, and one courtier after another knelt and paid his court and offered to the little King his condolences upon his heavy loss, whilst the dressing proceeded. In the beginning, a

shirt was taken up by the Chief Equerry in Waiting, who passed it to the First Lord of the Buckhounds, who passed it to the Second Gentleman of the Bedchamber, who passed it to the Head Ranger of Windsor Forest, who passed it to the Third Groom of the Stole, who passed it to the Chancellor Royal of the Duchy of Lancaster, who passed it to the Master of the Wardrobe, who passed it to Norroy King-at-Arms, who passed it to the Constable of the Tower, who passed it to the Chief Steward of the Household, who passed it to the Hereditary Grand Diaperer, who passed it to the Lord High Admiral of England, who passed it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who passed it to the First Lord of the Bedchamber, who took what was left of it and put it on Tom. Poor little wondering chap, it reminded him of passing buckets at a fire.

Each garment in its turn had to go through this slow and solemn process; consequently Tom grew very weary of the ceremony; so weary that he felt an almost gushing gratefulness when he at last saw his long silken hose begin the journey down the line and knew that the end of the matter was drawing near. But he exulted too soon. The First Lord of the Bedchamber received the hose and was about to encase Tom's legs in them, when a sudden flush invaded his face and he hurriedly hustled the things back into the hands of the Archbishop of Canterbury with an astounded look and a whispered, "See, my lord!" pointing to a something connected with the hose. The Archbishop paled, then flushed, and passed the hose to the Lord High Admiral, whispering, "See, my lord!" The Admiral passed the

hose to the Hereditary Grand Diaperer, and had hardly breath enough in his body to ejaculate, "See, my lord!" The hose drifted backward along the line, to the Chief Steward of the Household, the Constable of the Tower, Norroy King-at-Arms, the Master of the Wardrobe, the Chancellor Royal of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Third Groom of the Stole, the Head Ranger of Windsor Forest, the Second Gentleman of the Bedchamber, the First Lord of the Buckhounds,--accompanied always with that amazed and frightened "See! see!"--till they finally reached the hands of the Chief Equerry in Waiting, who gazed a moment, with a pallid face, upon what had caused all this dismay, then hoarsely whispered, "Body of my life, a tag gone from a truss-point!--to the Tower with the Head Keeper of the King's Hose!"--after which he leaned upon the shoulder of the First Lord of the Buckhounds to regather his vanished strength whilst fresh hose, without any damaged strings to them, were brought.

But all things must have an end, and so in time Tom Canty was in a condition to get out of bed. The proper official poured water, the proper official engineered the washing, the proper official stood by with a towel, and by-and-by Tom got safely through the purifying stage and was ready for the services of the Hairdresser-royal. When he at length emerged from this master's hands, he was a gracious figure and as pretty as a girl, in his mantle and trunks of purple satin, and purple-plumed cap. He now moved in state toward his breakfast-room, through the midst of the courtly assemblage; and as he passed, these fell back, leaving his

way free, and dropped upon their knees.

After breakfast he was conducted, with regal ceremony, attended by his great officers and his guard of fifty Gentlemen Pensioners bearing gilt battle-axes, to the throne-room, where he proceeded to transact business of state. His 'uncle,' Lord Hertford, took his stand by the throne, to assist the royal mind with wise counsel.

The body of illustrious men named by the late King as his executors appeared, to ask Tom's approval of certain acts of theirs--rather a form, and yet not wholly a form, since there was no Protector as yet. The Archbishop of Canterbury made report of the decree of the Council of Executors concerning the obsequies of his late most illustrious Majesty, and finished by reading the signatures of the Executors, to wit: the Archbishop of Canterbury; the Lord Chancellor of England; William Lord St. John; John Lord Russell; Edward Earl of Hertford; John Viscount Lisle; Cuthbert Bishop of Durham--

Tom was not listening--an earlier clause of the document was puzzling him. At this point he turned and whispered to Lord Hertford--

"What day did he say the burial hath been appointed for?"

"The sixteenth of the coming month, my liege."

"'Tis a strange folly. Will he keep?"

Poor chap, he was still new to the customs of royalty; he was used to seeing the forlorn dead of Offal Court hustled out of the way with a very different sort of expedition. However, the Lord Hertford set his mind at rest with a word or two.

A secretary of state presented an order of the Council appointing the morrow at eleven for the reception of the foreign ambassadors, and desired the King's assent.

Tom turned an inquiring look toward Hertford, who whispered--

"Your Majesty will signify consent. They come to testify their royal masters' sense of the heavy calamity which hath visited your Grace and the realm of England."

Tom did as he was bidden. Another secretary began to read a preamble concerning the expenses of the late King's household, which had amounted to 28,000 pounds during the preceding six months--a sum so vast that it made Tom Canty gasp; he gasped again when the fact appeared that 20,000 pounds of this money was still owing and unpaid; {4} and once more when it appeared that the King's coffers were about empty, and his twelve

hundred servants much embarrassed for lack of the wages due them. Tom spoke out, with lively apprehension--

"We be going to the dogs, 'tis plain. 'Tis meet and necessary that we take a smaller house and set the servants at large, sith they be of no value but to make delay, and trouble one with offices that harass the spirit and shame the soul, they misbecoming any but a doll, that hath nor brains nor hands to help itself withal. I remember me of a small house that standeth over against the fish-market, by Billingsgate--"

A sharp pressure upon Tom's arm stopped his foolish tongue and sent a blush to his face; but no countenance there betrayed any sign that this strange speech had been remarked or given concern.

A secretary made report that forasmuch as the late King had provided in his will for conferring the ducal degree upon the Earl of Hertford and raising his brother, Sir Thomas Seymour, to the peerage, and likewise Hertford's son to an earldom, together with similar aggrandisements to other great servants of the Crown, the Council had resolved to hold a sitting on the 16th of February for the delivering and confirming of these honours, and that meantime, the late King not having granted, in writing, estates suitable to the support of these dignities, the Council, knowing his private wishes in that regard, had thought proper to grant to Seymour '500 pound lands,' and to Hertford's son '800 pound lands, and



300 pound of the next bishop's lands which should fall vacant,'--his present Majesty being willing. {5}

Tom was about to blurt out something about the propriety of paying the late King's debts first, before squandering all this money, but a timely touch upon his arm, from the thoughtful Hertford, saved him this indiscretion; wherefore he gave the royal assent, without spoken comment, but with much inward discomfort. While he sat reflecting a moment over the ease with which he was doing strange and glittering miracles, a happy thought shot into his mind: why not make his mother Duchess of Offal Court, and give her an estate? But a sorrowful thought swept it instantly away: he was only a king in name, these grave veterans and great nobles were his masters; to them his mother was only the creature of a diseased mind; they would simply listen to his project with unbelieving ears, then send for the doctor.

The dull work went tediously on. Petitions were read, and proclamations, patents, and all manner of wordy, repetitious, and wearisome papers relating to the public business; and at last Tom sighed pathetically and murmured to himself, "In what have I offended, that the good God should take me away from the fields and the free air and the sunshine, to shut me up here and make me a king and afflict me so?" Then his poor muddled head nodded a while and presently drooped to his shoulder; and the business of the empire came to a standstill for want of that august

factor, the ratifying power. Silence ensued around the slumbering child, and the sages of the realm ceased from their deliberations.

During the forenoon, Tom had an enjoyable hour, by permission of his keepers, Hertford and St. John, with the Lady Elizabeth and the little Lady Jane Grey; though the spirits of the princesses were rather subdued by the mighty stroke that had fallen upon the royal house; and at the end of the visit his 'elder sister'--afterwards the 'Bloody Mary' of history--chilled him with a solemn interview which had but one merit in his eyes, its brevity. He had a few moments to himself, and then a slim lad of about twelve years of age was admitted to his presence, whose clothing, except his snowy ruff and the laces about his wrists, was of black,--doublet, hose, and all. He bore no badge of mourning but a knot of purple ribbon on his shoulder. He advanced hesitatingly, with head bowed and bare, and dropped upon one knee in front of Tom. Tom sat still and contemplated him soberly a moment. Then he said--

"Rise, lad. Who art thou. What wouldst have?"

The boy rose, and stood at graceful ease, but with an aspect of concern in his face. He said--

"Of a surety thou must remember me, my lord. I am thy whipping-boy."

"My WHIPPING-boy?"

"The same, your Grace. I am Humphrey--Humphrey Marlow."

Tom perceived that here was someone whom his keepers ought to have posted him about. The situation was delicate. What should he do?--pretend he knew this lad, and then betray by his every utterance that he had never heard of him before? No, that would not do. An idea came to his relief: accidents like this might be likely to happen with some frequency, now that business urgencies would often call Hertford and St. John from his side, they being members of the Council of Executors; therefore perhaps it would be well to strike out a plan himself to meet the requirements of such emergencies. Yes, that would be a wise course--he would practise on this boy, and see what sort of success he might achieve. So he stroked his brow perplexedly a moment or two, and presently said--

"Now I seem to remember thee somewhat--but my wit is clogged and dim with suffering--"

"Alack, my poor master!" ejaculated the whipping-boy, with feeling; adding, to himself, "In truth 'tis as they said--his mind is gone--alas, poor soul! But misfortune catch me, how am I forgetting! They said one

must not seem to observe that aught is wrong with him."

"'Tis strange how my memory doth wanton with me these days," said Tom.

"But mind it not--I mend apace--a little clue doth often serve to bring me back again the things and names which had escaped me. (And not they, only, forsooth, but e'en such as I ne'er heard before--as this lad shall see.) Give thy business speech."

"'Tis matter of small weight, my liege, yet will I touch upon it, an' it please your Grace. Two days gone by, when your Majesty faulted thrice in your Greek--in the morning lessons,--dost remember it?"

"Y-e-s--methinks I do. (It is not much of a lie--an' I had meddled with the Greek at all, I had not faulted simply thrice, but forty times.)

Yes, I do recall it, now--go on."

"The master, being wroth with what he termed such slovenly and doltish work, did promise that he would soundly whip me for it--and--"

"Whip THEE!" said Tom, astonished out of his presence of mind. "Why should he whip THEE for faults of mine?"

"Ah, your Grace forgetteth again. He always scourgeth me when thou dost fail in thy lessons."

"True, true--I had forgot. Thou teachest me in private--then if I fail, he argueth that thy office was lamely done, and--"

"Oh, my liege, what words are these? I, the humblest of thy servants, presume to teach THEE?"

"Then where is thy blame? What riddle is this? Am I in truth gone mad, or is it thou? Explain--speak out."

"But, good your Majesty, there's nought that needeth simplifying.--None may visit the sacred person of the Prince of Wales with blows; wherefore, when he faulteth, 'tis I that take them; and meet it is and right, for that it is mine office and my livelihood." {1}

Tom stared at the tranquil boy, observing to himself, "Lo, it is a wonderful thing,--a most strange and curious trade; I marvel they have not hired a boy to take my combings and my dressings for me--would heaven they would!--an' they will do this thing, I will take my lashings in mine own person, giving God thanks for the change." Then he said aloud--

"And hast thou been beaten, poor friend, according to the promise?"

"No, good your Majesty, my punishment was appointed for this day, and

peradventure it may be annulled, as unbefitting the season of mourning that is come upon us; I know not, and so have made bold to come hither and remind your Grace about your gracious promise to intercede in my behalf--"

"With the master? To save thee thy whipping?"

"Ah, thou dost remember!"

"My memory mendeth, thou seest. Set thy mind at ease--thy back shall go unscathed--I will see to it."

"Oh, thanks, my good lord!" cried the boy, dropping upon his knee again.

"Mayhap I have ventured far enow; and yet--"

Seeing Master Humphrey hesitate, Tom encouraged him to go on, saying he was "in the granting mood."

"Then will I speak it out, for it lieth near my heart. Sith thou art no more Prince of Wales but King, thou canst order matters as thou wilt, with none to say thee nay; wherefore it is not in reason that thou wilt longer vex thyself with dreary studies, but wilt burn thy books and turn thy mind to things less irksome. Then am I ruined, and mine orphan sisters with me!"

"Ruined? Prithee how?"

"My back is my bread, O my gracious liege! if it go idle, I starve. An' thou cease from study mine office is gone thou'lt need no whipping-boy. Do not turn me away!"

Tom was touched with this pathetic distress. He said, with a right royal burst of generosity--

"Discomfort thyself no further, lad. Thine office shall be permanent in thee and thy line for ever." Then he struck the boy a light blow on the shoulder with the flat of his sword, exclaiming, "Rise, Humphrey Marlow, Hereditary Grand Whipping-Boy to the Royal House of England! Banish sorrow--I will betake me to my books again, and study so ill that they must in justice treble thy wage, so mightily shall the business of thine office be augmented."

The grateful Humphrey responded fervidly--

"Thanks, O most noble master, this princely lavishness doth far surpass my most distempered dreams of fortune. Now shall I be happy all my days, and all the house of Marlow after me."

Tom had wit enough to perceive that here was a lad who could be useful to him. He encouraged Humphrey to talk, and he was nothing loath. He was delighted to believe that he was helping in Tom's 'cure'; for always, as soon as he had finished calling back to Tom's diseased mind the various particulars of his experiences and adventures in the royal school-room and elsewhere about the palace, he noticed that Tom was then able to 'recall' the circumstances quite clearly. At the end of an hour Tom found himself well freighted with very valuable information concerning personages and matters pertaining to the Court; so he resolved to draw instruction from this source daily; and to this end he would give order to admit Humphrey to the royal closet whenever he might come, provided the Majesty of England was not engaged with other people. Humphrey had hardly been dismissed when my Lord Hertford arrived with more trouble for Tom.

He said that the Lords of the Council, fearing that some overwrought report of the King's damaged health might have leaked out and got abroad, they deemed it wise and best that his Majesty should begin to dine in public after a day or two--his wholesome complexion and vigorous step, assisted by a carefully guarded repose of manner and ease and grace of demeanour, would more surely quiet the general pulse--in case any evil rumours HAD gone about--than any other scheme that could be devised.

Then the Earl proceeded, very delicately, to instruct Tom as to the



observances proper to the stately occasion, under the rather thin disguise of 'reminding' him concerning things already known to him; but to his vast gratification it turned out that Tom needed very little help in this line--he had been making use of Humphrey in that direction, for Humphrey had mentioned that within a few days he was to begin to dine in public; having gathered it from the swift-winged gossip of the Court. Tom kept these facts to himself, however.

Seeing the royal memory so improved, the Earl ventured to apply a few tests to it, in an apparently casual way, to find out how far its amendment had progressed. The results were happy, here and there, in spots--spots where Humphrey's tracks remained--and on the whole my lord was greatly pleased and encouraged. So encouraged was he, indeed, that he spoke up and said in a quite hopeful voice--

"Now am I persuaded that if your Majesty will but tax your memory yet a little further, it will resolve the puzzle of the Great Seal--a loss which was of moment yesterday, although of none to-day, since its term of service ended with our late lord's life. May it please your Grace to make the trial?"

Tom was at sea--a Great Seal was something which he was totally unacquainted with. After a moment's hesitation he looked up innocently and asked--

"What was it like, my lord?"

The Earl started, almost imperceptibly, muttering to himself, "Alack, his wits are flown again!--it was ill wisdom to lead him on to strain them" --then he deftly turned the talk to other matters, with the purpose of sweeping the unlucky seal out of Tom's thoughts--a purpose which easily succeeded.