



The King's secret.

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1. Chapter I. The court at old Whitehall.

Gay was the group round the sundial in the King's Garden. It was in the month of May, but despite the time of year the weather was cold, and the courtiers - for of such the group consisted - were wearing short capes for their satin doublets. Three of them were seated round a small table; one, leaning back in his chair, his hat tilted over his eyes, one leg thrown carelessly over the other, with an air of indescribable comfort and laziness; another, with a glass in his hand and his head resting on the other, while his elbow was propped on the table, looked as though he had already had enough wine, without finishing that still left in his glass, and the third, slowly turning over the pages of a book, did not appear to be listening to his companions' conversation. A young man was leaning with his back against the sundial, and staring fixedly up at the blue sky; two other men, their hands behind their backs, were standing near and completed the group. On the table stood two bottles and some glasses, and near by a bench and several chairs.

"An other glass, Rochester?" asked one of those seated. "Just a small one, to drink to the health of the brown-cheeked country damsel, who attracted you so at Woodstock."

"I shall perhaps never see her again," said the young man, dreamily, and then, suddenly bringing his eyes down from the sky, he added, "I thank you, Etherege, but I want no more wine."

"Nethinks he needs but a little more, and he could no longer stand upright," remarked the man with the book. "See, he already needs the sun-

Nineteen years had elapsed since the end of the Triple Alliance, and Dorset was again at Whitehall. By his side stood the King, not the gay Charles the Second, surrounded by his spaniels and jesting with his courtiers, but a grave looking man, with a frown constantly between his brows and a smile rarely on his lips. The breeze which blew gently in through the open window wafted no sound of ^{the} silvery laughter of some favourite in with it; no licentious, witty jokes besprinkled the conversation of the courtiers out in the garden; those days were over and King Charles was no more. The throne of England was occupied by a less pleasant gentleman than the merry monarch, but by a worthier man. Charles the Second was dead, and William the Third had taken his place.

"And so, my lord," William was saying, "there was a secret alliance between France and England which prevented England from helping the Dutch while King Louis attacked ~~the~~?"

"I am surprised that your Majesty has not heard of it before," said Dorset.

"Would that I had known it while it existed!" exclaimed the King.

"Why did you not tell me then, my lord, instead of now?"

"I was not your Majesty's subject," Dorset reminded him.

"True," said William. "And you knew it all along, my lord Dorset?"

"All along, from the very beginning. All the time," said Dorset, "I knew the King's Secret."

The end.

Oct. 1907.