

# "SHREWSBURY"

By STANLEY J. WEYMAN.

On that the man with the wand stood aside still a little doubtfully—and let us pass, and my patron preceding me, we went up a wide staircase and along a silent corridor and through one or two opening doors, the duke seeming to be conversant with the house. It was impossible not to admire the fine richness of the carved furniture, which stood here and there in the corridors, or the grotesque designs and eastern coloring of the chinaware and Mogul bowls that peered from the corners or rose holly on brackets. Such a mode of furnishing was new to me, but neither its novelty nor the evidence of wealth and taste which abundantly met the eye impressed me so deeply as the stillness which everywhere prevailed, and which seemed so much a part of the palace that when his grace opened the second swing door and the shrill, piping voice of a child crowding and laughing in an ecstasy of infantile pleasure, came forth and met us, I started as if a gun had exploded.

I know now that I was not alone, but my patron assurance that he whom he sought was not there, but in his closet, led to my admission, and that without that my lord would have left him and that the duke, as it was he said nothing to me, but went on, and I, following him in my impudence, went on to the study, where, at that moment he had a me as rare as it is by me well remembered.

We stood on the threshold of a wide and spacious gallery, set with here and there a great China vase and hung with pictures which even then I discerned to be of great beauty, and afterward learned were of no less rarity. My lord, who had been waiting at this vista, paused naturally at a spot under one of the windows where, with his back to us and ribbons in his hands, a slight gentlemanly figure, who looked more than real; nevertheless the child shrieked in joy, and, dancing, jerked the ribbons and waved a little whip in response to the shouts of the gentlemen, whose long, curled periwigs bobbed oddly on his shoulders—he had his back to us—pranced more stoutly, though he looked as if he were a king, a little moment I stared at this picture, little thinking on what I gazed; nor was it until a gentleman seated at a side table behind the child, and with a guttural exclamation came toward us, that I remarked this third occupant of the gallery. When I did so I was so startled that I almost fell overboard, my lord was taken aback and disturbed. It even seemed to me that my patron made a hasty movement to withdraw. Before he could do so, however, or I, who behind him barred the way, could take the hint, the gentleman in black, warned of our presence by the other's exclamation, turned to us, and standing and looking the duke in his hands, looked at us.

He had a long, narrow face, which seemed to call for the dark, heavy wig that fell around it, a large hooked nose and full peevish lips, with eyes both bright and angry. I am told that he seldom smiled, and never laughed, and that while the best tales of King Charles' court passed round him, he would stand abstracted, or on occasion utter the teller by a silent nod. The courtiers, however, and King's favorites, who could find no worse title for him. Yet that he had a well of humor, deeply hidden and rarely drawn upon, no one could doubt who saw him approach in a carriage of any amusement in his eyes giving the lie to his pursed-up lips and the grimace of his visage.

"Your grace is always welcome," he said, speaking in English, a little broken and guttural. "And yet—you might have come more apropos, I confess."

"A thousand pardons, sir," my lord answered, bowing until his knee well touched the ground. "I thought that you were in your closet, sir, or I should have taken your pleasure in I intruded."

"But you have now?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this person—?" he looked at the gentleman in black.

"That is Lord Duck," he turned and addressed the child who was still tugging at the ribbons "Is that part?" Do you hear?"

"Yes, I said, 'I merely came to take the air.'"

"You must go, go, petit vaillant! I have business."

The child looked at him boldly. "Faut-il?"

"Où! Où! Say merci, and go."

"Merci, monsieur," the boy answered. And then to us with a solemn nod, "J'ai eu un plaisir de vous voir."

"Cheval! Cheval!" corrected the gentleman in black. "And be off."

Applied by what I had heard not only that he stood in the gallery of Kensington, but a mansion which his majesty had lately bought from Lord Nottingham and made his favorite residence—but that the gentleman in black whom he had found so simply employed was no other than the king himself.

same candor, I think, but at that the gentleman who had interrupted him before struck in again, addressing him rapidly in what I took to be Dutch, and smiling, pointing out the danger of too great openness. At any rate I took that to be the gist of his words, not only from his manner, but from the fact that when he had done—the king, looking gloomy and answered nothing—he turned to my lord.

"The king trusts your grace," he said bluntly. "He has never said so much to an Englishman before. I am sure that the trust is well placed and that his majesty's feelings will go no further."

The duke bowed. "Your majesty authorizes me to take the necessary steps," he said, speaking somewhat dryly, but otherwise ignoring what had passed. "To secure your safety, air, as well as to arrest the guilty, no time should be lost. Warrants should be issued immediately and these persons taken up."

"Reason can warn them," the king said in his ordinary tone. "Yes, air, to my lord, and let the council be recalled. The guards, too, should be doubled, and the regiment of Foot Guards, mentioned in the Duke's must look to that, and do you, my lord," he continued rapidly, addressing the gentleman beside him, whom he had just mentioned. "Fetch him his hat and lose no time. Take one of my coaches. It is a plot, if all be true, should do us good in the country. And that, I think, is your grace's opinion."

"It should, sir. Doubtless, sir, English have our faults, but we are not fond of leaving."

"And are you confident that this is no bubble?" the king said, thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir, I am."

By this time Lord Portland had withdrawn through a door at the further end of the gallery. The king, taking a turn this way and that, with his hands clasped behind him, and his head bent low, as if his great intellect had been busied with some great matter, stood in thought. After waiting a moment the duke coughed, and this failing to attract the king's attention, he continued to address him. "There is another matter I have to mention to you, sir," he said, with a touch of constraint in his tone.

"The king trusts your grace," he said bluntly. "He has never said so much to an Englishman before. I am sure that the trust is well placed and that his majesty's feelings will go no further."

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## "WILL THAT SUIT YOUR LORDSHIP?"

"Well, it was a very pretty dilemma," said the king, with a sort of gloom. "And I don't know what to do. I'm in a dilemma."

"At Dr. Lloyd's in Hogden Gardens," my lord answered. But he could not conceal his gloom.

"The king must be issued," said the king, with a touch of gloom. "The king must be issued, will you see it with the others?"

"My lord, but with such a slight that it required no wizard to discern both the cloud that hung over him, and also that now he had done what Ferguson had dared to do, he was consequently in a very good position. The king, after considering him a moment, with a singular expression, between amusement and reproach, broke the silence. "I will see you to-morrow, my lord. I will tell you what to do. Sit down now and here and write a line to monsieur, bidding him to be gone, and send it by a private hand, and the warrant by a messenger an hour later."

"The duke started at the king in astonishment. "But he will escape, sir," he faltered.

"So much the better," the king answered indifferently. "If we take him, what are we to do with him? Besides, to tell you the truth, I don't think he did me a great service eight years ago."

"He is?"

"Yes, sir," the king said, smiling. "He induced his father to fly the country, and he had stayed—but you know that story. So do you warn him, and the sooner he is beyond La Mancha the better."

"Still the duke unhappy. 'I dare not do it, sir,' he said at last, after a pause. "Dare not do it? When I authorize it?"

"No, sir; because if I were impeached by the Commons—"

The king shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, that is the difficulty. I should like to see the town council and provincial councils and states general. And now these Commons and lords. Shall I ever be quit of them? We must have a good lawyer, and a good one. If they impeach me I go back to Lou, and they may send me to the guillotine."

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secretly believed it; and he smiled when the duke came to tell him he allowed me to escape. Then, "And you have never seen him since that day to this?" he said incredulously.

"Never," said the duke, positively. "But it is not my intention to lose sight of him again."

"Ah," the king said.

"I have not told you, sir, all that happened," the duke continued, reading the king's thoughts. "But, briefly, Mr. Ferguson, who has come to be little short of a man, drew a pistol on me at the close of our interview, and but for my friend here—who had been placed to listen, but at that broke from his place of hiding and knocked up the muzzle so that the duke fled hastily—I should have come off ill."

"And I not much better," the king said, nodding and looking grave. "You are un-lucky."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that puts another face on it, and if you retain him beside you, what he has now done will be of the last importance. Thank you, my friend," he continued, addressing me, "can you keep your mouth shut?"

"I said humbly that I could and would," the duke answered emphatically. "And take this letter to Hogden Gardens to Bishop Lloyd's. See Bishop Lloyd and put it in his hands. Say nothing, give no message, but your masters in St. James' square. You will see it, duke, with a plain seal? Good. And go out, man."

"Yes, sir, but as you are in, an answer no question. And now for the council and warrants, my lord. We have lost too much time already."

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