

JANE SEYMOUR
BY
WILLIAM
HARRISON
AINSWORTH

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

I.

Of Henry's Attachment to Jane Seymour.

ON the anniversary of Saint George, 1536, and exactly seven years from the opening of this chronicle, Henry assembled the knights-companions within Windsor Castle to hold the grand feast of the most noble Order of the Garter.

Many important events had occurred in the wide interval thus suffered to elapse. Wolsey had long since sunk under his reverses—for he never regained the royal favour after his dismissal—and had expired at Leicester Abbey, on the 26th November 1530.

But the sufferings of Catherine of Arragon were prolonged up to the commencement of the year under consideration. After the divorce and the elevation of Anne Boleyn to the throne in her stead, she withdrew to Kimbolten Castle, where she dwelt in the greatest retirement, under the style of the Princess Dowager. Finding her end approaching, she sent a humble message to the king, imploring him to allow her one last interview with her daughter, that she might bestow her blessing upon her; but the request was refused. A touching letter, however, which she wrote to the king on her death-bed, moved him to tears; and having ejaculated a few expressions of his sense of her many noble qualities, he retired to his closet to indulge his grief in secret. Solemn obsequies were ordered to be performed at Windsor and Greenwich on the day of her interment, and the king and the whole of his retinue put on mourning for her.

With this arrangement Anne Boleyn cared not to comply. Though she had attained the summit of her ambition; though the divorce had been pronounced, and she was crowned queen; though she had given birth to a daughter—the Princess Elizabeth, afterwards the illustrious queen of that name two years before; and though she could have no reasonable apprehensions from her, the injured Catherine, during her lifetime, had always been an object of dread to her. She heard of her death with undisguised satisfaction, clapped her hands, exclaiming to her attendants, "Now I am indeed queen!" and put the crowning point to her unfeeling conduct by decorating herself and her dames in the gayest apparel on the day of the funeral.

Alas! she little knew that at that very moment the work of retribution commenced, and that the wrongs of the injured queen, whose memory she thus outraged, were soon to be terribly and bloodily avenged.

Other changes had likewise taken place, which may be here recorded. The Earl of Surrey had made the tour of France, Italy, and the Empire, and had fully kept his word, by proclaiming the supremacy of the Fair Geraldine's beauty at all tilts and tournaments, at which he constantly bore away the prize. But the greatest reward, and that which he hoped would crown his fidelity—the hand of his mistress—was not reserved for him.

At the expiration of three years, he returned home, polished by travel, and accounted one of the bravest and most accomplished cavaliers of the day. His reputation had preceded him, and he was received with marks of the highest distinction and favour by Henry, as well as by Anne Boleyn. But the king was still averse to the match, and forbade the Fair Geraldine to return to court.

Finding so much opposition on all sides, the earl was at last brought to assent to the wish of the Fair Geraldine, that their engagement should be broken off. In her letters, she assured him that her love had undergone no abatement—and never would do so—but that she felt they must give up all idea of an union.

These letters, probably the result of some manoeuvring on his own part, set on foot by the royal mandate, were warmly seconded by the Duke of Norfolk, and after many and long solicitations, he succeeded in wringing from his son a reluctant acquiescence to the arrangement.

The disappointment produced its natural consequences on the ardent temperament of the young earl, and completely chilled and blighted his feelings. He became moody and discontented; took little share in the amusement and pastimes going forward; and from being the blithest cavalier at court, became the saddest. The change in his demeanour did not escape the notice of Anne Boleyn, who easily divined the cause, and she essayed by raillery and other arts to wean him from his grief. But all was for some time of no avail. The earl continued inconsolable. At last, however, by the instrumentality of the queen and his father, he was contracted to the Lady Frances Vere, daughter of the Earl of Oxford, and was married to her in 1535.

Long before this the Duke of Richmond had been wedded to the Lady Mary Howard.

For some time previous to the present era of this chronicle, Anne Boleyn had observed a growing coolness towards her on the part of the king, and latterly it had become evident that his passion for her was fast subsiding, if indeed it had not altogether expired.

Though Anne had never truly loved her royal consort, and though at that very time she was secretly encouraging the regards of another, she felt troubled by this change, and watched all the king's movements with jealous anxiety, to ascertain if any one had supplanted her in his affections.

At length her vigilance was rewarded by discovering a rival in one of the loveliest of her dames, Jane Seymour. This fair creature, the daughter of Sir John Seymour, of Wolff Hall, in Wiltshire, and who was afterwards, it is almost needless to say, raised to as high a dignity as Anne Boleyn herself, was now in the very pride of her beauty. Tall, exquisitely proportioned, with a complexion of the utmost brilliancy and delicacy, large liquid blue eyes, bright chestnut tresses, and lovely features, she possessed charms that could not fail to captivate the amorous monarch. It seems marvellous that Anne Boleyn should have such an attendant; but perhaps she felt confident in her own attractions.

Skilled in intrigue herself, Anne, now that her eyes were opened, perceived all the allurements thrown out by Jane to ensnare the king, and she intercepted many a furtive glance between them. Still she did not dare to interfere. The fierceness of Henry's

temper kept her in awe, and she knew well that the slightest opposition would only make him the more determined to run counter to her will. Trusting, therefore, to get rid of Jane Seymour by some stratagem, she resolved not to attempt to dismiss her, except as a last resource.

A slight incident occurred, which occasioned a departure from the prudent course she had laid down to herself.

Accompanied by her dames, she was traversing the great gallery of the palace at Greenwich, when she caught the reflection of Jane Seymour, who was following her, in a mirror, regarding a jewelled miniature. She instantly turned round at the sight, and Jane, in great confusion, thrust the picture into her bosom.

"Ah I what have you there?" cried Anne.

"A picture of my father, Sir John Seymour," replied Jane, blushing deeply.

"Let me look at it," cried Anne, snatching the picture from her. "Ah! call you this your father? To my thinking it is much more like my royal husband. Answer me frankly, minion—answer me, as you value your life! Did the king give you this?"

"I must decline answering the question," replied Jane, who by this time had recovered her composure.

"Ah! am I to be thus insolently treated by one of my own dames?" cried Anne.

"I intend no disrespect to your majesty," replied Jane, "and I will, since you insist upon it, freely confess that I received the portrait from the king. I did not conceive there could be any harm in doing so, because I saw your majesty present your own portrait, the other day, to Sir Henry Norris."

Anne Boleyn turned as pale as death, and Jane Seymour perceived that she had her in her power.

"I gave the portrait to Sir Henry as a recompense for an important service he rendered me," said Anne, after a slight pause.

"No doubt," replied Jane; "and I marvel not that he should press it so fervently to his lips, seeing he must value the gift highly. The king likewise bestowed his portrait upon me for rendering him a service."

"And what was that?" asked Anne.

"Nay, there your majesty must hold me excused," replied the other. "It were to betray his highness's confidence to declare it. I must refer you to him for explanation."

"Well, you are in the right to keep the secret," said Anne, forcing a laugh. "I dare say there is no harm in the portrait—indeed, I am sure there is not, if it was given with the same intent that mine was bestowed upon Norris. And so we will say no more upon the matter, except that I beg you to be discreet with the king. If others should comment upon your conduct, I may be compelled to dismiss you."

"Your majesty shall be obeyed," said Jane, with a look that intimated that the request had but slight weight with her.

"Catherine will be avenged by means of this woman," muttered Anne as she turned away. "I already feel some of the torments with which she threatened me. And she

suspects Norris. I must impress more caution on him. Ah! when a man loves deeply, as he loves me, due restraint is seldom maintained."

But though alarmed, Anne was by no means aware of the critical position in which she stood. She could not persuade herself that she had entirely lost her influence with the king; and she thought that when his momentary passion had subsided, it would return to its old channels.

She was mistaken. Jane Seymour was absolute mistress of his heart; and Anne was now as great a bar to him as she had before been an attraction. Had her conduct been irreproachable, it might have been difficult to remove her; but, unfortunately, she had placed herself at his mercy, by yielding to the impulses of vanity, and secretly encouraging the passion of Sir Henry Norris, groom of the stole.

This favoured personage was somewhat above the middle Size, squarely and strongly built. His features were regularly and finely formed, and he had a ruddy complexion, brown curling hair, good teeth, and fine eyes of a clear blue. He possessed great personal strength, was expert in all manly exercises, and shone especially at the jousts and the manege. He was of an ardent temperament, and Anne Boleyn had inspired him with so desperate a passion that he set at nought the fearful risk he ran to obtain her favour.

In all this seemed traceable the hand of fate—in Henry's passion for Jane Seymour, and Anne's insane regard for Norris—as if in this way, and by the same means in which she herself had been wronged, the injured Catherine of Arragon was to be avenged.

How far Henry's suspicions of his consort's regard for Norris had been roused did not at the time appear. Whatever he felt in secret, he took care that no outward manifestation should betray him. On the contrary he loaded Norris, who had always been a favourite with him, with new marks of regard, and encouraged rather than interdicted his approach to the queen.

Things were in this state when the court proceeded to Windsor, as before related, on Saint George's day.

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

II.

How Anne Boleyn received Proof of Henry's Passion for Jane Seymour.

On the day after the solemnisation of the Grand Feast of the Order of the Garter, a masqued fete of great splendour and magnificence was held within the castle. The whole of the state apartments were thrown open to the distinguished guests, and universal gaiety prevailed. No restraint was offered to the festivity by the king, for though he was known to be present, he did not choose to declare himself.

The queen sat apart on a fauteuil in the deep embrasure of a window; and as various companies of fantastic characters advanced towards her, she more than once fancied she detected amongst them the king, but the voices convinced her of her mistake. As the evening was wearing, a mask in a blue domino drew near her, and whispered in a devoted and familiar tone, "My queen!"

"Is it you, Norris?" demanded Anne, under her breath.

"It is," he replied. "Oh, madam! I have been gazing at you the whole evening, but have not dared to approach you till now."

"I am sorry you have addressed me at all, Norris," she rejoined. "Your regard for me has been noticed by others, and may reach the king's ears. You must promise never to address me in the language of passion again."

"If I may not utter my love I shall go mad," replied Norris. "After raising me to the verge of Paradise, do not thrust me to the depths of Tartarus."

"I have neither raised you nor do I cast you down," rejoined Anne. "That I am sensible of your devotion, and grateful for it, I admit, but nothing more. My love and allegiance are due to the king."

"True," replied Norris bitterly; "they are so, but he is wholly insensible to your merits. At this very moment he is pouring his love-vows in the ear of Jane Seymour."

"Ah! is he so?" cried Anne. "Let me have proof of his perfidy, and I may incline a more favourable ear to you."

"I will instantly obtain you the proof, madam," replied Norris, bowing and departing.

Scarcely had he quitted the queen, and mixed with the throng of dancers, than he felt a pressure upon his arm, and turning at the touch, beheld a tall monk, the lower part of whose face was muffled up, leaving only a pair of fierce black eyes and a large aquiline nose visible.

"I know what you want, Sir Henry Norris," said the tall monk in a low deep voice; "you wish to give the queen proof of her royal lord's inconstancy. It is easily done. Come with me."

"Who are you?" demanded Norris doubtfully.

"What matters it who I am?" rejoined the other; "I am one of the masquers, and chance to know what is passing around me. I do not inquire into your motives, and therefore you have no right to inquire into mine."

"It is not for my own satisfaction that I desire this proof," said Norris, "because I would rather shield the king's indiscretions than betray them. But the queen has conceived suspicions which she is determined to verify."

"Think not to impose upon me," replied the monk with a sneer. "Bring the queen this way, and she shall be fully satisfied."

"I can run no risk in trusting you," said Norris, "and therefore I accept your offer."

"Say no more," cried the monk disdainfully, "I will await you here."

And Norris returned to the queen.

"Have you discovered anything?" she cried.

"Come with me, madam," said Norris, bowing and taking her hand.

Proceeding thus they glided through the throng of dancers, who respectfully cleared a passage for them as they walked along until they approached the spot where the tall monk was standing. As they drew near him he moved on, and Norris and the queen followed in silence. Passing from the great hall in which the crowd of dancers were assembled, they descended a short flight of steps, at the foot of which the monk paused, and pointed with his right hand to a chamber, partly screened by the folds of a curtain.

At this intimation the queen and her companion stepped quickly on, and as she advanced, Anne Boleyn perceived Jane Seymour and the king seated on a couch within the apartment. Henry was habited like a pilgrim, but he had thrown down his hat, ornamented with the scallop-shell, his vizard, and his staff, and had just forced his fair companion to unmask.

At the sight, Anne was transfixed with jealous rage, and was for the moment almost unconscious of the presence of Norris, or of the monk, who remained behind the curtain, pointing to what was taking place.

"Your majesty is determined to expose my blushes," said Jane Seymour, slightly struggling with her royal lover.

"Nay, I only want to be satisfied that it is really yourself, sweetheart," cried Henry passionately. "It was in mercy to me, I suppose, that you insisted upon shrouding those beauteous features from my view."

"Hear you that, madam?" whispered Norris to Anne.

The queen answered by a convulsive clasp of the hand.

"Your majesty but jests with me," said Jane Seymour. "Jests!" cried Henry passionately.

"By my faith! I never understood the power of beauty till now. No charms ever moved my heart like yours; nor shall I know a moment's peace till you become mine."

"I am grieved to hear it, my liege," replied Jane Seymour, "for I never can be yours, unless as your queen."

Again Norris hazarded a whisper to Anne Boleyn, which was answered by another nervous grasp of the hand.

"That is as much as to say," pursued Jane, seeing the gloomy reverie into which her royal lover was thrown, "I can give your majesty no hopes at all."

"You have been schooled by Anne Boleyn, sweetheart," said Henry.

"How so, my liege?" demanded Jane Seymour.

"Those are the very words she used to me when I wooed her, and which induced me to divorce Catherine of Arragon," replied Henry. "Now they may bring about her own removal."

"Just Heaven!" murmured Anne.

"I dare not listen to your majesty," said Jane Seymour, in a tremulous tone; "and yet, if I dared speak—"

"Speak on, fearlessly, sweetheart," said Henry.

"Then I am well assured," said Jane, "that the queen no longer loves you; nay, that she loves another."

"It is false, minion!" cried Anne Boleyn, rushing forward, while Norris hastily retreated, "it is false! It is you who would deceive the king for your own purposes. But I have fortunately been brought hither to prevent the injury you would do me. Oh, Henry! have I deserved this of you?"

"You have chanced to overhear part of a scene in a masquerade, madam—that is all," said the king.

"I have chanced to arrive most opportunely for myself," said Anne. "As for this slanderous and deceitful minion, I shall dismiss her from my service. If your majesty is determined to prove faithless to me, it shall not be with one of my own dames."

"Catherine of Arragon should have made that speech," retorted Jane Seymour bitterly.

"She had reason to complain that she was supplanted by one much beneath her. And she never played the king falsely."

"Nor have I!" cried Anne fiercely. "If I had my will, I should strike thee dead for the insinuation. Henry, my lord—my love—if you have any regard for me, instantly dismiss Jane Seymour."

"It may not be, madam," replied Henry in a freezing tone; "she has done nothing to deserve dismissal. If any one is to blame in the matter, it is myself."

"And will you allow her to make these accusations against me without punishment?" cried Anne.

"Peace, madam!" cried the king sternly; "and thank my good-nature that I go no further into the matter. If you are weary of the masque, I pray you retire to your own apartments. For myself, I shall lead Jane Seymour to the bransle."

"And if your majesty should need a partner," said Jane, walking up to Anne and speaking in a low tone, "you will doubtless find Sir Henry Norris disengaged."

The queen looked as if stricken by a thunderbolt. She heard the triumphant laugh of her rival; she saw her led forth, all smiles and beauty and triumph, by the king to the dance,

and she covered her face in agony. While she was in this state, a deep voice breathed in her ears, "The vengeance of Catherine of Arragon begins to work!" Looking up, she beheld the tall figure of the monk retreating from the chamber.

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

III.

What passed between Norris and the Tall Monk.

Tottering to the seat which Henry and Jane had just quitted, Anne sank into it. After a little time, having in some degree recovered her composure, she was about to return to the great hall, when Norris appeared.

"I did not deceive you, madam," he said, "when I told you the king was insensible to your charms; he only lives for Jane Seymour."

"Would I could dismiss her!" cried Anne furiously.

"If you were to do so, she would soon be replaced by another," rejoined Norris. "The king delights only in change. With him, the last face is ever the most beautiful."

"You speak fearful treason, sir!" replied Anne; "but I believe it to be the truth."

"Oh, then, madam!" pursued Norris, "since the king is so regardless of you, why trouble yourself about him? There are those who would sacrifice a thousand lives, if they possessed them, for your love."

"I fear it is the same with all men," rejoined Anne. "A woman's heart is a bauble which, when obtained, is speedily tossed aside."

"Your majesty judges our sex too harshly," said Norris. "If I had the same fortune as the king, I should never change."

"The king himself once thought so—once swore so," replied Anne petulantly. "It is the common parlance of lovers. But I may not listen to such discourse longer."

"Oh, madam!" cried Norris, "you misjudge me greatly. My heart is not made of the same stuff as that of the royal Henry. I can love deeply—devotedly—lastingly."

"Know you not that by these rash speeches you place your head in jeopardy?" said Anne.

"I would rather lose it than not be permitted to love you," he replied.

"But your rashness endangers me," said the queen. "Your passion has already been noticed by Jane Seymour, and the slightest further indiscretion will be fatal."

"Nay, if that be so," cried Norris, "and your majesty should be placed in peril on my account, I will banish myself from the court, and from your presence, whatever the effort cost me."

"No," replied Anne, "I will not tax you so hardly. I do not think," she added tenderly, "deserted as I am by the king, that I could spare you."

"You confess, then, that I have inspired you with some regard?" he cried rapturously.

"Do not indulge in these transports, Norris," said Anne mournfully. "Your passion will only lead to your destruction—perchance to mine. Let the certainty that I do love, content you, and seek not to tempt your fate further."

"Oh, madam! you make me the happiest of men by the avowal," he cried. "I envy not now the king, for I feel raised above him by your love."

"You must join the revel, Norris," said Anne; "your absence from it will be observed."

And extending her hand to him, he knelt down and pressed it passionately to his lips.

"Ah! we are observed," she cried suddenly, and almost with a shriek. "Rise, sir!"

Norris instantly sprang to his feet, and, to his inexpressible dismay, saw the figure of a tall monk gliding away. Throwing a meaning look at the almost sinking queen, he followed the mysterious observer into the great hall, determined to rid himself of him in some way before he should have time to make any revelations.

Avoiding the brilliant throng, the monk entered the adjoining corridor, and descending the great staircase, passed into the upper quadrangle. From thence he proceeded towards the cloisters near St. George's Chapel, where he was overtaken by Norris, who had followed him closely.

"What would you with me, Sir Henry Norris?" cried the monk, halting.

"You may guess," said Norris, sternly and drawing his sword. "There are secrets which are dangerous to the possessor. Unless you swear never to betray what you have seen and heard, you die."

The tall monk laughed derisively.

"You know that your life is in my power," he said, "and therefore you threaten mine. Well, e'en take it, if you can."

As he spoke, he drew a sword from beneath his robe, and stood upon his defence. After a few passes, Norris's weapon was beaten from his grasp.

"You are now completely at my mercy," said the monk, "and I have nothing to do but to call the guard, and declare all I have heard to the king."

"I would rather you plunged your sword into my heart," said Norris.

"There is one way—and only one—by which my secrecy may be purchased," said the monk.

"Name it," replied Norris. "Were it to be purchased by my soul's perdition, I would embrace it."

"You have hit the point exactly," rejoined the monk drily. "Can you not guess with whom you have to deal?"

"Partly," replied Norris "I never found such force in mortal arm as you have displayed."

"Probably not," laughed the other: "most of those who have ventured against me have found their match. But come with me into the park, and you shall learn the condition of my secrecy."

"I cannot quit the castle," replied Norris; "but I will take you to my lodgings, where we shall be wholly unobserved."

And crossing the lower ward, they proceeded to the tower on the south side of it, now appropriated to the governor of the alms knights.

About an hour after this Norris returned to the revel. His whole demeanour was altered, and his looks ghastly. He sought the queen, who had returned to the seat in the embrasure.

"What has happened?" said Anne, in a low tone, as he approached her. "Have you killed him?"

"No," he replied; "but I have purchased our safety at a terrible price."

"You alarm me, Norris; what mean you?" she cried. "I mean this," he answered, regarding her with passionate earnestness: "that you must love me now, for I have perilled my salvation for you. That tall monk was Herne the Hunter."

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

IV.

Of the Secret Interview between Norris and Anne Boleyn, and
of the Dissimulation practised by the King.

Henry's attentions to Jane Seymour at the masqued fete were so marked, that the whole court was made aware of his passion. But it was not anticipated that any serious and extraordinary consequences would result from the intoxication—far less that the queen herself would be removed to make way for her successful rival. It was afterwards, however, remembered that at this time Henry held frequent, long, and grave conferences with the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk, and appeared to be engrossed in the meditation of some project.

After the scene at the revel, Anne did not make another exhibition of jealousy; but it was not that she was reconciled to her situation, or in any way free from uneasiness. On the contrary, the unhappy Catherine of Arragon did not suffer more in secret; but she knew, from experience, that with her royal consort all reproaches would be unavailing.

One morning, when she was alone within her chamber, her father, who was now Earl of Wiltshire, obtained admittance to her.

"You have a troubled look, my dear lord," she said, as she motioned him to a seat.

"And with good reason," he replied. "Oh, Anne! words cannot express my anxiety at the present state of things."

"It will speedily pass by, my lord," she replied; "the king will soon be tired of his new idol."

"Not before he has overthrown the old one, I fear," rejoined the earl. "Jane Seymour's charms have usurped entire sovereignty over him. With all her air of ingenuousness and simplicity, the minion is artful and dangerous. She has a high mark, I am persuaded—no less than the throne."

"But Henry cannot wed her—he cannot divorce me," said Anne.

"So thought Catherine of Arragon," replied her father; "and yet she was divorced. Anne, I am convinced a plot is hatching against you."

"You do not fear for my life, father?" she cried, trembling.

"I trust there are no grounds for charges against you by which it might be brought in jeopardy," replied the earl gravely.

"None, father—none!" she exclaimed.

"I am glad of it," rejoined the earl; "for I have heard that the king said to one who suggested another divorce to him, 'No, if the queen comes within the scope of the divorce, she also comes within the pale of the scaffold.'"

"A pledge was extorted from him to that effect," said Anne, in a hollow voice.

"That an attempt will be made against you, I firmly believe," replied the earl; "but if you are wholly innocent you have nothing to fear."

"Oh, father! I know not that," cried Anne. "Innocence avails little with the stony-hearted Henry."

"It will prove your best safeguard," said the earl. "And now farewell, daughter! Heaven guard you! Keep the strictest watch upon yourself."

So saying, he quitted the apartment, and as soon as she was left alone, the unhappy Anne burst into an agony of tears.

From this state of affliction she was roused by hearing her own name pronounced in low accents, and looking up, she beheld Sir Henry Norris.

"Oh, Norris!" she said, in a tone of reproach, "you have come hither to destroy me."

"No one knows of my coming," he said; "at least, no one who will betray me. I was brought hither by one who will take care we are not observed."

"By Herne?" demanded Anne.

Norris answered in the affirmative.

"Would you had never leagued yourself with him!" she cried; "I fear the rash act will bring destruction upon us both."

"It is too late to retract now," he replied; "besides, there was no help for it. I sacrificed myself to preserve you."

"But will the sacrifice preserve me?" she cried. "I fear not. I have just been told that the king is preparing some terrible measure against me—that he meditates removing me, to make way for Jane Seymour."

"You have heard the truth, madam," replied Norris, "he will try to bring you to the block."

"And with him, to try is to achieve," said Anne. "Oh, Norris! it is a fearful thing to contemplate such a death!"

"But why contemplate it, madam?" said Norris; "why, if you are satisfied that the king has such designs against you—why, if you feel that he will succeed, tarry for the fatal blow? Fly with me—fly with one who loves you, and will devote his whole life to you—who regards you, not as the queen, but as Anne Boleyn. Relinquish this false and hollow grandeur, and fly with me to happiness and peace."

"And relinquish my throne to Jane Seymour?" rejoined Anne "Never! I feel that all you assert is true—that my present position is hazardous—that Jane Seymour is in the ascendant, while I am on the decline, if not wholly sunk—that you love me entirely, and would devote your life to me—still, with all these motives for dread, I cannot prevail upon myself voluntarily to give up my title, and to abandon my post to a rival."

"You do not love me, then, as I love you, Anne," said Norris. "If I were a king, I would abandon my throne for you."

"You think so now, Norris, because you are not king," she replied. "But I am queen, and will remain so, till I am forced to abandon my dignity."

"I understand, madam," rejoined Norris gloomily. "But oh I bethink you to what risks you expose yourself. You know the king's terrible determination—his vindictiveness, his ferocity."

"Full well," she replied—"full well; but I will rather die a queen than live disgrace and ruined. In wedding Henry the Eighth, I laid my account to certain risks, and those I must brave."

Before Norris could urge anything further, the door was suddenly opened, and a tall dark figure entered the chamber, and said hastily—"The king is at hand."

"One word more, and it is my last," said Norris to Anne. "Will you fly with me to-night?—all shall be ready."

"I cannot," replied Anne.

"Away!" cried Herne, dragging Norris forcibly behind the tapestry.

Scarcely had they disappeared when Henry entered the chamber. He was in a gayer mood than had been usual with him of late.

"I am come to tell you, madam," he said, "that I am about to hold jousts in the castle on the first of May, at which your good brother and mine, the Lord Rochford, will be the challenger, while I myself shall be the defendant. You will adjudge the prize."

"Why not make Jane Seymour queen of the jousts?" said Anne, unable to resist the remark.

"She will be present at them," said Henry, "but I have my own reasons," he added significantly, "for not wishing her to appear as queen on this occasion."

"Whatever may be your reasons, the wish is sufficient for me," said Anne. "Nay, will you tarry a moment with me? It is long since we have had any converse in private together."

"I am busy at this moment," replied Henry bluffly; "but what is it you would say to me?"

"I would only reproach you for some lack of tenderness, and much neglect," said Anne.

"Oh, Henry! do you remember how you swore by your life—your crown—your faith—all that you held sacred or dear—that you would love me ever?"

"And so I would, if I could," replied the king; "but unfortunately the heart is not entirely under control. Have you yourself, for instance, experienced no change in your affections?"

"No," replied Anne. "I have certainly suffered severely from your too evident regard for Jane Seymour; but, though deeply mortified and distressed, I have never for a moment been shaken in my love for your majesty."

"A loyal and loving reply," said Henry. "I thought I had perceived some slight diminution in your regard."

"You did yourself grievous injustice by the supposition," replied Anne.

"I would fain believe so," said the king; "but there are some persons who would persuade me that you have not only lost your affection for me, but have even cast eyes of regard on another."

"Those who told you so lied!" cried Anne passionately. "Never woman was freer from such imputation than myself."

"Never woman was more consummate hypocrite," muttered Henry.

"You do not credit me, I see," cried Anne.

"If I did not, I should know how to act," replied the king. "You remember my pledge?"

"Full well," replied Anne; "and if love and duty would not restrain me, fear would."

"So I felt," rejoined the king; "but there are some of your sex upon whom nothing will operate as a warning—so faithless and inconstant are they by nature. It has been hinted to me that you are one of these; but I cannot think it. I can never believe that a woman for whom I have placed my very throne in jeopardy—for whom I have divorced my queen-whose family I have elevated and ennobled—and whom I have placed upon the throne would play me false. It is monstrous-incredible!"

"It is—it is!" replied Anne.

"And now farewell," said Henry. "I have stayed longer than I intended, and I should not have mentioned these accusations, which I regard as wholly groundless, unless you had reproached me."

And he quitted the chamber, leaving Anne in a strange state of perplexity and terror.

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

V.

What happened at the Jousts.

The first of May arrived; and though destined to set in darkness and despair, it arose in sunshine and smiles.

All were astir at an early hour within the castle, and preparations were made for the approaching show. Lists were erected in the upper quadrangle, and the whole of the vast area was strewn with sand. In front of the royal lodgings was raised a gallery, the centre of which, being set apart for the queen and her dames, was covered with cloth of gold and crimson velvet, on which the royal arms were gorgeously emblazoned. The two wings were likewise richly decorated, and adorned with scutcheons and pennons, while from the battlements of the eastern side of the court were hung a couple of long flags.

As soon as these preparations were completed, a throng of pages, esquires, armourers, archers, and henchmen, entered it from the Norman gateway, and took up positions within the barriers, the space without the pales being kept by a double line of halberdiers. Next came the trumpeters, mounted on richly caparisoned horses, and having their clarions decorated with silken bandrols, fringed with gold. Stationing themselves at the principal entrance of the lists, they were speedily joined by the heralds, pursuivants, and other officers of the tilt-yard.

Presently afterwards, the Duke of Suffolk, who was appointed judge of the lists, appeared, and rode round the arena to see that all was in order. Apparently well satisfied with the survey, he dismounted, and proceeded to the gallery.

Meanwhile, the crowd within the court was increased by a great influx of the different members of the household, amongst whom were Shoreditch, Paddington, and Hector Cutbeard.

"Marry, this promises to be a splendid sight!" said the clerk of the kitchen; "the king will, no doubt, do his devoir gallantly for the sake of the bright eyes that will look upon him."

"You mean the queen's, of course?" said Shoreditch.

"I mean hers who may be queen," replied Cutbeard; "Mistress Jane Seymour."

"May be queen!" exclaimed Shoreditch. "You surely do not think the king will divorce his present consort?"

"Stranger things have happened," replied Cutbeard significantly. "If I am not greatly out of my reckoning," he added, "these are the last jousts Queen Anne will behold."

"The saints forefend!" cried Shoreditch; "what reason have you for thinking so?"

"That I may not declare," replied Cutbeard; "but before the jousts are over you will see whether I have been rightly informed or not."

"Hush!" exclaimed Shoreditch. "There is a tall monk eyeing us strangely; and I am not certain that he has not overheard what you have said."

"He is welcome to the intelligence," replied Cutbeard; "the end will prove its truth."

Though this was uttered in a confident tone, he nevertheless glanced with some misgiving at the monk, who stood behind Paddington. The object of the investigation was a very tall man, with a cowl drawn over his brow. He had a ragged black beard, fierce dark eyes, and a complexion like bronze. Seeing Cutboard's glance anxiously fixed upon him, he advanced towards him, and said in a low tone—"You have nothing to fear from me; but talk not so loud if you value your head."

"So saying he proceeded to another part of the lists.

"Who is that tall monk?" asked Paddington.

"Devil knows!" answered Cutbeard; "I never saw him before. But he has a villainous cut-throat look."

Soon afterwards a flourish of trumpets was heard, and amid their joyous bruit the queen, sumptuously arrayed in cloth of gold and ermine, and having a small crown upon her brow, entered the gallery, and took her seat within it. Never had she looked more beautiful than on this fatal morning, and in the eyes of all the beholders she completely eclipsed her rival, Jane Seymour. The latter, who stood on her right hand, and was exquisitely attired, had a thoughtful and anxious air, as if some grave matter weighed upon her.

While the queen's attendants were taking their places, Lord Rochford, accompanied by Sir Henry Norris and the Earls of Surrey and Essex, entered the lists. The four knights were completely armed, and mounted on powerful steeds barded with rich cloth of gold, embroidered with silver letters. Each had a great crimson plume in his helmet. They rode singly round the arena, and bowed as they passed the royal gallery, Norris bending almost to his saddle-bow while performing his salutation to the queen.

The field being thus taken by the challengers, who retired to the upper end of the court, a trumpet was thrice sounded by a herald, and an answer was immediately made by another herald stationed opposite Henry the Seventh's buildings. When the clamour ceased, the king fully armed, and followed by the Marquis of Dorset, Sir Thomas Wyat, and the Lord Clifford, rode into the lists.

Henry was equipped in a superb suit of armour, inlaid with gold, and having a breastplate of the globose form, then in vogue; his helmet was decorated with a large snow-white plume. The trappings of his steed were of crimson velvet, embroidered with the royal arms, and edged with great letters of massive gold bullion, full of pearls and precious stones. He was attended by a hundred gentlemen, armourers, and other officers, arrayed in white velvet.

Having ridden round the court like the others, and addressed his salutation exclusively to Jane Seymour, Henry took his station with his companions near the base of the Round Tower, the summit of which was covered with spectators, as were the towers and battlements around.

A trumpet was now sounded, and the king and the Lord Rochford having each taken a lance from his esquire, awaited the signal to start from the Duke of Suffolk, who was seated in the left wing of the royal gallery. It was not long delayed. As the clarion sounded clearly and loudly for the third time, he called out that the champions might go. No sooner were the words uttered, than the thundering tramp of the steeds resounded, and the opponents met midway. Both their lances were shivered; but as the king did not, in the slightest degree, change his position, he was held to have the best of it. Courses were then run by the others, with varied success, the Marquis of Dorset being unhorsed by Sir Henry Norris, whose prowess was rewarded by the plaudits of the assemblage, and what was infinitely more dear to him, by the smiles of the queen.

"You have ridden well, Norris," cried Henry, advancing towards him. "Place yourself opposite me, and let us splinter a lance together."

As Norris reined back his steed, in compliance with the injunction, the tall monk stepped from out the line, and drawing near him, said, "If you wish to prove victorious, aim at the upper part of the king's helmet." And with these words he withdrew.

By the time Norris had placed his lance in the rest, the trumpet sounded. The next moment the word was given, and the champions started. Henry rode with great impetuosity, and struck Norris in the gorget with such good will that both he and his steed were shaken.

But Norris was more fortunate. Following the advice of the monk, he made the upper part of the king's helmet his mark, and the blow was so well dealt, that, though he did not dislodge the royal horseman, it drove back his steed on its haunches.

The success was so unequivocal that Norris was at once declared the victor by the judge. No applause, however, followed the decision, from a fear of giving offence to the king.

Norris dismounted, and committing his steed to the care of an esquire, and his lance to a page, took off his helmet and advanced towards the royal gallery, near which the Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt were standing talking with the other dames. As Norris drew near, Anne leaned over the edge of the gallery, and smiled at him tenderly, and, whether by design or accident, let fall her embroidered handkerchief.

Norris stooped to pick it up, regarding her as he did so with a glance of the most passionate devotion. A terrible gaze, however, was fixed on the unfortunate pair at that moment. It was that of the king. While Henry was careering in front of the gallery to display himself before Jane Seymour, a tall monk approached him, and said, "Look at Sir Henry Norris!"

Thus addressed, Henry raised his beaver, that he might see more distinctly, and beheld Norris take up the embroidered handkerchief, which he recognised as one that he had given, in the early days of his affection, to the queen.

The sight stung him almost to madness, and he had great difficulty in repressing his choler. But if this slight action, heightened to importance, as it was, by the looks of the parties, roused his ire, it was nothing to what followed. Instead of restoring it to the

queen, Norris, unconscious of the danger in which he stood, pressed the handkerchief fervently to his lips.

"I am hitherto the victor of the jousts," he said; "may I keep this as the prize?"

Anne smiled assent.

"It is the proudest I ever obtained," pursued Norris. And he placed it within his helmet.

"Does your majesty see that?" cried the tall monk, who still remained standing near the king.

"Death of my life!" exclaimed Henry, "it is the very handkerchief I gave her before our union! I can contain myself no longer, and must perforce precipitate matters. What ho!" he cried, riding up to that part of the gallery where the Duke of Suffolk was seated—"let the jousts be stopped!"

"Wherefore, my dear liege?" said Suffolk. "The Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt are about to run a course."

"Let them be stopped I say!" roared Henry, in a tone that admitted of no dispute. And wheeling round his charger, he dashed into the middle of the barriers, shouting in loud, authoritative accents, "The jousts are at an end! Disperse!"

The utmost consternation was occasioned by the announcement. The Duke of Suffolk instantly quitted his seat, and pressed through the crowd to the king, who whispered a few hasty words in his ear. Henry then called to the Earl of Surrey, the Marquis of Dorset, the Lord Clifford, Wyatt, and some others, and bidding them attend him, prepared to quit the court. As he passed the royal gallery, Anne called to him in an agonised voice—"Oh, Henry! what is the matter?—what have I done?"

But without paying the slightest attention to her, he dashed through the Norman Gate, galloped down the lower quadrangle, and quitted the castle.

The confusion that ensued may be imagined. All saw that something extraordinary and terrible had taken place, though few knew precisely what it was. Dismay sat in every countenance, and the general anxiety was heightened by the agitation of the queen, who, uttering a piercing scream, fell back, and was borne off in a state of insensibility by her attendants.

Unable to control himself at the sight, Norris burst through the guard, and rushing up the great staircase, soon gained the apartment to which the queen had been conveyed. Owing to the timely aid afforded her, she was speedily restored, and the first person her eyes fell upon was her lover. At the sight of him a glance of affection illumined her features, but it was instantly changed into an expression of alarm.

At this juncture the Duke of Suffolk, who, with Bouchier and a party of halberdiers, had entered the room, stepped up to the queen, and said—"Will it please you, madam, to retire to an inner apartment? I grieve to say you are under arrest."

"Arrest!" exclaimed Anne; "for what crime, your grace?"

"You are charged with incontinency towards the king's highness," replied Suffolk sternly.

"But I am innocent!" cried Anne—"as Heaven shall judge me, I am innocent!"

"I trust you will be able to prove yourself so, madam," said Suffolk. "Sir Henry Norris, your person is likewise attached."

"Then I am lost indeed!" exclaimed Anne distractedly.

"Do not let these false and malignant accusations alarm you, madam," said Norris. "You have nothing to fear. I will die protesting your innocence."

"Sir Henry Norris," said the duke coldly, "your own imprudence has brought about this sad result."

"I feel it," replied Norris; "and I deserve the worst punishment that can be inflicted upon me for it. But I declare to you as I will declare upon the rack, if I am placed upon it—that the queen is wholly innocent. Let her not suffer for my fault."

"You hear what Sir Henry says," cried Anne; "and I call upon you to recollect the testimony he has borne."

"I shall not fail to do so, madam," replied Suffolk. "Your majesty will have strict justice."

"Justice!" echoed Anne, with a laugh of bitter incredulity. "Justice from Henry the Eighth?"

"Beseech you, madam, do not destroy yourself," said Norris, prostrating himself before her. "Recollect by whom you are surrounded. My folly and madness have brought you into this strait, and I sincerely implore your pardon for it."

"You are not to blame, Norris," said Anne; "it is fate, not you, that has destroyed me. The hand that has dealt this blow is that of a queen within the tomb."

"Captain Boucher," said the Duke of Suffolk, addressing that officer, who stood near him, "you will convey Sir Henry Norris to the strong-room in the lower gateway, whence he will be removed to the Tower."

"Farewell forever, Norris!" cried Anne. "We shall meet no more on earth. In what has fallen on me I recognize the hand of retribution. But the same measure which has been meted to me shall be dealt to others. I denounce Jane Seymour before Heaven! She shall not long retain the crown she is about to snatch from me!"

"That imprecation had better have been spared, madam," said the duke.

"Be advised, my gracious mistress," cried Norris, "and do not let your grief and distraction place you in the power of your enemies. All may yet go well."

"I denounce her!" persisted Anne, wholly disregarding the caution; "and I also denounce the king. No union of his shall be happy, and other blood than mine shall flow."

At a sign from the duke she was here borne, half suffocated with emotion, to an inner apartment, while Norris was conveyed by Bouchier and a company of halberdiers to the lower gateway, and placed within the prison chamber.

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

VI.

What passed between Anne Boleyn and the Duke of Suffolk, and how Herne the Hunter appeared to her in the Oratory.

For some hours Anne Boleyn's attendants were alarmed for her reason, and there seemed good grounds for the apprehension, so wildly and incoherently did she talk, and so violently comport herself—she who was usually so gentle now weeping as if her soul would pass away in tears—now breaking into fearful hysterical laughter. It was a piteous sight, and deeply moved all who witnessed it. But towards evening she became calmer, and desired to be left by herself. Her wish being complied with, she fell upon her knees, and besought Heaven's forgiveness for her manifold offences.

"May my earthly sufferings," she cried, "avail me here—after, and may my blood wash out my guilt. I feel the enormity of my offence, and acknowledge the justice of my punishment. Pardon me, O injured Catherine—pardon me, I implore thee! Thou seest in me the most abject pitiable woman in the whole realm! Overthrown, neglected, despised—about to die a shameful death—what worse can befall me? Thine anguish was great, but it was never sharpened by remorse like mine. Oh! that I could live my life over again. I would resist all the dazzling temptations I have yielded to—above all, I would not injure thee. Oh! that I had resisted Henry's love—his false vows—his fatal lures! But it is useless to repine. I have acted wrongfully and must pay the penalty of my crime. May my tears, my penitence, my blood operate as an atonement, and procure me pardon from the merciful Judge before whom I shall shortly appear."

In such prayers and lamentations she passed more than an hour, when her attendants entered to inform her that the Duke of Suffolk and the Lords Audley and Cromwell were without, and desired to see her. She immediately went forth to them.

"We are come to acquaint you, madam," said Suffolk, "that you will be removed at an early hour tomorrow morning, to the Tower, there to abide during the king's pleasure."

"If the king will have it so, my lords," she replied, "I must needs go; but I protest my innocence, and will protest it to the last. I have ever been a faithful and loyal consort to his highness, and though I may not have demeaned myself to him so humbly and gratefully as I ought to have done—seeing how much I owe him—yet I have lacked nothing in affection and duty. I have had jealous fancies and suspicions of him, especially of late, and have troubled him with them; but I pray his forgiveness for my folly, which proceeded from too much regard, and if I am acquitted of my present charge, I will offend him so no more."

"We will report what you say to the king," rejoined Suffolk gravely; "but we are bound to add that his highness does not act on mere suspicion, the proofs of your guilt being strong against you."

"There can be no such proofs," cried Anne quickly. "Who are my accusers? and what do they state?"

"You are charged with conspiring against the king's life, and dishonouring his bed," replied Suffolk sternly. "Your accusers will appear in due season."

"They are base creatures suborned for the purpose!" cried Anne. "No loyal person would so forswear himself."

"Time will show you who they are, madam," said Suffolk.

"But having now answered all your questions, I pray you permit us to retire."

"Shall I not see the king before I am taken to the Tower?" said Anne, upon whom the terror of her situation rushed with new force.

"His highness has quitted the castle," replied Suffolk, "and there is no likelihood of his return to-night."

"You tell me so to deceive me," cried Anne. "Let me see him—let me throw myself at his feet! I can convince him of my innocence and move him to compassion! Let me see him, I implore of you—I charge you!"

"I swear to you, madam, that the king has departed for Hampton Court," replied Suffolk.

"Then take me to him there, under strong guard, or as secretly as you please," she cried passionately; "I will return with you instantly, if I am unsuccessful."

"Were I to comply with your request it would be fruitless, madam," replied Suffolk; "the king would not see you."

"Oh, Suffolk!" cried Anne, prostrating herself before him, "I have shown you many kindnesses in my season of power, and have always stood your friend with the king. Do me this favour now; I will never forget it. Introduce me to the king. I am sure I can move his heart, if I can only see him."

"It would cost me my head, madam," said the duke in an inexorable tone. "Rise, I pray you."

"You are more cruel than the king," said Anne, obeying. "And now, my lords," she continued with more composure and dignity, "since you refuse my last request, and plainly prove to me the sort of justice I may expect, I will not detain you longer. I shall be ready to attend you to the Tower tomorrow."

"The barge will proceed an hour before dawn," said Suffolk.

"Must I, then, go by water?" asked Anne.

"Such are the king's commands," replied Suffolk.

"It is no matter," she rejoined; "I shall be ready when you will, for I shall not retire to rest during the night."

Upon this Suffolk and the others slowly withdrew, and Anne again retired to the oratory.

She remained alone, brooding, in a state of indescribable anguish, upon the probable fate awaiting her, when all at once, raising her eyes, she beheld a tall dark figure near the arras.

Even in the gloom she recognised Herne the Hunter, and with difficulty repressed a scream.

"Be silent!" cried Herne, with an emphatic gesture. "I am come to deliver you."

Anne could not repress a joyful cry.

"Not so loud," rejoined Herne, "or you will alarm your attendants. I will set you free on certain conditions."

"Ah! conditions!" exclaimed Anne, recoiling; "if they are such as will affect my eternal welfare, I cannot accept them."

"You will repent it when it is too late," replied Herne. "Once removed to the Tower I can no longer aid you. My power extends only to the forest and the castle."

"Will you take me to the king at Hampton Court?" said Anne.

"It would be useless," replied Herne. "I will only do what I have stated. If you fly with me, you can never appear again as Anne Boleyn. Sir Henry Norris shall be set free at the same time, and you shall both dwell with me in the forest. Come!"

"I cannot go," said Anne, holding back; "it were to fly to a worse danger. I may save my soul now; but if I embrace your offer I am lost for ever."

Herne laughed derisively.

"You need have no fear on that score," he said.

"I will not trust you," replied Anne. "I have yielded to temptation already, and am now paying the penalty of it."

"You are clinging to the crown," said Herne, "because you know that by this step you will irrecoverably lose it. And you fancy that some change may yet operate to your advantage with the king. It is a vain delusive hope. If you leave this castle for the Tower, you will perish ignominiously on the block."

"What will be, must be!" replied Anne. "I will not save myself in the way you propose."

"Norris will say, and with reason, that you love him not," cried Herne.

"Then he will wrong me," replied Anne; "for I do love him. But of what account were a few years of fevered happiness compared with endless torture?"

"I will befriend you in spite of yourself," vociferated Herne, seizing her arm; "you shall go with me!"

"I will not," said Anne, falling on her knees. "Oh, Father of Mercy!" she cried energetically, "deliver me from this fiend!"

"Take your fate, then!" rejoined Herne, dashing her furiously backwards.

And when her attendants, alarmed by the sound, rushed into the chamber, they found her stretched on the floor in a state of insensibility.

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

VII.

How Herne appeared to Henry In the Home Park.

On that same night, at a late hour, a horseman, mounted on a powerful steed, entered the eastern side of the home park, and stationed himself beneath the trees. He had not been there long, when the castle clock tolled forth the hour of midnight, and ere the deep strokes died away, a second horseman was seen galloping across the moonlit glade towards him.

"Has all been done as I directed, Suffolk?" he demanded, as the newcomer approached him.

"It has, my liege," replied the duke. "The queen is imprisoned within her chamber, and will be removed, at early dawn, to the Tower."

"You had better start in an hour from this time," said the king. "It is a long passage by water, and I am anxious to avoid all chance of attempt at rescue."

"Your wishes shall be obeyed," replied the duke. "Poor soul! her grief was most agonizing, and I had much ado to maintain my composure. She implored, in the most passionate manner, to be allowed to see your highness before her removal. I told her it was impossible; and that even if you were at the castle, you would not listen to her supplications."

"You did right," rejoined Henry; "I will never see her more—not that I fear being moved by her prayers, but that, knowing how deceitful and faithless she is, I loathe to look upon her. What is expressed upon the matter by the household? Speak frankly."

"Frankly then," replied the duke, "your highness's proceedings are regarded as harsh and unjustifiable. The general opinion is, that you only desire to remove Anne to make way for Mistress Jane Seymour."

"Ha! they talk thus, do they?" cried the king. "I will silence their saucy prating ere long. Tell all who venture to speak to you on the subject that I have long suspected the queen of a secret liking for Norris, but that I determined to conceal my suspicions till I found I had good warrant for them. That occurred, as you know, some weeks ago. However, I awaited a pretext for proceeding against them, and it was furnished by their own imprudence to-day. Convinced that something would occur, I had made my preparations; nor was I deceived. You may add, also, that not until my marriage is invalidated, Anne's offspring illegitimatised, and herself beheaded, shall I consider the foul blot upon my name removed."

"Has your majesty any further commands?" said Suffolk. "I saw Norris in his prison before I rode forth to you."

"Let him be taken to the Tower, under a strong escort, at once," said Henry. "Lord Rochford, I suppose, has already been removed there?"

"He has," replied the duke. "Shall I attend your majesty to your followers?"

"It is needless," replied the king. "They are waiting for me, close at hand, at the foot of Datchet Bridge. Fare well, my good brother; look well to your prisoners. I shall feel more easy when Anne is safely lodged within the Tower."

So saying he wheeled round, and striking spurs into his steed, dashed through the trees, while the duke rode back to the castle.

Henry had not proceeded far, when a horseman, mounted on a sable steed, emerged from the thicket, and galloped up to him. The wild attire and antlered helm of this personage proclaimed the forest fiend.

"Ah! thou here, demon!" cried the king, his lion nature overmastered by superstitious fear for a moment. "What wouldst thou?"

"You are on the eve of committing a great crime," replied Herne; "and I told you that at such times I would always appear to you."

"To administer justice is not to commit crime," rejoined the king. "Anne Boleyn deserves her fate."

"Think not to impose on me as you have imposed on Suffolk!" cried Herne, with a derisive laugh. "I know your motives better; I know you have no proof of her guilt, and that in your heart of hearts you believe her innocent. But you destroy her because you would wed Jane Seymour! We shall meet again ere long—ho! ho! ho!"

And giving the rein to his steed, he disappeared among the trees.

Jane Seymour By William Harrison Ainsworth

VIII.

The Signal Gun.

Anne Boleyn's arraignment took place in the great hall of the White Tower, on the 16th of May, before the Duke of Norfolk, who was created lord high steward for the occasion, and twenty-six peers. The duke had his seat under a canopy of state, and beneath him sat the Earl of Surrey as deputy earl-marshal.

Notwithstanding an eloquent and impassioned defence, Anne was found guilty; and having been required to lay aside her crown and the other insignia of royalty, was condemned to be burned or beheaded at the king's pleasure.

On the following day, she was summoned to the archiepiscopal palace at Lambeth, whither she was privately conveyed; and her marriage with the king was declared by Cranmer to be null and void, and to have always been so. Death by the axe was the doom awarded to her by the king, and the day appointed for the execution was Friday the 19th of May, at the hour of noon.

Leaving the conduct of the fatal ceremony to the Duke of Suffolk, who had orders to have a signal gun fired from the summit of the White Tower, which was to be answered from various points, when all was over, Henry repaired to Windsor Castle on the evening of Thursday. Before this, he had formally offered his hand to Jane Seymour; and while the unfortunate queen was languishing within the Tower, he was basking in the smiles of his new mistress, and counting the hours till he could make her his own. On the Tuesday before the execution, Jane Seymour retired to her father's mansion, Wolff Hall, in Wiltshire, where preparations were made for the marriage, which it was arranged should take place there in private on the Saturday.

On arriving at the castle, Henry gave out that he should hunt on the following morning in the great park, and retired to his closet. But he did not long remain there, and putting on the garb of a yeoman of the guard, descended by the narrow flight of steps (already mentioned as occupying the same situation as the existing Hundred Steps) to the town, and proceeded to the Garter, where he found several guests assembled, discussing the affairs of the day, and Bryan Bowntance's strong ale at the same time. Amongst the number were the Duke of Shoreditch, Paddington, Hector Cutbeard, and Kit Coe. At the moment of the king's entrance, they were talking of the approaching execution.

"Oh, the vanity of worldly greatness!" exclaimed Bryan, lifting up his hands. "Only seven years ago, last Saint George's Day, this lovely queen first entered the castle with the king, amid pomp and splendour and power, and with a long life—apparently—of happiness before her. And now she is condemned to die."

"But if she has played the king false she deserves her doom," replied Shoreditch. "I would behead my own wife if she served me the same trick—that is, if I could."

"You do right to say 'if you could,'" rejoined Paddington. "The beheading of a wife is a royal privilege, and cannot be enjoyed by a subject."

"Marry, I wonder how the king could prefer Mistress Jane Seymour, for my part!" said Hector Cutbeard. "To my thinking she is not to be compared with Queen Anne."

"She has a lovely blue eye, and a figure as straight as an arrow," returned Shoreditch.

"How say you, master?" he added, turning to the king; "what think you of Mistress Jane Seymour?"

"That she is passably fair, friend," replied Henry.

"But how as compared with the late—that is, the present queen, for, poor soul! she has yet some hours to live," rejoined Shoreditch. "How, as compared with her?"

"Why, I think Jane Seymour the more lovely, Undoubtedly," replied Henry. "But I may be prejudiced."

"Not in the least, friend," said Cutbeard. "You but partake of your royal master's humour. Jane Seymour is beautiful, no doubt, and so was Anne Boleyn. Marry! we shall see many fair queens on the throne. The royal Henry has good taste and good management. He sets his subjects a rare example, and shows them how to get rid of troublesome wives. We shall all divorce or hang our spouses when we get tired of them. I almost wish I was married myself, that I might try the experiment—ha! ha!"

"Well, here's the king's health!" cried Shoreditch, "and wishing him as many wives as he may desire. What say you, friend?" he added, turning to Henry. "Will you not drink that toast?"

"That will I," replied Henry; "but I fancy the king will be content for the present with Mistress Jane Seymour."

"For the present, no doubt," said Hector Cutbeard; "but the time will come—and ere long—when Jane will be as irksome to him as Anne is now."

"Ah, God's death, knave! darest thou say so?" cried Henry furiously.

"Why, I have said nothing treasonable, I hope?" rejoined Cutbeard, turning pale; "I only wish the king to be happy in his own way. And as he seems to delight in change of wives, I pray that he may have it to his heart's content."

"A fair explanation," replied Henry, laughing.

"Let me give a health, my masters!" cried a tall archer, whom no one had hitherto noticed, rising in one corner of the room. "It is—The headsman of Calais, and may he do his work featly tomorrow!"

"Ha! ha! ha! a good toast!" cried Hector Cutbeard.

"Seize him who has proposed it!" cried the king, rising; "it is Herne the Hunter!"

"I laugh at your threats here as elsewhere, Harry," cried Herne. "We shall meet tomorrow."

And flinging the horn cup in the face of the man nearest him, he sprang through an open window at the back, and disappeared.

Both Cutbeard and Shoreditch were much alarmed lest the freedom of their expressions should be taken in umbrage by the king; but he calmed their fears by bestowing a good humoured buffet on the cheek of the latter of them, and quitting the hostel, returned to the castle by the same way he had left it.

On the following morning, about ten o'clock, he rode into the great park, attended by a numerous train. His demeanour was moody and stern, and a general gloom pervaded the company. Keeping on the western side of the park, the party crossed Cranbourne chase; but though they encountered several fine herds of deer, the king gave no orders to uncouple the hounds.

At last they arrived at that part of the park where Sandpit Gate is now situated, and pursuing a path bordered by noble trees, a fine buck was suddenly unharboured, upon which Henry gave orders to the huntsmen and others to follow him, adding that he himself should proceed to Snow Hill, where they would find him an hour hence.

All understood why the king wished to be alone, and for what purpose he was about to repair to the eminence in question, and therefore, without a word, the whole company started off in the chase.

Meanwhile, the king rode slowly through the woods, often pausing to listen to the distant sounds of the hunters, and noticing the shadows on the greensward as they grew shorter, and proclaimed the approach of noon. At length he arrived at Snow Hill, and stationed himself beneath the trees on its summit.

From this point a magnificent view of the castle, towering over its pomp of woods, now covered with foliage of the most vivid green, was commanded. The morning was bright and beautiful, the sky cloudless, and a gentle rain had fallen over night, which had tempered the air and freshened the leaves and the greensward. The birds were singing blithely in the trees, and at the foot of the hill crouched a herd of deer. All was genial and delightful, breathing of tenderness and peace, calculated to soften the most obdurate heart.

The scene was not without its effect upon Henry; but a fierce tumult raged within his breast. He fixed his eyes on the Round Tower, which was distinctly visible, and from which he expected the signal, and then tried to peer into the far horizon. But he could discern nothing. A cloud passed over the sun, and cast a momentary gloom over the smiling landscape. At the same time Henry's fancy was so powerfully excited, that he fancied he could behold the terrible tragedy enacting at the Tower.

"She is now issuing forth into the green in front of Saint Peter's Chapel," said Henry to himself. "I can see her as distinctly as if I were there. Ah, how beautiful she looks! and how she moves all hearts to pity! Suffolk, Richmond, Cromwell, and the Lord Mayor are there to meet her. She takes leave of her weeping attendants—she mounts the steps of the scaffold firmly—she looks round, and addresses the spectators. How silent they are, and how clearly and musically her voice sounds! She blesses me.—I hear It!—I feel it here! Now she disrobes herself, and prepares for the fatal axe. It is wielded by the skilful executioner of Calais, and he is now feeling its edge. Now she takes leave of her dames,

and bestows a parting gift on each. Again she kneels and prays. She rises. The fatal moment is at hand. Even now she retains her courage—she approaches the block, and places her head upon it. The axe is raised—ha!"

The exclamation was occasioned by a flash of fire from the battlements of the Round Tower, followed by a volume of smoke, and in another second the deep boom of a gun was heard.

At the very moment that the flash was seen, a wild figure, mounted on a coal-black steed, galloped from out the wood, and dashed towards Henry, whose horse reared and plunged as he passed.

"There spoke the knell of Anne Boleyn!" cried Herne, regarding Henry sternly, and pointing to the Round Tower. "The bloody deed is done, and thou art free to wed once more. Away to Wolff Hall, and bring thy new consort to Windsor Castle!"

Freeeditorial 