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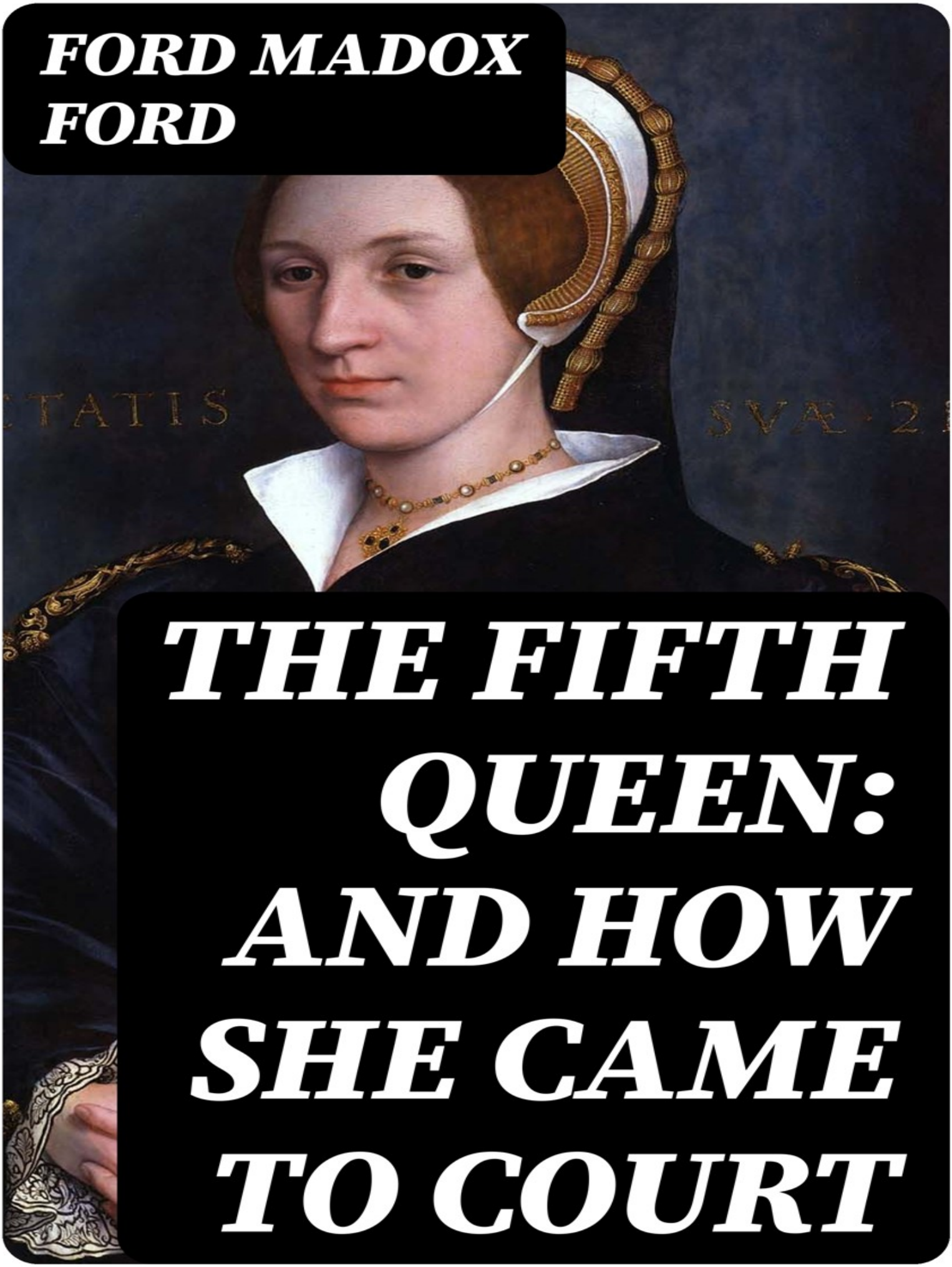

THE FIFTH QUEEN: AND HOW SHE CAME TO COURT

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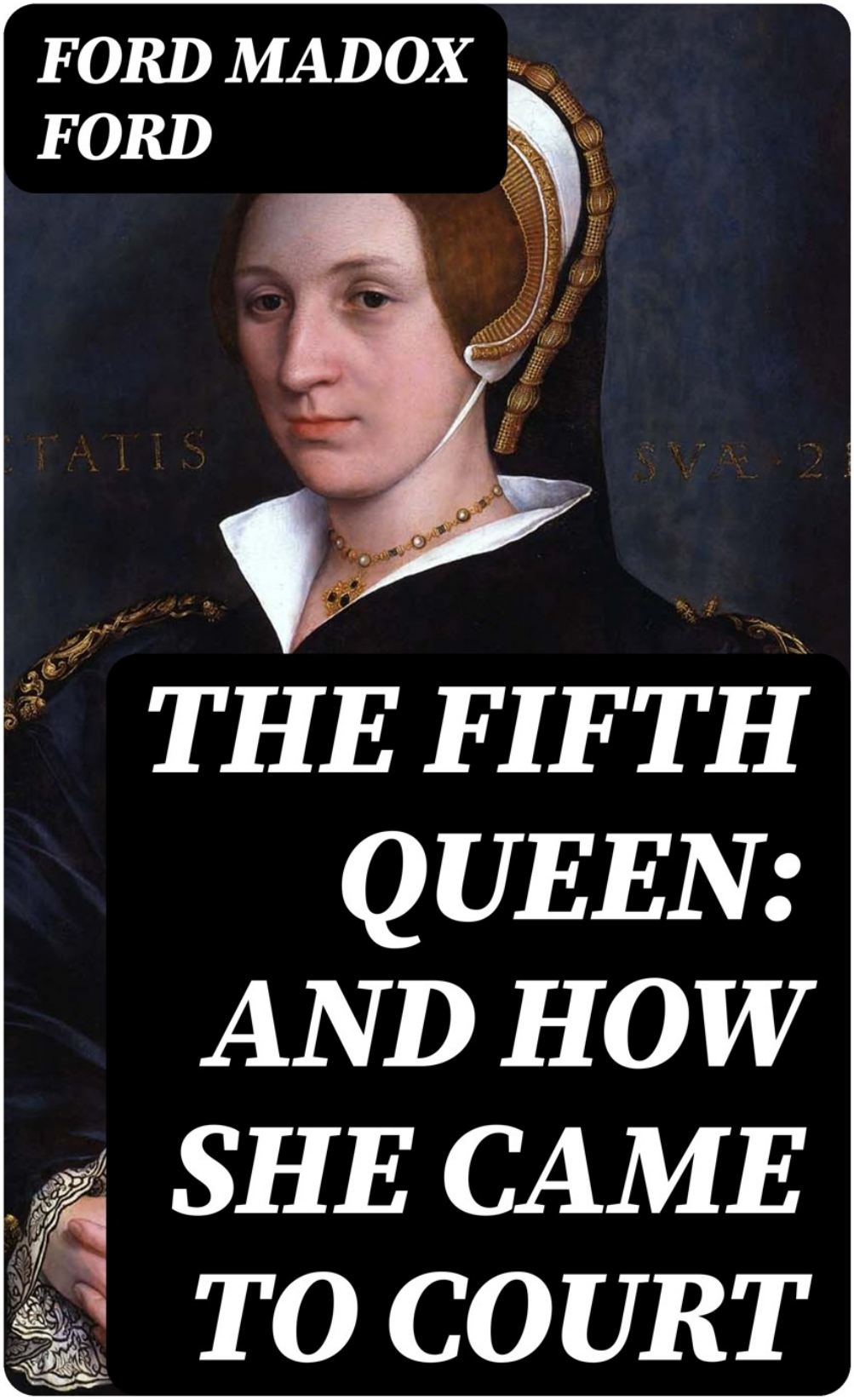

THE FIFTH QUEEN: AND HOW SHE CAME TO COURT

Ford Madox Ford

The Fifth Queen: And How She Came to Court

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Table of Contents

THE COMING

Table of Contents

I

Table of Contents

Magister Nicholas Udal, the Lady Mary's pedagogue, was very hungry and very cold. He stood undecided in the mud of a lane in the Austin Friars. The quickset hedges on either side were only waist high and did not shelter him. The little houses all round him of white daub with grey corner beams had been part of the old friars' stables and offices. All that neighbourhood was a maze of dwellings and gardens, with the hedges dry, the orchard trees bare with frost, the arbours wintry and deserted. This congregation of small cottages was like a patch of common that squatters had taken; the great house of the Lord Privy Seal, who had pulled down the monastery to make room for it, was a central mass. Its gilded vanes were in the shape of men at arms, and tore the ragged clouds with the banners on their lances. Nicholas Udal looked at the roof and cursed the porter of it.

'He could have given me a cup of hypocras,' he said, and muttered, as a man to whom Latin is more familiar than the vulgar tongue, a hexameter about 'pocula plena.'

He had reached London before nine in one of the King's barges that came from Greenwich to take musicians back that night at four. He had breakfasted with the Lady Mary's women at six off warm small beer and fresh meat, but it was

eleven already, and he had spent all his money upon good letters.

He muttered: '*Pauper sum, pateor, fateor, quod Di dant fero*,' but it did not warm him.

The magister had been put in the Lady Mary's household by the Lord Privy Seal, and he had a piece of news as to the Lady's means of treasonable correspondence with the Emperor her uncle. He had imagined that the news—which would hurt no one because it was imaginary—might be worth some crowns to him. But the Lord Privy Seal and all his secretaries had gone to Greenwich before it was light, and there was nothing there for the magister.

'You might have known as much, a learned man,' the porter had snarled at him. 'Isn't the new Queen at Rochester? Would our lord bide here? Didn't your magistership pass his barge on the river?'

'Nay, it was still dark,' the magister answered. The porter sniffed and slammed to the grating in the wicket. Being of the Old Faith he hated those Lutherans—or those men of the New Learning—that it pleased his master to employ.

Udal hesitated before the closed door; he hesitated in the lane beyond the corner of the house. Perhaps there would be no barges at the steps—no King's barges. The men of the Earl Marshal's service, being Papists, would pelt him with mud if he asked for a passage; even the Protestant lords' men would jeer at him if he had no pence for them—and he had none. He would do best to wait for the musicians' barge at four.

Then he must eat and shelter—and find a wench. He stood in the mud: long, thin, brown in his doctor's gown of

fur, with his black flapped cap that buttoned well under his chin and let out his brown, lean, shaven and humorous face like a woodpecker's peering out of a hole in a tree.

The volumes beneath his arms were heavy: they poked out his gown on each side, and the bitter cold pinched his finger ends as if they had been caught in a door. The weight of the books pleased him for there was much good letters there—a book of Tully's epistles for himself and two volumes of Plautus' comedies for the Lady Mary. But what among his day's purchases pleased him most was a medallion in silver he had bought in Cheapside. It showed on the one side Cupid in his sleep and on the other Venus fondling a peacock. It was a heart-compelling gift to any wench or lady of degree.

He puckered up his deprecatory and comical lips as he imagined that that medal would purchase him the right to sigh dolorously in front of whatever stomacher it finally adorned. He could pour out odes in the learned tongue, for the space of a week, a day, or an afternoon according to the rank, the kindness or the patience of the recipient.

Something invisible and harsh touched his cheek. It might have been snow or hail. He turned his thin cunning face to the clouds, and they threatened a downpour. They raced along, like scarves of vapour, so low that you might have thought of touching them if you stood on tiptoe.

If he went to Westminster Hall to find Judge Combers, he would get his belly well filled, but his back wet to the bone. At the corner of the next hedge was the wicket gate of old Master Grocer Badge. There the magister would find at least a piece of bread, some salt and warmed mead. Judge

Combers' wife was easy and bounteous: but old John Badge's daughter was a fair and dainty morsel.

He licked his full lips, leered to one side, muttered, 'A curse on all lords' porters,' and made for John Badge's wicket. Badge's dwelling had been part of the monastery's curing house. It had some good rooms and two low storeys —but the tall garden wall of the Lord Privy Seal had been built against its side windows. It had been done without word or warning. Suddenly workmen had pulled down old Badge's pigeon house, set it up twenty yards further in, marked out a line and set up this high wall that pressed so hard against the house end that there was barely room for a man to squeeze between. The wall ran for half a mile, and had swallowed the ground of twenty small householders. But never a word of complaint had reached the ears of the Privy Seal other than through his spies. It was, however, old Badge's ceaseless grief. He had talked of it without interlude for two years.

The Badges' room—their houseplace—was fair sized, but so low ceiled that it appeared long, dark and mysterious in the winter light There was a tall press of dark wood with a face minutely carved and fretted to represent the portal of Amiens Cathedral, and a long black table, littered with large sheets of printed matter in heavy black type, that diffused into the cold room a faint smell of ink. The old man sat quavering in the ingle. The light of the low fire glimmered on his silver hair, on his black square cap two generations old; and, in his old eyes that had seen three generations of changes, it twinkled starrily as if they were spinning round.

In the cock forward of his shaven chin, and the settling down of his head into his shoulders, there was a suggestion of sinister and sardonic malice. He was muttering at his son:

'A stiff neck that knows no bending, God shall break one day.'

His son, square, dark, with his sleeves rolled up showing immense muscles developed at the levers of his presses, bent his black beard and frowned his heavy brows above his printings.

'Doubtless God shall break His engine when its work is done,' he muttered.

'You call Privy Seal God's engine?' the old man quavered ironically. 'Thomas Cromwell is a brewer's drunken son. I know them that have seen him in the stocks at Putney not thirty years ago.'

The printer set two proofs side by side on the table and frowningly compared them, shaking his head.

'He is the flail of the monks,' he said abstractedly. 'They would have burned me and thousands more but for him.'

'Aye, and he has put up a fine wall where my arbour stood.'

The printer took a chalk from behind his ear and made a score down his page.

'A wall,' he muttered; 'my Lord Privy Seal hath set up a wall against priestcraft all round these kingdoms——'

'Therefore you would have him welcome to forty feet of my garden?' the old man drawled. 'He pulls down other folks' crucifixes and sets up his own walls with other folks' blood for mortar.'

The printer said darkly:

'Papists' blood.'

The old man pulled his nose and glanced down.

'We were all Papists in my day. I have made the pilgrimage to Compostella, for all you mock me now.'

He turned his head to see Magister Udal entering the door furtively and with eyes that leered round the room. Both the Badges fell into sudden, and as if guilty, silence.

'*Domus parva, quies magna*,' the magister tittered, and swept across the rushes in his furs to rub his hands before the fire. 'When shall I teach your Margot the learned tongues?'

'When the sun sets in the East,' the printer muttered.

Udal sent to him over his shoulder, as words of consolation:

'The new Queen is come to Rochester.'

The printer heaved an immense sigh:

'God be praised!'

Udal snickered, still over his shoulder:

'You see, neither have the men of the Old Faith put venom in her food, nor have the Emperor's galleys taken her between Calais and Sandwich.'

'Yet she comes ten days late.'

'Oh moody and suspicious artificer. *Afflavit deus!* The wind hath blown dead against Calais shore this ten days.'

The old man pulled his long white nose:

'In my day we could pray to St Leonard for a fair wind.'

He was too old to care whether the magister reported his words to Thomas Cromwell, the terrible Lord Privy Seal, and too sardonic to keep silence for long about the inferiority of his present day.

'When shall I teach the fair Margot the learned tongue?' Udal asked again.

'When wolves teach conies how to play on pipes,' the master printer snarled from his chest.

'The Lord Privy Seal never stood higher,' Udal said. 'The match with the Cleves Lady hath gained him great honour.'

'God cement it!' the printer said fervently.

The old man pulled at his nose and gazed at nothing.

'I am tired with this chatter of the woman from Cleves,' he croaked, like a malevolent raven. 'An Anne she is, and a Lutheran. I mind we had an Anne and a Lutheran for Queen before. She played the whore and lost her head.'

'Where's your niece Margot?' Udal asked the printer.

'You owe me nine crowns,' the old man said.

'I will give your Margot ten crowns' worth of lessons in Latin.'

'Hold and enough,' the printer muttered heavily. 'Tags from Seneca in a wench's mouth are rose garlands on a cow's horns.'

'The best ladies in the land learn of me,' Udal answered.

'Aye, but my niece shall keep her virtue intact.'

'You defame the Lady Mary of England,' Udal snickered.

The old man said vigorously, 'God save her highness, and send us her for Queen. Have you begged her to get me redress in the matter of that wall?'

'Why, Providence was kind to her when it sent her me for her master,' Udal said. 'I never had apter pupil saving only one.'

'Shall Thomas Cromwell redress?' the old man asked.

'If good learning can make a good queen, trust me to render her one,' Udal avoided the question. 'But alas! being declared bastard—for very excellent reasons—she may not ——'

'You owe me nine crowns,' old Badge threatened him. He picked irritably at the fur on his gown and gazed at the carved leg of the table. 'If you will not induce Privy Seal to pull down his wall I will set the tipstaves on you.'

Master Udal laughed. 'I will give thy daughter ten crowns' worth of lessons in the learned tongues.'

'You will receive another broken crown, magister,' the younger John said moodily. 'Have you not scars enow by your wenching?'

Udal pushed back the furs at his collar. 'Master Printer John Badge the Younger,' he flickered, 'if you break my crown I will break your chapel. You shall never have license to print another libel. Give me your niece in wedlock?'

The old man said querulously, 'Here's a wantipole without ten crowns would marry a wench with three beds and seven hundred florins!'

Udal laughed. 'Call her to bring me meat and drink,' he said. 'Large words ill fill an empty stomach.'

The younger John went negligently to the great Flemish press. He opened the face and revealed on its dark shelves a patty of cold fish and a black jack. With heavy movements and a solemn face he moved these things, with a knife and napkins, on to the broad black table.

The old man pulled his nose again and grinned.

'Margot's in her chamber,' he chuckled. 'As you came up the wicket way I sent my John to turn the key upon her. It's

there at his girdle.' It clinked indeed among rules, T-squares and callipers at each footstep of the heavy printer between press and table.

Magister Udal stretched his thin hands towards it. 'I will give you the printing of the Lady Mary's commentary of Plautus for that key,' he said.

The printer murmured 'Eat,' and set a great pewter salt-cellar, carved like a Flemish pikeman, a foot high, heavily upon the cloth.

Udal had the appetite of a wolf. He pulled off his cap the better to let his jaws work.

'Here's a letter from the Doctor Wernken of Augsburg,' he said. 'You may see how the Lutherans fare in Germany.'

The printer took the letter and read it, standing, frowning and heavy. Magister Udal ate; the old man fingered his furs and, leaning far back in his mended chair, gazed at nothing.

'Let me have the maid in wedlock,' Udal grunted between two bites. 'Better women have looked favourably upon me. I had a pupil in the North——'

'She was a Howard, and the Howards are all whores,' the printer said, over the letter. 'Your Doctor Wernken writes like an Anabaptist.'

'They are even as the rest of womenkind,' Udal laughed, 'but far quicker with their learning.'

A boy rising twenty, in a grey cloak that showed only his bright red stockings and broad-toed red shoes, rattled the back door and slammed it to. He pulled off his cap and shook it.

'It snows,' he said buoyantly, and then knelt before his grandfather. The old man touched his grandson's cropped

fair head.

'*Benedicite*, grandson Hal Poins,' he muttered, and relapsed into his gaze at the fire.

The young man bent his knee to his uncle and bowed low to the magister. Being about the court, he had for Udal's learning and office a reverence that neither the printer nor his grandfather could share. He unfastened his grey cloak at the neck and cast it into a corner after his hat. His figure flashed out, lithe, young, a blaze of scarlet with a crowned rose embroidered upon a chest rendered enormous by much wadding. He was serving his apprenticeship as ensign in the gentlemen of the King's guard, and because his dead father had been beloved by the Duke of Norfolk it was said that his full ensigncy was near. He begged his grandfather's leave to come near the fire, and stood with his legs apart.

'The new Queen's come to Rochester,' he said; 'I am here with the guard to take the heralds to Greenwich Palace.'

The printer looked at him unfavourably from the corner of his dark and gloomy eyes.

'You come to suck up more money,' he said moodily. 'There is none in this house.'

'As Mary is my protectress!' the boy laughed, 'there is!' He stuck his hands into his breeches pocket and pulled out a big fistful of crowns that he had won over-night at dice, and a long and thin Flemish chain of gold. 'I have enow to last me till the thaw,' he said. 'I came to beg my grandfather's blessing on the first day of the year.'

'Dicing ... Wenching ...' the printer muttered.

'If I ask thee for no blessing,' the young man said, 'it's because, uncle, thou'rt a Lutheran that can convey none.

Where's Margot? This chain's for her.'

'The fair Margot's locked in her chamber,' Udal snickered.

'Why-som-ever then? Hath she stolen a tart?'

'Nay, but I would have her in wedlock.'

'Thou—you—your magistership?' the boy laughed incredulously. The printer caught in his tone his courtier's contempt for the artificer's home, and his courtier's reverence for the magister's learning.

'Keep thy sister from beneath this fox's tooth,' he said. 'The likes of him mate not with the like of us.'

'The like of thee, uncle?' the boy retorted, with a good-humoured insolence. 'My father was a gentleman.'

'Who married my sister for her small money, and died leaving thee and thy sister to starve.'

'Nay, I starve not,' the boy said. 'And Margot's a plump faggot.'

'A very Cynthia among willow-trees,' the magister said.

'Why, your magistership shall have her,' the boy said. 'I am her lawful guardian.'

His grandfather laughed as men laugh to see a colt kick up its heels in a meadow.

But the printer waved his bare arm furiously at the magister.

'Get thee gone out of this decent house.' His eyes rolled, and his clenched fist was as large as a ham. 'Here you come not a-wenching.'

'Moody man,' the magister said, 'your brains are addled with suspicions.'

The young man swelled his scarlet breast still more consequentially. 'This is no house of thine, uncle, but my

grandfar's.'

'Young ass's colt!' the printer fulminated. 'Would'st have thy sister undone by this Latin mouth-mincer?'

Udal grinned at him, and licked his lips. The printer snarled:

'Know'st thou not, young ass, that this man was thrown out of his mastership at Eton for his foul living?'

Udal was suddenly on his feet with the long pasty-knife held back among the furs of his gown.

'Ignoble ...' he began, but he lost his words in his trembling rage. The printer snatched at his long measuring stick.

'Down knife,' he grunted, for his fury, too, made his throat catch.

'Have a care, nunkey,' the young man laughed at the pair of them. 'They teach knife-thrusts in his Italian books.'

'I will have thy printer's licence revoked, ignoble man,' the magister said, grinning hideously. 'Thou, a Lutheran, to turn upon me who was undone by Papist lies! They said I lived foully; they said I stole the silver cellars....'

He turned upon the old man, stretching out the hand that held the knife in a passionate gesture:

'Your Papists said that,' he appealed. 'But not a one of them believed it, though you dub me Lutheran.... See you, do I not govern now the chief Papist of you all? Would that be if they believed me filthy in my living. Have I not governed in the house of the Howards, the lord of it being absent? Would that have been if they had believed it of me?... And then....' He turned again upon the printer. 'For

the sake of your men ... for the sake of the New Learning, which God prosper, I was cast down.'

The printer grunted surlily:

''Tis known no wench is safe from thy amorousness. How many husbands have broken thy pate?'

The magister threw the knife on to the table and rose, frostily rustling in his gown.

'I shall bring thee down, ignoble man,' he said.

'If thou hast the power to do that,' the old man asked suddenly, 'wherefore canst not get me redress in the matter of my wall?'

The magister answered angrily:

'Privy Seal hath swallowed thy land: he shall not disgorge. But this man he shall swallow. Know you not that you may make a jack swallow, but no man shall make him give back; I, nor thou, nor the devil's self?'

'Oh, a God's name bring not Flail Crummock into this household,' the young man cut in. 'Would you undo us all?'

'Ignoble, ignoble, to twit a man with that Eton villainy,' the magister answered.

'A God's name bring not Privy Seal into the quarrel,' the young man repeated. 'None of us of the Old Faith believe that lie.'

'Keep thy tongue off Cromwell's name, young fool,' his grandfather said. 'We know not what walls have ears.'

The young man went pale: the printer himself went pale, remembering suddenly that the magister was a spy of Cromwell's; all three of them had their eyes upon Udal; only the old man, with his carelessness of his great age, grinned with curiosity as if the matter were a play that did not

concern him. The magister was making for the door with the books beneath his arm and a torturing smile round his lips. The boy, with a deep oath, ran out after him, a scarlet flash in the darkening room.

Old Badge pulled at his nose and grinned maliciously at the fire beside him.

'That is thy deliverer: that is thy flail of the monks,' he croaked at his son. The printer gazed moodily at the fire.

'Nay, it is but one of his servants,' he answered mechanically.

'And such servants go up and down this realm of England and ride us with iron bridles.' The old man laughed dryly and bitterly. 'His servant? See how we are held—we dare not shut our doors upon him since he is Cromwell's servant, yet if he come in he shall ruin us, take our money that we dare not refuse, deflower our virgins.... What then is left to us between this setter up of walls and his servants?'

The printer, fingering the T-square in his belt, said, slowly, 'I think this man loves too well that books should be printed in the Latin tongue to ruin any printer of them upon a private quarrel. Else I would get me across the seas.'

'He loves any wench much better,' the old man answered maliciously. 'Hearken!'

Through the wall there came a scuffling sound, thumps, and the noise of things falling. The wall there touched on the one that Cromwell had set up, so that there was bare room for a man to creep between.

'Body of God,' the printer said, 'is he eavesdropping now?'

'Nay, this is courtship,' the old man answered. His head leaned forward with a birdlike intentness; he listened with one hand held out as if to still any sound in the room. They heard footsteps from the floor above, a laugh and voices. 'Now Margot talks to him from her window.'

The printer had a motion of convulsed rage:

'I will break that knave's spine across my knee.'

'Nay, let be,' the old man said. 'I command thee, who am thy father, to let the matter be.'

'Would you have him ...' the printer began with a snarl.

'I would not have my house burnt down because this Cromwell's spy's body should be found upon our hands.... To-morrow the wench shall be sent to her aunt Wardle in Bedfordshire—aye, and she shall be soundly beaten to teach her to love virtue.'

The young man opened the house door and came in, shivering in his scarlet because he had run out without his cloak.

'A pretty medley you have made,' he said to his uncle, 'but I have calmed him. Wherefore should not this magister marry Margot?' He made again for the fire. 'Are we to smell always of ink?' He looked disdainfully at his uncle's proofs, and began to speak with a boy's seriousness and ingenuous confidence. They would tell his uncle at Court that if good print be the body of a book, good learning is even the soul of it. At Court he would learn that it is thought this magister shall rise high. There good learning is much prized. Their Lord the King had been seen to talk and laugh with this magister. 'For our gracious lord loveth good letters. He is in such matters skilled beyond all others in the realm.'

The old man listened to his grandson, smiling maliciously and with pride; the printer shrugged his shoulders bitterly; the muffled sounds and the voices through the house-end continued, and the boy talked on, laying down the law valiantly and with a cheerful voice.... He would gain advancement at Court through his sister's marriage with the magister.

Going back to the palace at Greenwich along with the magister, in the barge that was taking the heralds to the King's marriage with Anne of Cleves, the young Poins was importunate with Udal to advance him in his knowledge of the Italian tongue. He thought that in the books of the Sieur Macchiavelli upon armies and the bearing of arms there were unfolded many secret passes with the rapier and the stiletto. But Udal laughed good-humouredly. He had, he said, little skill in the Italian tongue, for it was but a bastard of classical begettings. And for instruction in the books of the Sieur Macchiavelli, let young Poins go to a man who had studied them word by word—to the Lord Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell.

They both dropped their voices at the name, and, another gentleman of the guard beginning to talk of rich men who had fallen low by the block, the stake, and gaming, Udal mentioned that that day he had seen a strange sight.

'There was in the Northern parts, where I governed in his absence the Lord Edmund Howard's children, a certain Thomas Culpepper. Main rich he was, with many pastures and many thousands of sheep. A cousin of my lady's he

was, for ever roaring about the house. A swaggerer he was, that down there went more richly dressed than earls here.'

That day Udal had seen this Culpepper alone, without any servants, dressed in uncostly green, and dragging at the bridle of a mule, on which sat a doxy dressed in ancient and ragged furs. So did men fall in these difficult days.

'How came he in London town?' the Norroy King-at-Arms asked.

'Nay, I stayed not to ask him,' Udal answered. He sighed a little. 'Yet then, in my Lord Edmund's house I had my best pupil of all, and fain was I to have news of her.... But he was a braggart; I liked him not, and would not stay to speak with him.'

'I'll warrant you had dealings with some wench he favoured, and you feared a drubbing, magister,' Norroy accused him.

The long cabin of the state barge was ablaze with the scarlet and black of the guards, and with the gold and scarlet of the heralds. Magister Udal sighed.

'You had good, easy days in Lord Edmund's house?' Norroy asked.

II

Table of Contents

The Lord Privy Seal was beneath a tall cresset in the stern of his barge, looking across the night and the winter river. They were rowing from Rochester to the palace at Greenwich, where the Court was awaiting Anne of Cleves. The flare of the King's barge a quarter of a mile ahead moved in a glowing patch of lights and their reflections, as

though it were some portent creeping in a blaze across the sky. There was nothing else visible in the world but the darkness and a dusky tinge of red where a wave caught the flare of light further out.

He stood invisible behind the lights of his cabin; and the thud of oars, the voluble noises of the water, and the crackling of the cresset overhead had, too, the quality of impersonal and supernatural phenomena. His voice said harshly:

'It is very cold; bring me my greatest cloak.'

Throckmorton, the one of Cromwell's seven hundred spies who at that time was his most constant companion, was hidden in the deep shadow beside the cabin-door. His bearded and heavy form obscured the light for a moment as he hurried to fetch the cloak. But merely to be the Lord Cromwell's gown-bearer was in those days a thing you would run after; and an old man in a flat cap—the Chancellor of the Augmentations, who had been listening intently at the door—was already hurrying out with a heavy cloak of fur. Cromwell let it be hung about his shoulders.

The Chancellor shivered and said, 'We should be within a quarter-hour of Greenwich.'

'Get you in if you be cold,' Cromwell answered. But the Chancellor was quivering with the desire to talk to his master. He had seen the heavy King rush stumbling down the stairs of the Cleves woman's lodging at Rochester, and the sight had been for him terrible and prodigious. It was Cromwell who had made him Chancellor of the Augmentations—who had even invented the office to deal with the land taken from the Abbeys—and he was so much

the creature of this Lord Privy Seal that it seemed as if the earth was shivering all the while for the fall of this minister, and that he himself was within an inch of the ruin, execration, and death that would come for them all once Cromwell were down.

Throckmorton, a giant man with an immense golden beard, issued again from the cabin, and the Privy Seal's voice came leisurely and cold:

'What said Lord Cassilis of this? And the fellow Knighton? I saw them at the stairs.'

Privy Seal had such eyes that it was delicate work lying to him. But Throckmorton brought out heavily:

'Cassilis, that this Lady Anne should never be Queen.'

'Aye, but she must,' the Chancellor bleated. He had been bribed by two of the Cleves lords to get them lands in Kent when the Queen should be in power. Cromwell's silence made Throckmorton continue against his will:

'Knighton, that the Queen's breath should turn the King's stomach against you! Dr. Miley, the Lutheran preacher, that by this evening's work the Kingdom of God on earth was set trembling, the King having the nature of a lecher....'

He tried to hold back. After all, it came into his mind, this man was nearly down. Any one of the men upon whom he now spied might come to be his master very soon. But Cromwell's voice said, 'And then?' and he made up his mind to implicate none but the Scotch lord, who was at once harmless and unliable to be harmed.

'Lord Cassilis,' he brought out, 'said again that your lordship's head should fall ere January goes out.'

He seemed to feel the great man's sneer through the darkness, and was coldly angry with himself for having invented no better lie. For if this invisible and threatening phantom that hid itself among these shadows outlasted January he might yet outlast some of them. He wondered which of Cromwell's innumerable ill-wishers it might best serve him to serve. But for the Chancellor of the Augmentations the heavy silence of calamity, like the waiting at a bedside for death to come, seemed to fall upon them. He imagined that the Privy Seal hid himself in that shadow in order to conceal a pale face and shaking knees. But Cromwell's voice came harsh and peremptory to Throckmorton:

'What men be abroad at this night season? Ask my helmsmen.'

Two torchlights, far away to the right, wavered shaking trails in the water that, thus revealed, shewed agitated and chopped by small waves. The Chancellor's white beard shook with the cold, with fear of Cromwell, and with curiosity to know how the man looked and felt. He ventured at last in a faint and bleating voice:

What did his lordship think of this matter? Surely the King should espouse this lady and the Lutheran cause.

Cromwell answered with inscrutable arrogance:

'Why, your cause is valuable. But this is a great matter. Get you in if you be cold.'

Throckmorton appeared noiselessly at his elbow, whilst the Chancellor was mumbling: 'God forbid I should be called Lutheran.'

The torches, Throckmorton said, were those of fishers who caught eels off the mud with worms upon needles.

'Such night work favours treason,' Cromwell muttered. 'Write in my notebook, "The Council to prohibit the fishing of eels by night."'

'What a nose he hath for treasons,' the Chancellor whispered to Throckmorton as they rustled together into the cabin. Throckmorton's face was gloomy and pensive. The Privy Seal had chosen none of his informations for noting down. Assuredly the time was near for him to find another master.

The barge swung round a reach, and the lights of the palace of Greenwich were like a flight of dim or bright squares in mid air, far ahead. The King's barge was already illuminating the crenellated arch at the top of the river steps. A burst of torches flared out to meet it and disappeared. The Court was then at Greenwich, nearly all the lords, the bishops and the several councils lying in the Palace to await the coming of Anne of Cleves on the morrow. She had reached Rochester that evening after some days' delay at Calais, for the winter seas. The King had gone that night to inspect her, having been given to believe that she was soberly fair and of bountiful charms. His courteous visit had been in secret and in disguise; therefore there were no torchmen in the gardens, and darkness lay between the river steps and the great central gateway. But a bonfire, erected by the guards to warm themselves in the courtyard, as it leapt up or subsided before the wind, shewed that tall tower pale and high or vanishing into the night with its carved stone garlands, its stone men at arms, its lions,

roses, leopards, and naked boys. The living houses ran away from the foot of the tower, till the wings, coming towards the river, vanished continually into shadows. They were low by comparison, gabled with false fronts over each set of rooms and, in the glass of their small-paned windows, the reflection of the fire gleamed capriciously from unexpected shadows. This palace was called Placentia by the King because it was pleasant to live in.

Cromwell mounted the steps with a slow gait and an arrogant figure. Under the river arch eight of his gentlemen waited upon him, and in the garden the torches of his men shewed black yew trees cut like peacocks, clipped hedges like walls with archways above the broad and tiled paths, and fountains that gleamed and trickled as if secretly in the heavy and bitter night.

A corridor ran from under the great tower right round the palace. It was full of hurrying people and of grooms who stood in knots beside doorways. They flattened themselves against the walls before the Lord Privy Seal's procession of gentlemen in black with white staves, and the ceilings seemed to send down moulded and gilded stalactites to touch his head. The beefeater before the door of the Lady Mary's lodgings spat upon the ground when he had passed. His hard glance travelled along the wall like a palpable ray, about the height of a man's head. It passed over faces and slipped back to the gilded wainscoting; tiring-women upon whom it fell shivered, and the serving men felt their bowels turn within them. His round face was hard and alert, and his lips moved ceaselessly one upon another. All those serving people wondered to see his head so high, for already it was

known that the King had turned sick at the sight of his bedfellow that should be. And indeed the palace was only awake at that late hour because of that astounding news, dignitaries lingering in each other's quarters to talk of it, whilst in the passages their waiting men supplied gross commentaries.

He entered his door. In the ante-room two men in his livery removed his outer furs deftly so as not to hinder his walk. Before the fire of his large room a fair boy knelt to pull off his jewelled gloves, and Hanson, one of his secretaries, unclasped from his girdle the corded bag that held the Privy Seal. He laid it on a high stand between two tall candles of wax upon the long table.

The boy went with the gloves and Hanson disappeared silently behind the dark tapestry in the further corner. Cromwell was meditating above a fragment of flaming wood that the fire had spat out far into the tiled fore-hearth. He pressed it with his foot gently towards the blaze of wood in the chimney.

His plump hands were behind his back, his long upper lip ceaselessly caressed its fellow, moving as one line of a snake's coil glides above another. The January wind crept round the shadowy room behind the tapestry, and as it quivered stags seemed to leap over bushes, hounds to spring in pursuit, and a crowned Diana to move her arms, taking an arrow from a quiver behind her shoulder. The tall candles guarded the bag of the Privy Seal, they fluttered and made the gilded heads on the rafters have sudden grins on their faces that represented kings with flowered crowns, queens with their hair combed back on to pillows, and pages

with scolloped hats. Cromwell stepped to an aumbry, where there were a glass of wine, a manchet of bread, and a little salt. He began to eat, dipping pieces of bread into the golden salt-cellar. The face of a queen looked down just above his head with her eyes wide open as if she were amazed, thrusting her head from a cloud.

'Why, I have outlived three queens,' he said to himself, and his round face resignedly despised his world and his times. He had forgotten what anxiety felt like because the world was so peopled with blunderers and timid fools full of hatred.

The marriage with Cleves was the deathblow to the power of the Empire. With the Protestant Princes armed behind his back, the imbecile called Charles would never dare to set his troops on board ship in Flanders to aid the continual rebellions, conspiracies and risings in England. He had done it too often, and he had repented as often, at the last moment. It was true that the marriage had thrown Charles into the arms of France: the French King and he were at that very minute supping together in Paris. They would be making treaties that were meant to be broken, and their statesmen were hatching plots that any scullion would reveal. Francis and his men were too mean, too silly, too despicable, and too easily bribed to hold to any union or to carry out any policy....

He sipped his wine slowly. It was a little cold, so he set it down beside the fire. He wanted to go to bed, but the Archbishop was coming to hear how Henry had received his Queen, and to pour out his fears. Fears! Because the King had been sick at sight of the Cleves woman! He had this