CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND APPOINTMENT AT DONCASTER

The position and objects of the rebels having been set forth, it is now time to consider the situation from the King's point of view.

The Pilgrims had stated their grievances definitely, and begged the King to tell them what redress he was prepared to give. In order to discover what answer he would make, it is necessary to go back to the mission of Bowes and Ellerker at the beginning of November. On their first arrival Henry had himself drawn up a reply to the five articles[1], very much on the lines of his reply to Lincolnshire[2], but on the whole milder in tone. The King condescended almost to argument, as for instance in the recital of the names of his Privy Council, now full of noblemen, whereas at the beginning of his reign there had been but two nobles of the old blood, "others, as the Lords Marney and Darcy, scant well-born gentlemen." Also he demanded the surrender of only ten ringleaders, instead of a hundred, as in Lincolnshire[3]. It is not necessary to go into the details of the reply, however, for in essence it was simply a refusal to listen to any of the rebels' remonstrances, and it had no external result because it was never sent.

When he wrote it Henry seems to have been under the impression that the Pilgrims were already scattered, and that the affair would be over almost as quickly as the Lincolnshire rising. By the time the reply was received the rebels might be expected to be in a properly submissive frame of mind. As he gradually became convinced that the truce was merely a truce, and not a capitulation, the dreadful suspicion may have dawned in his mind that these traitors might not accept his gracious answer, written with his own hand, in the proper spirit. They might hesitate, argue, even reject it. The very idea of such a humiliation was too terrible to be entertained. The King would not run such a risk. Instead of issuing

[1] L. and P. xi, 957; printed in full, Speed, op. cit. bk. ix, ch. 21.
[2] L. and P. xi, 780 (2). [3] Ibid. 957.

his reply to the Yorkshiremen, he caused his reply to Lincolnshire to be printed, thus returning an indirect answer to the rebels, without exposing himself. But his labour was not wasted, for he let it be known among the Pilgrims that he had answered their petition, but that he would not as yet allow them to see his reply. His letter to Ellerker and Bowes supplied this omission to some extent, and once the Pilgrims had made a full list of their grievances, as a substitute for their first general petition, the King's answer became quite insufficient. The stages by which Henry was reluctantly forced to acknowledge that he was obliged to treat formally with the Pilgrims have already been traced. On 14 November he had resolved to send Norfolk and Fitzwilliam to negotiate with them[1], and the first set of instructions was drawn up for their direction. They were to be provided with a safe-conduct under the Great Seal, "a proclamation implying a pardon," and the King's original answer. On their arrival at Doncaster they were permitted to arrange an interview with Darcy and three hundred others. They were to induce this company to come to them merely on their own promise of safety if possible, but if they could not be persuaded that this was sufficient security they might be given the safe-conduct. On this point of the safe-conduct the King was extremely sensitive. He seems to have felt that to grant one was a kind of recognition of belligerency; also it hurt his pride to acknowledge that any of his subjects were not wholly at his mercy. Apart from this we perhaps may see here one of the extraordinary freaks of his conscience. He would have had no hesitation in ordering Suffolk to seize the Pilgrims who had come to negotiate with Norfolk on the security of Norfolk's word, but he would prefer not to violate his own safe-conduct. Except for this matter there is not much of importance in these first instructions to Norfolk. Henry was not going to give way on any point. Darcy and his company must be persuaded and exhorted by the Duke to submit themselves entirely to the King, to make no further question concerning their petitions, and to accept the pardon which the King was willing to extend to all but a few persons specially named. If the rebels would conform themselves absolutely and surrender the aforesaid ringleaders they might be permitted to receive the King's answer "in a much more certain sort than the articles were proponed so that all indifferent men must be content."[2] If they would submit, Norfolk was to administer to them the oath of the Lincolnshire men; if they refused he was to gain as much time

[1] L. and P. XI, 1065. [2] Ibid. 1064.

as possible by discussion, and at the first favourable opportunity he must break off the negotiations and straightway attack the rebels[1].

With these instructions Norfolk and Fitzwilliam set out. On 27 November the King wrote to them at Leicester. The rebels' attitude was still very threatening, and he seems to have thought that there was little prospect of peace, but he was still determined not to yield a single point; he would not give hostages for Aske; he would not grant fourteen days' truce for the appointment, "our instructions treat of a time to be won by policy, and not of an abstinence by pact, which would give them time to fortify themselves."[2]

These letters and instructions must have been very painful reading for Norfolk and the Admiral. It was abundantly evident by this time that there was no chance of winning over Darcy, and as far as could be discovered the other leaders were equally unapproachable. For a short while the royalists entertained some hope of winning over Aske, owing to the report of a spy. This man was called Knight, and was a servant of Sir Francis Brian[3]. Knight went into the rebels' country about 14 November[4], to learn what he could about their strength. When he was in York, his appearance aroused suspicion, but he escaped by saying that he was a servant of Sir Peter Vavasour. On 15 November, however, he was recognised as Brian's servant and taken before Aske. With great presence of mind and some humour Knight told the captain that Sir Francis had sent him in pursuit of his chaplain who was a thief[5]. Aske sent Knight back to his master with a letter to request a description of the missing chaplain, as he was determined not to protect bad characters[6]. It was Knight who told Sir Francis that Aske had only one eye. He had returned to his master by 18 November[7]. Apparently Knight had had some communication with Sir Peter Vavasour, whose name he had used as a protection, although Sir Peter was with the Pilgrims[8]. Knight told Sir Francis Brian that, according to Sir Peter, Aske had been heard to say that some men who were not suspected were worse than he, and that he would gladly accept the King's pardon. Brian repeated this to Sir Anthony Browne, who sent the report on to Norfolk and Fitzwilliam. The King's deputies reached Nottingham on Wednesday 29 November,

[1] L. and P. xi, 1064. [2] Ibid. 1174. [3] Ibid. 1103.
[4] Ibid. 1079. [5] Ibid. 1103.
[6] Ibid. 1079. [7] Ibid. 1103.
[8] L. and P. xii (1), 6, printed in full, Eng. Hist. Rev. v, 340.

and there they wrote to Sir Peter Vavasour[1]. They stated that it had been represented to them that Aske was wavering. If he would, he could do more service than a greater man, and Sir Peter must urge him to throw himself on the King's mercy. In token of his goodwill, let him come to the meeting at Doncaster without hostages, bringing with him this letter, which should be his safeguard[2]. This application to the supposed originator of the roundabout story demolished it altogether. Vavasour wrote back to say that there was no truth in the report that Aske was wavering. He himself dared not sign his letter, lest it should be intercepted. Thus all hope from this quarter vanished[3]. The reports from the north showed no signs of giving way on the part of the rebels. On the contrary, it was doubtful whether they would consent to treat at all. If they were really so much excited and so confident it was quite evident that they would not humbly accept any answer which the King might choose to make.

It may be asked why the royalists should fear the prospect of battle, when they had at their backs London, the King's treasure and the King's fleet. Norfolk and the nobles with him were honestly on Henry's side, but the particular sting lay in the fact that they would be fighting for Cromwell. They would be actually the protectors and maintainers of the man whom they most detested. While they were risking their lives and spending their money in his hated cause, he would be at the King's side, enjoying the King's favour, and probably poisoning the King's mind against them. In the circumstances it is not surprising that Norfolk, in particular, was ready to do almost anything rather than fight. The state of his feelings may be judged by the fact that between 24 November and 2 December he found courage to write to the King laying before him the situation at its very worst[4]. The letter seems to have been carried by Sir John Russell. It is lost, but there was a passage in it very irritating to Henry, in which Norfolk declared that everything depended on the weather; the waters of the river were falling and he could trust neither to Trent nor to Don[5]; moreover he enclosed the evidence of sixty gentlemen that "other parties were not to be trusted unto."[6] These other parties were probably the leaders of the Pilgrimage, Darcy, Latimer and the rest, and the report was that they would not be persuaded to betray their cause and come over to the King, as he hoped.

[1] L. and P. XI, 1196. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. 1242.
[4] Ibid. 1237, printed in full, Hardwicke, Miscellaneous State Papers, I, 30.
[5] See note A at end of chapter. [6] L. and P. XI, 1241.

Henry was furiously angry at the contents of this letter. His situation with regard to Norfolk was indeed peculiarly galling to a man of his pride and temper. Norfolk for the moment was indispensable; he might not be a very good general, but he was the only one Henry possessed. Until the rebellion was suppressed the King could not afford to quarrel with him. But, while conscious of his own helplessness, Henry did not trust Norfolk in the least. He did not believe that the desperate letter contained a true account of the rebels' position; in his eyes it was all a trick to frighten him into coming to terms. Yet Norfolk could not be superseded, because there was no one to take his place, and he could not be forced to insist that the rebels should either fight or accept Henry's terms, because if Henry threatened him too boldly it was very probable that he would join the rebels himself. In the replies which were drawn up on 2 December, the King put a great restraint upon himself. Nevertheless the private letter which he sent to Norfolk was sufficiently alarming. Henry complained that Norfolk's desperate reports agreed neither with the information of spies nor with each other. In the first campaign he had particularly declared that he could hold the line of the Trent, and had attributed all his ill success to Shrewsbury's advance to the Don. Now he said that he could hold neither Don nor Trent, and yet it was evident that Shrewsbury's advance had saved a large district for the King[1]. From Newark he had written that he would esteem no promise made to the rebels nor think his honour touched in the breach of it[2], but nevertheless he had come to terms with them, disbanded his army without any exploit, and favoured their petitions at court. "We have now declared to you our whole stomach, as to him that we love and trust, which if you take as it is meant we doubt not but you will thank us, and by your deeds cause us eftsoons to thank you."[3] This was on the whole a temperate letter, but there is an undercurrent of restrained fury running through it which must have been very alarming to Norfolk. Such a rebuke might have goaded a loyal man into fighting immediately, or might have frightened a cautious man into going straight over to the rebels; but Henry knew Norfolk's character. The only emotion which it aroused in him was an intense desire to dispose of this tiresome business and return to court, where his "back-friends" must be intriguing against him.

[1] L. and P. xi, 1226; printed in full, State Papers, i, 518.
[2] L. and P. xi, 864; see above.
[3] L. and P. xi, 1226; printed in full, State Papers, i, 518.

At the same time the Privy Council received news that, according to letters from Sir William Musgrave, Tynedale and Reedsdale were loyal, Cumberland and Westmorland not ill-disposed, Lord Clifford was holding Carlisle and the Earl of Cumberland Skipton[1]. They thought therefore that Norfolk had only to deal with Yorkshire. They wrote to him to engage the rebels in conference while Suffolk prepared to attack them from the east, and Shrewsbury and Derby on the west. If the rebels could not be persuaded to accept the limited pardon and give up their ringleaders, he was to attack at once, for the King would on no account grant a general pardon. They enclosed the King's letter, but assured Norfolk that whatever it might contain the King was as gracious to him as ever he was in his life, from which it appears that they were rather nervous about the effect that Henry's remonstrance might have[2]. Sir John Russell also carried back a secret letter from the King to Shrewsbury. It is a high tribute to the old Earl's character that all parties trusted him; even the King placed more reliance on him than on Norfolk, although he now showed his confidence by asking him to do a dirty piece of work. In his reports Shrewsbury, whenever possible, had spoken a good word for his old friend Darcy. Henry now commissioned him to enter into secret negotiations with Darcy and Aske. He was not to allow the rest of the Council to know anything about it, but if he could by any means persuade them to come over to the King, he might give them the pardons, made out, one for Darcy, and the other for Aske, which Russell had in his possession. "The dates which are left blank you have power to fill up, but you must do so in such sort that there appear no diversity of hands." Was forgery one of the ordinary accomplishments of a Tudor nobleman? Russell also took a set of articles which Shrewsbury was empowered to declare if no terms were made with the rebels, but no copy of these articles has survived[3].

On the very day that these letters were despatched, Saturday 2 December, Norfolk wrote again to the King from Welbeck, still more emphatically setting forth the impossibility of inducing the rebels to submit unconditionally[4]. Sir Francis Brian carried this letter, and Suffolk also sent his opinion, which agreed with Norfolk's, that if the King would not grant a free parliament and a general

[1] L. and P. XI, 1207, 1208.
[2] Ibid. 1228; printed in full, Hardwicke, op. cit. I, 27.
[3] L. and P. XI, 1225; printed in full, State Papers, I, 519.
[4] L. and P. XI, 1237; printed in full, Hardwicke, op. cit. I, 30.

pardon there was no hope of coming to terms[1]. Sir Francis reached the court, at Richmond, on the night of Sunday 3 December[2]. After he had made his report the King could no longer doubt the gravity of the position. It was possible to believe that Norfolk was exaggerating, but Suffolk and Sir Francis himself were entirely loyal and their information must be taken seriously. Although he had urged both Suffolk and Norfolk to fight, Henry did not want to provoke actual warfare unless he could be quite certain of winning. Since there was no alternative between concession and battle he reluctantly gave directions for a new set of instructions to be drawn up[3]. In the beginning of this document he again complained of the desperate contents of Norfolk's letters. He reproached all the council of his army for neglecting to seize and fortify the Don, and for allowing the rebels to muster in such force at Pontefract without making corresponding levies. They were on no account to treat unless the numbers were equal on both sides,—either the Pilgrims must disband, or the King's troops must be increased. If this matter could be adjusted Norfolk, Fitzwilliam and the others were empowered to hold the conference. As usual the King held forth at great length on the reproaches that they must heap on the rebels for their disloyalty, ingratitude, etc., but if all their eloquence did not avail to make the Pilgrims accept the limited pardon, Norfolk was to say that his commission extended no further, but that if they would state clearly what they wanted he would venture to prolong the truce and himself lay their petition before the King. He was to persuade them that they only wanted a general pardon and a free parliament; they must be made to sign these articles and to undertake not to molest the King on any other point. Then Norfolk might make a truce for six or seven days, *as if to send to the King*, and at the end of this time he might present to them the general pardon which Sir John Russell would carry with him when he delivered these instructions. At the same time Norfolk might give them the King's promise that a parliament should be held, beginning on the last day of September 1537 at any place the King might appoint. If they insisted on any other articles, besides the pardon and the parliament, Norfolk was to make a truce for twenty days, to let the King know all particulars, and to send secretly to Derby to summon all the forces of Cheshire and Lancashire, to Suffolk to

[1] L. and P. xi, 1236; printed in full, State Papers, i. 521.
[2] L. and P. xi, 1237; printed in full, Hardwicke, op. cit. i, 30.
[3] See note B at end of chapter.

prepare Lincolnshire, while he himself got ready to seize all the fords of the Don until the King could make his preparations for advancing against the rebels in person[1]. The idea of prolonging the truce while secretly levying forces seems to have been suggested in the first place by Norfolk in a letter from Newark that has not been preserved. In a postscript the King replied to Norfolk's suggestion and to another letter from Nottingham. Although he approved of the general scheme, he would give no definite orders for further levies, as it would be so expensive. He promised to send three more safe-conducts, in addition to the one drawn up on 30 November which Norfolk had already received[2]; the new ones were made out for sixteen, twenty and forty days respectively, as he did not know what length of time might be agreed upon, and if a blank safe-conduct were sent, it would be visible that the date had been filled in by another hand[3]. Commissions of lieutenancy were also sent, made out to Norfolk and Shrewsbury, and to Norfolk and the Council. The King concluded by complaining again of their desperate letters. If they must send him so much bad news, he said, they might send some good news to balance it, or at least suggest some "honest remedy" for the evil. There is one other small but significant point: in the original draft orders are given for the payment of the men now with Norfolk, namely the "bands" of Sir John Russell, Sir Francis Brian, Sir Anthony Browne and Richard Cromwell, but the names of Sir Francis Brian and Richard Cromwell are struck out. Sir Francis had just brought up letters from Norfolk, and the rebels had refused to treat while Richard Cromwell was in Norfolk's company. The King silently yielded this point without any argument or blustering[4].

With these instructions Henry sent a letter to Suffolk[5]. After briefly telling him that he was prepared, in case of extremity, to grant a free pardon and a parliament to the rebels, "although we thought the granting of such a pardon would only encourage others," he gave orders that Suffolk must make up his companies to eight thousand men, and prepare to attack at once on receiving the word from Norfolk. The first plan was that on the alarm he should seize Hull and advance on York, sending word to Lord Clifford to set out from Carlisle and meet him. But this scheme was completely

[1] L. and P. XI, 1227; printed in full, State Papers, I, 511.
[2] L. and P. XI, 1205, 1206.
[3] See note C at end of chapter.
[4] L. and P. XI, 1227; printed in full, State Papers, I, 511.
[5] L. and P. XI, 1236; printed in full, State Papers, I, 521.

cancelled and he was ordered not to attempt to take Hull, but to await further advice. Letters and proclamations were enclosed to be sent by sea to Berwick and thence distributed to Lord Clifford, Sir William Musgrave, Edward Aglionby (of Carlisle), Sir Thomas Clifford, Sir Reynold Carnaby and the towns of Berwick and Carlisle. Suffolk received a commission of lieutenancy joining him with Norfolk and Shrewsbury[1], and a pardon and oath to be proclaimed and administered in Marshland and Holderness[2].

The Privy Council wrote to Norfolk at the same time, but their letter only hints at the King's change of attitude[3]. These Privy Council letters seem to have been composed to sweeten the King's more outspoken despatches. This one begins with warm praises of Norfolk and his colleagues. The King was making plans in case of war, but the Privy Council contemplated peace. If, as they did not doubt, Norfolk brought the affair to a satisfactory conclusion, the King was pleased with the Duke's plan that he should immediately advance into Yorkshire, with a good train of noblemen and gentlemen, to administer the oath; but Norfolk must send further particulars, as the King's charges had been great, and expenses must be kept down. They sent the Ten Articles and copies of the circular to the bishops[4], to be declared to the people. "There remains one thing to be considered which the King has much to heart and we all no less desire—the preservation of his Grace's honour, which will be much touched if no man be reserved to punishment." There is a certain humour in the earnestness with which the Council beseech Norfolk to "reserve" some vile persons, even if only a very few, and among them, if possible, Sir Robert Constable[5]. Sir Robert had offended the King mortally by saying that the truce had been broken when Edward Waters was sent to Scarborough. Henry, in his usual daring fashion, had retorted the reproach on the rebels in his instructions; Norfolk was to complain of the taking of Edward Waters as an innovation during the truce[6].

The Council also mentioned that the King had written to the Earl of Northumberland to come up to London "if nothing chance to him in the mean season,"[7] rather a sinister reservation. The Earl had sent a ring as a token to the King at the beginning of the month, through Suffolk's hands[8]. They added that Norfolk would

[1] L. and P. xi, 1236.
[2] Ibid. 1235; cf. 1197.
[3] Ibid. 1237; printed in full, Hardwicke, op. cit. i, 30.
[4] See above, chap. xiii.
[5] L. and P. xi, 1237.
[6] Ibid. 1227.
[7] Ibid. 1237.
[8] Ibid. 1221.

doubtless see that the Earl's brethren did no displeasure, a task somewhat beyond his power[1].

Such were the final instructions despatched to Norfolk before the conference. They did not arrive till Wednesday 6 December, and would have been too late if the meeting had not been deferred for a day.

On Saturday 2 December Norfolk was at Welbeck writing desperate letters to the King. On Sunday 3 December he was at Hatfield, and with him were his half-brother Lord William Howard, Sir William Fitzwilliam and Sir Anthony Browne[2]. He had summoned Shrewsbury to join them, but Shrewsbury that day sent word that he was so ill that it would be impossible for him to reach Doncaster before Wednesday[3]. Probably Lancaster Herald arranged to defer the meeting when he went to Pontefract that eventful Sunday. Shrewsbury's letter was written in the morning, and after dinner Norfolk mentioned in a letter to the King that the meeting would not be till Wednesday. The principal object of the letter was to give warning that William Steward of Scotland was on his way to France and had passed right through the rebel country. It would therefore be well to stop him, as he might be carrying messages from the rebels to the King of Scotland. Norfolk reported that the nobles at Pontefract were in half captivity to the commons, who were very numerous and wild, but he was not without hopes of winning over some of the gentlemen[4]. This no doubt is an allusion to the Archbishop's sermon and the tumult in the church. Norfolk must have written on the report of Lancaster Herald. It is rather difficult to discover exactly what arrangements the Herald made for the first meeting on Monday. Robert Aske said afterwards that he delivered the King's safe-conduct for ten knights and esquires, each accompanied by three servants[5]. On the other hand Fitzwilliam, writing on Monday 4 December, told the King that the gentlemen were coming with only two servants each and "upon our honours without your Grace's safe-conduct."[6] Fitzwilliam would be the better authority, as Aske may easily have forgotten the exact particulars, if it were not possible that Fitzwilliam was trying to soothe the King, whose angry letters of 2 December had just been received. They seem to have arrived early on Monday morning before the meeting, and Norfolk and Fitzwilliam answered them at 8 A.M. In

[1] L. and P. XI, 1237; printed in full, Hardwicke, op. cit. I, 30.
[2] L. and P. XI, 1234. [3] Ibid. 1233. [4] Ibid. 1234.
[5] L. and P. XII (1), 6; printed Eng. Hist. Rev. V, 340. [6] L. and P. XI, 1243.