

IN LOVE
AND WAR

CHARLES GIBBON

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IN LOVE AND WAR

“There was a May, and a weel-far’d May,
Lived high up in yon glen;
Her name was Katherine Janfarie,
She was courted by mony men.”

The Ballad of Katherine Janfarie.

IN LOVE AND WAR

A ROMANCE BY

CHARLES GIBBON

AUTHOR OF "A HEART'S
PROBLEM," ETC.



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IN LOVE AND WAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOT TROD.

“He’s ta’en her by the milk-white hand,
And by the grass-green sleeve.
He’s mounted her high behind himsel’,
At her kinsmen spear’d na leave.”

Katherine Janfarie.

“BRING out the hounds, Nicol,” shouted Sir Hugh Janfarie, the Knight of Johnstone Tower, to his second son; and then to one of his men: “You fetch me a burning sod. It shall be a Hot Trod, and by the Sacred Mother a hotter trod than has been known on the Border this while.”

He mounted his horse and took his place at the head of his men; a leash of hounds was brought from the kennel, and the party started at a round pace.

Nicol rode in advance, carrying a burning turf on the point of a spear, to denote to all men that they had declared hue and cry against a marauder, and that they were in hot pursuit. The fiery symbol of their purpose, according to the law of the Marches, protected them from interruption so long as they molested none save the enemy they pursued. The same law doomed to death any who might attempt to bar the way of those who, with proper reason, were following the track of an offender.

Katherine Janfarie, Sir Hugh’s only daughter, and Sir Bertrand Gordon, the Laird of Lamington, were the offenders, and the objects of this fierce pursuit.

Sir Hugh had that day forced his daughter into marriage with Sir Robert Cochrane, the chief favourite of the king, James III. ; Katherine had wept, implored, defied—refused even in presence of the priest to accept the man chosen by her parents as her husband—but all without avail. The ceremony proceeded, and she was declared to be duly wedded to Cochrane. Kinsmen and retainers were hospitably entertained; bonfires were prepared, and sports went forward just as if it had been one of the happiest matches ever known on the Border.

A marauding expedition of Sir Hugh and his two sons—Richard, the master of Johnstone, and Nicol—had drawn down upon them the wrath of the Duke of Albany, then Lord Warden of the Marches. He had seized the greater part of their holdings, threatened to lay waste their home, and to drive them from the land, root and branch. As Albany was then in high favour with the English Court, the Janfaries could not hope for any succour from that quarter. Under ordinary circumstances they might have calculated upon such succour. Their sole hope of rescue centred in King James, and he could only be reached successfully through his favourite, Cochrane. Him Sir Hugh sought, knowing that he had no kindly regard for the king's brother, Albany; and whatever might have been the nature of their interview, the result was that Cochrane pledged himself to restore the lands of Sir Hugh, and to protect him from Albany's vengeance. He fulfilled his pledge to the letter.

That was the service he had rendered the family, and the price was the hand of Katherine Janfarie.

To those who knew Cochrane, the price seemed a poor one for so much service; but none doubted that he had good reasons for making such a bargain, and for insisting upon its fulfilment in despite of the objections the lady raised. He had reasons, and potent ones. His influence over the king seemed to increase daily; but, in proportion, the hate with which he was regarded by the noblemen whose places he usurped at Court, and by the people whose rights he trampled upon, also increased. On this account he sought alliance with some family, at whose command a sufficiently considerable force could be brought into the field to serve in a degree as a protection against his enemies.

There were other reasons for his present course, but they were known only to himself ; and he kept his own counsel.

The rejoicings were at their height, when Sir Bertrand Gordon made his way secretly into the tower. The unhappy bride, who, with despairing hope, had looked for his coming, met her lover. They passed unseen to the court ; he lifted her up beside him on his horse, Falcon, and before a hand could be raised to stay them, they were through the gateway and beyond reach.

Then ensued wild confusion, exclamations of rage, and threats of vengeance. The bridegroom and the elder brother Richard were the first mounted and in pursuit. But it was not long before Sir Hugh had raised the symbol of the hot-trod, and, with fifty picked men, his kinsmen, Musgrave and Fenwick, by his side, and sure-scented hounds to guide them, followed in the track of the lovers.

The darkening gloaming favoured the fugitives as they were borne along by the swift-footed horse. Falcon proved himself worthy of his name, and every encouraging sound of his master's voice seemed to inspire him with new strength ; he seemed to have almost a human sense of the perilous venture in which he played so prominent a part.

The horse dashed through the shadows which seemed like giant forms reaching towards him to bar the way, and which were baffled by his speed. Now the black irregular line of the Annan water came in view ; and as Falcon approached the ford in the direction of which he had been guided, it became evident that his strength was failing. He had been ridden far and fast that day to reach Johnstone Tower, and now the unusual strain that had been put upon his power began to tell.

This Lamington would fain have concealed from his companion, but she was quick to observe how much more frequently he required to speak, urging the jaded animal forward. When they had forded the Annan, voice and spur prompted Falcon into a gallop, but the effort he made was apparent. His pace was slower, he snorted heavily at every bound, and those grim shadows of surrounding objects seemed to stoop closer and longer over him.

"If he should fail us now," she said, raising her pale face, "they will overtake us and they will kill you."

"Have no fear. Falcon will hold out until we reach

Dumfries, and there I hope to find a friend waiting with fresh horses to carry us in safety to our journey's end."

"Safety," she echoed, doubtfully. "Ah, Bertrand, where in all Scotland shall we find that now? We have made relentless enemies of my father and my brothers, and there is no resting-place to which they will not follow us."

"I do not fear that, either; for, give me only a few days, and I will satisfy them that I have rescued you from the hands of a villain—one so foul at heart that, knowing him, no man would stir a step in his cause."

"You will never satisfy them of that."

"Well, if the worst happen, we can defend ourselves."

She started suddenly, straining her eyes into the gloom behind.

"Did you hear?" she cried.

"I heard nothing but the wind."

"It was like the baying of a hound."

"That might have been, and yet give us no cause for trouble. But it is your fancy that plays tricks with you. Come, Falcon, lad, complete the work you have begun so well. On, lad, on; there is only a little space to cover now."

Katherine was silenced, but not satisfied.

The horse responded to the new command with a mighty effort; but his speed soon relaxed again, to be again quickened by voice and spur.

The constant effort to sustain the horse became almost as fatiguing to the rider as the exertion it produced was to the animal. A fair speed, however, was maintained; and at length, as they neared Dumfries, the towers of Grey Friars and St. Michael loomed up darkly against the lowering sky.

Then Bertrand permitted Falcon to slacken pace, and enter the town at a jaded walk. The douce burgesses, who in those days observed the simple rule of bedding soon after sunset and rising with the lark, had, for the most part, retired to rest, and were undisturbed by the ring of the horse's slow steps. There were, however, gleams of light in a few windows where a late feast or sickness caused some of the folk to make a breach in the rule. A pale sickly light illumed several of the windows of the monastery of Grey Friars—in the chapel of which Comyn was slain by Bruce and his followers. The black

outline of the ancient castle of the Maxwells rose protectingly above the sleeping town, and the lights gleaming through the portholes of the guard-house indicated that watch and ward were observed.

The better to avoid the curious gaze of any loiterer, Lamington passed down by the warder's dyke towards the Nith. On reaching the margin of the broad waste called the Sands, which were at high tide covered with water, and at the ebb left bare and yellow, he turned in the direction of the bridge of Devorgilla.

Almost opposite to the bridge, and distant from it not more than two hundred yards, was a square, white house, of two storeys in height, and roofed with thick, brown thatch. It had a squat, comfortable look in daylight, and stood in the midst of a cluster of small houses. It had three entrance doors, one giving to the High Street, the second, an equally important one, giving to the bridge; and the third, at the side, was used only for communication with the stables. This was the principal hostelry of the town, and was called the Royal Hunt, on account of its having been the resting-place of the king's party on the way to the royal forest of Kells. Matthew Hislop was the vintner, and he was soon brought to the door by the loud summons of Lamington, although the house had been closed for the night.

The vintner was a stout fellow of middle age, who before he had settled down to his present occupation had proved the strength of his limbs in many a Border wrestling bout, and in not a few fights of a more questionable character.

He stared in some astonishment at the appearance of the cavalier and the lady with one horse. The worn-out appearance of the latter, its hide covered with foam and bespattered with mud, were suggestive of a ride that had not been altogether one of pleasure. Whatever suspicions might have been aroused in his mind, he was not permitted to express them, even if he had intended to do so.

Bertrand hastily inquired if he had any guest waiting for a friend.

"Was there any sign?" queried the vintner, cautiously.

"Yes, the man's belt is buckled with a boar's head such as this."

Opening his cloak the knight displayed the silver buckle of his own sword-belt, which was formed like a boar's head.

"It's the Gordon," muttered Hislop, recognizing the badge of the family; "na, the chiel ye want is no here."

Lamington gave vent to an exclamation of disappointment, and then, hastily: "Show me your best chamber, and get the horse taken to the stable. There are twenty crowns for you if you serve me faithfully to-night."

This promise infused sudden alacrity into the movements of the host; and whilst he conducted his guests to his principal chamber upstairs, an ostler took the horse round to the stable.

The vintner, promptly obeying the orders he had received, spread the table with the best repast his larder could supply at the moment; and whilst he was thus occupied, Lamington questioned him as to the possibility of obtaining a couple of good horses.

"There's no a brute in the stable that could travel five miles the night," was the disappointing answer.

"Can you not borrow from some of your neighbours?"

"No—at any rate, I cannot think o' ane that could oblige ye, for the morn's fair-day at Lockerbie, and a' the horse and cattle that's worth a straw are awa' there."

"We must wait, then, for Will's arrival, or we must start again after Falcon has had a rest," was the disagreeable conclusion which the knight was compelled to accept.

Hislop was retiring, when he was stayed by Lamington touching his arm.

"See you, master vintner, should ill luck bring you other guests to-night, than the man we are looking for, give us timely warning; and take heed that they know nothing of our presence here. Be faithful, and the twenty crowns may be doubled."

"I ken what's what," nodded the vintner discreetly, "and I gie you my word that nae harm shall come to ye or the bonnie lady in my house."

"Enough, see you to the comfort of my horse; we may have to depend on his speed again."

The door closed upon Hislop, and Gordon turned to the lady.

CHAPTER II.

FORESHADOWS.

“Say, should we scorn joy’s transient beams
Because to-morrow storms may lour?”

Glenfinlas.

THE room was long and narrow, with two windows opening to the high street. It was lit by a cresset hanging from the low roof by an iron chain. The light scattered the darkness from the centre of the chamber, but permitted it to form in dark shadows in the corners, and to give the larger pieces of the massive furniture a gloomy aspect. The feeble light, the big shadows, and the quietude of the night, rendered the appearance of the apartment cold and dismal.

Lamington was surprised to see Katherine with her head bowed on the table and her hands clasped as if she were in pain. Anxiously he raised her head and gazed in her eyes, which were full of tears.

“Katherine, do you fear our fate so much that all your courage has forsaken you?”

She answered him low and tremulously.

“No, Bertrand; I do not fear our fate, whatever that may be; but I fear the course which has led us to it.”

“You mean that you are calmer now, and that you regret the sacrifice you have made for my sake?”

“Not that; I regret nothing that is done for your sake, and had you come to me before they had forced me to the altar I would have been happy now, and could have met the dangers that arise at every step with a firm heart.”

“Why then be sad?”

She glanced round the room shudderingly.

“They told me I was his wife—and Heaven itself frowns upon the woman who breaks the sacred tie of wedlock. He has the right to claim me, to drag me from you, and the mighty voice of the Church supports his claim. Whilst he lives I can never call you husband.”

“You made no vow,” he cried earnestly; “you were forced to the altar; the coward priest, who was unworthy

of his high office, performed the ceremony in terror of his own wretched life; and the Church will refuse to acknowledge such a mockery of its most holy rites."

"If that be so, a weary burden is lifted from my heart."

"It is so, as you shall find before many hours are past. I carry you now to the Abbot Panther, and he shall protect you until the Pope himself shall have annulled every claim that Cochrane might have upon you. A few weeks will suffice to obtain your release, and until then regard me as your friend—your brother who devotes his life to your happiness."

"You give me new strength, and henceforth you shall find me as fearless and unfaltering as yourself."

He pressed her hand respectfully to his lips.

"That is Katherine Janfarie who is speaking now, and not the timid maiden who trembles at the shadows of her own fancy. Remember, there must be no more doubts—no more lingering looks cast backward, or I shall doubt your love."

She clasped his arms spasmodically.

"You must never doubt that," she cried, "for it would kill me. I have forsaken all the world for you. I have staked even the good name, which is my highest treasure; and if you doubt me after that, there is nothing more to live for."

"I will never doubt," he said, in a low, passionate tone, "until you yourself shall say you wish you had not loved me."

"When you prove false, my misery may wring from me such a cry as that, but no other power can move me to it."

"And when I do prove false you shall have the right to spurn me."

Their eyes were bright with confidence, undimmed by any speck of dread of the possible terrors the future might have in store.

"Come," he said presently, with a happy laugh, "I see the tears are gone from your eyes, which tell me that all doubt has vanished from your mind. Be ever so—look always thus, and you will find me always at your feet—your slave. Ay, by my faith, as much your slave when wedded years have passed, with all their petty bickerings,

as now, when we are looking to the future through the bright halo of hopeful love."

"That is a pledge," she said, affected by his good humour, and the grave trouble of her visage disappeared in a smile.

"A pledge it is, and you shall christen it with me in this wine. Come, we will be merry while we have this moment to rest, and I will describe our course to you."

He spoke with the ease of one unconscious of danger, and with the gaiety of one who is perfectly happy. This naturally influenced her, and before many minutes had passed she was almost as merry as if there were no peril near.

"First, I have to place you under the safe keeping of Abbot Panther," he proceeded gaily; "he is one who fears neither king nor baron. He has the power, and I believe he has the will to serve me. I journeyed with him from France, where he is Abbot of Poitou; and I have a tryst with him at Kells. He is the Pope's Legate, and once under his protection the king himself will hesitate to force your inclination, even in behoof of his favourite, Cochrane."

"But the king will visit his displeasure with him on you."

"Most like he will; but there is a way by which I hope to overcome it. His brothers, Albany and Mar, hold me in some esteem—I dare swear esteem as high as their dislike for Cochrane is deep. With their aid I hope to satisfy our royal master that in this matter I have done nothing save that which an honourable gentleman must have done; and that in other matters I have served him best when he condemned me most—in proving the falseness of the knave who is now chief in his counsels."

"Take heed, Bertrand, take heed; it is a dangerous path you seek to tread."

"The more honour in the victory."

"Ay, but in this the odds are too much against you. If it were in the field of battle that you had to prove yourself, I would buckle on your sword, and watch with proud eyes your steps to victory—or death" (trembling a little at that word). "I have no fear when the foeman stands declared before you in the light of day. Then I would pray the Sacred Mother to watch over you, and could wait the issue

calmly. But in this course you mark out, you have to deal with wolves and foxes in the dark, scarce knowing who is your friend and who your enemy. It is not the sword of a gentleman that can protect you; you must wield the weapons of the knaves you fight against; cunning must be your brand, and artifice your shield."

"Be it so; at least I shall use them honestly, and for a worthy purpose."

"Why use them at all?"

"Because there is no other way to justice."

"Then why seek such justice? Why not be content in having that man's claim to me annulled, and in taking me to your home? We can be very happy there, making a world of our own, whilst all the storms and miseries of ambition and intrigue pass by us unheeded."

His brow became clouded, and his hands clenched. Then sadly—

"My home, Katherine—have you forgotten?—my home is where my sword or wit may cleave a way for me. The old tower stands yonder by the eerie Loch of Var, and it will give us shelter from the wind and rain when the need comes. But it can give us no protection from the spite of men. It is garrisoned by two old servitors who have been faithful to our house in its misfortune as in its triumph, and their son—the fellow who should have met us here. They are strong enough to hold it, for it owns nothing that is worth any man's lifting. The lands around it, which once gave its owners the right to stand abreast with the foremost of the country, are not ours now, but the king's, since my father was falsely charged with aiding Douglas in slaying Maclellan of Bombie. That sentence must be revoked; those lands must be restored to me before I cease to war with whatever weapons my need may demand."

Katherine's reply was interrupted by the baying of a hound, and the clatter of horses' hoofs rising above the whistling of the wind.

Bertrand sprang to the casement, and, slightly parting the hangings, peered forth. He saw two horsemen disappearing in the direction of the stable.

"If I am not happily mistaken," he whispered hurriedly, "it is your brother and Cochrane who have made upon us. We must try Falcon again."

Katherine leaped to her feet, and drew close over her head the cloak her lover had placed around her. She had become pale at the announcement of the pursuers' arrival, but she was firm and decisive in her movements.

The door suddenly opened, and Hislop entered with much confusion in his manner.

"Your horse is dead, sir," he said, under his breath, and closing the door after him.

"Dead!" ejaculated the fugitives together.

"Ay, dead, sir, and a bonnie beast he was tae; but ye hae ridden him owre sair. He wad neither take bite nor sup when we got him into the stable; he just drappit doon pechan' his life out, and he died just as I was wetting his mou' wi' some o' the best Malmsey."

"Why did you not call me sooner?" said Bertrand, angrily.

"I didna want to disturb ye, sir; and maybe it was as weel, for there are twa gentlemen hae just ridden into the yard, and the youngest o' them saw your horse, and said he would swear it was Lamington's. By that he ken'd that ye and the lady were in the house, and they're seeking ye up and down."

"Where are they?"

"One o' them's keeping guard in the lobby, and the ither's turning every room he's come tae tapsalteerie. But ye just unlock yon door ahint ye wi' the key ye see hanging on it, and it opens on a stair that'll tak' ye doon tae the kitchen, and the guidwife will try to slip ye oot, while I try tae get that chiel tae quit the lobby."

"Where are their horses?"

"In the stable-yard."

Bertrand seized the key from the nail on which it hung, and opened the narrow door which gave to the private staircase.

Katherine uttered an exclamation of amaze, and Bertrand drew back a pace, for the moment the door was opened they were confronted by Sir Robert Cochrane!

Searching the house, Cochrane had discovered the entrance to the staircase in the kitchen, and followed it with this result.

CHAPTER III.

THE BROKEN SWORD.

“But hark, what means you faint halloo?
The chase is up—but they shall know
The stag at bay’s a dangerous foe.”

SCOTT.

THERE was a peculiarly cold smile on Cochrane’s sallow visage, and a gratified glitter in his eyes, as he noted the effect his unexpected appearance created. He spoke with a tone of satiric civility, affecting to treat the whole transaction as only a jest which had been carried a little too far.

“You have afforded us excellent sport, Master Gordon,” he said, showing a row of white teeth, through which the words passed hissing, “and you, too, mistress, we have to thank you for this merry game of hide-and-seek; but I am afraid, the hiders being found, the game must end.”

“Stand aside, sir,” cried Lamington, fiercely; “we are in no mood for jests, and least of all from you.”

Cochrane did not move, and he addressed himself directly to Katherine.

“Madam, as your husband, and as one holding some position that may not be lightly tarnished, I must beg you to accompany me straight to your home. We will forget this little excursion you have made, somewhat against my will, and we will try to keep all knowledge of it from those who might judge it more harshly than I wish to do.”

Her face crimsoned, and an angry light shone in her eyes. Contempt, scorn, and defiance were in her look as she answered him—

“The title you claim was obtained by force. No word or look of mine gave assent to the bond which you hold over me. Foully and cruelly it was thrust upon me, and the dear Virgin be my witness now that I renounce it utterly—I spurn it from me, and no power on earth shall ever make me yield to it.”

The cold smile—cruel and satanic almost in expression—became more marked on Cochrane's face.

"You are my wife, madam, despite your brave renunciation of my title to call you so. But, however strong you may feel in your determination now, I doubt not that in time you will learn wisdom and forswear this girlish passion—ay, and regret it too."

He spoke with irritating coolness and confidence.

She would have answered again, but Gordon prevented her.

"Hush, Katherine! have no more words with him. This fellow understands no argument of goodness or justice; but there is one law he understands—that of necessity—and we must put him to it."

Whilst he had been speaking, Cochrane, though watching him closely, had bent his head as if listening for the sound of some one coming, and he was apparently satisfied with the result.

"You are a valiant gentleman, Master Gordon," he said, sneeringly; "you have proved yourself worthy of the name you bear, and I own that I would rather have called you friend than foe. Since that may not be, I salute you with all due respect as a worthy enemy in the field or in the council chamber. But, as a gentleman, I think you can scarcely deny my right to remove that lady."

Gordon with difficulty restrained himself during the delivery of these cynical remarks, and he answered impatiently—

"Fine words, sir, will not prove your right; but you have a sword, and it may. On guard."

Giving Cochrane no more time than to place himself in a position of defence, Gordon assailed him with rapid and vigorous passes which only an experienced swordsman could have parried. Cochrane seemed to be more intent at first upon discovering the peculiar method of his opponent's play, than upon giving thrust for thrust. For the moment his coolness and his purely defensive action seemed to give him the advantage. But at the instant when he seemed to have discovered the trick of his antagonist's fence, and was about to avail himself of that knowledge in a deadly lunge, Lamington, by a dexterous swirl of his sword, wrenched Cochrane's out of his hand.

Cochrane stood astounded, and at the mercy of his enemy. The sword point was at his breast, when Katherine threw herself upon her lover's arm.

"Not yet, Bertrand," she cried, "not in my sight. Let him live until the world knows his baseness, and some vulgar hand strikes him to the earth."

Gordon sheathed his weapon, and picked up from the floor that of Cochrane.

"If you were capable of gratitude," he said, sternly, "I would bid you be grateful to this lady for your wretched life. As it is, I am content to obey her wish, unworthy as you are of one merciful thought. But thus I show my scorn of your knighthood."

So saying, he broke the sword across his knee, and flung the pieces at the man's feet.

"You have given me a lesson," said the defeated man, or rather hissed, for his teeth were clenched and more displayed than usual, "and I thank you. I will not forget it. I know your trick, and it will not serve you a second time."

"By St. Michael, the second time will ring the death-knell of one of us. Take up your sword, broken though it be; it is a worthier weapon than you have any right to wear. Now, stand aside."

Gripping him by the arm, he whirled him across the floor. At the same time Hislop, who had contrived to hide himself from Cochrane's view by stooping behind one of the chairs in the obscurity of the corner, darted forward and extinguished the cresset, throwing the chamber into complete darkness.

Gordon's hand was fortunately on the door, and he passed through, drawing Katherine after him. He took the precaution to remove the key from the inside, and so locked the door when he got out, making their outwitted enemy a prisoner.

They descended a dark narrow flight of stairs, and suddenly found themselves in the kitchen of the hostelry, which was occupied only by Dame Hislop, and a man who was stretched on a wooden settle, fast asleep and snoring loudly.

The dame was a broad-shouldered, big-boned woman, with rather harsh features, but with good-humoured eyes that softened them even to a kindly look.

"Oh, sirs," she exclaimed, in an undertone, "but this is the maist awsome night that ever was. Dinna ye hear the racket that's in the toon and gathering about our house, as if the deil himsel' had ta'en quarters in it, and the folk were gaun to drive him out wi' flaming swords and a smell o' his ain brimstone? We'll hae the big drum beating in a minute, and the whale toon will be skelpin' about in its sark."

These observations were made rather to herself than to her guests, whose presence she seemed scarcely to observe until she had finished. Her words drew the attention of Katherine and Lamington to the disturbance without, which in the excitement of the encounter with Cochrane they had not observed sooner.

There was a loud confusion of voices, the baying of hounds, the trampling of horses' hoofs, and the general din made by an excited crowd. Presently to this was added the loud beating of a drum, answered by shouts and watch-cries from various points of the town.

Hislop burst into the kitchen.

"It's a Hot Trod that's after ye," he gasped, "and the toon's rising. Do ye no hear the drum beating as though a' the deils in the Border were making an assault? Saints save us, if it's ken'd that I hae been hiding ye, it's as muckle as my life's worth."

"Can we not pass forth?" said Gordon. "We will be safer in the midst of the crowd than here."

"Ods my life, man, ye canna gang out; the house is surrounded wi' Border prickers. Gie them some duds, guid wife, to cast ower their ain, whilst I try and put the folk aff the scent."

He rushed out, and as he did so there was a tramp of heavy footsteps in the passage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISGUISE.

“ There were four and twenty bonnie boys
 A’ clad in Johnstone grey ;
 They said they would take the bride again
 By the strong hand if they may.

“ Some o’ them were right willing men,
 But they were na willing a’ ;
 And four and twenty Leader lads
 Bid them mount and ride awa’.”

Katherine Janfarie.

THE din without grew louder as the startled burgesses, half-dressed, and armed with the first weapons that had offered to their hands, hastened to the scene of the alarm. Here the burning peat which Nicol Janfarie held aloft on his spear declared the purpose of the untimely disturbance ; and every good man and true was thereby bound to render what assistance might be in his power to seize the fugitives.

Many of the townfolk were the more readily disposed to comply with the rule out of spite for the alarm they had undergone, and for the disagreeable interruption of their slumbers. Some there were, however, who, on learning the nature of the “cattle” which had been lifted, were rather inclined to enter upon the search as a sport than with any serious desire to arrest the defaulters. These were the younger men, whose sympathies were naturally on the side of the lovers ; whilst the former were the elders, who had more regard for their own comfort than for Cupid’s perplexities, and who had daughters of their own to protect against moonlight lovers.

The babble and turmoil swelled and lingered in the neighbourhood of the Royal Hunt, and at the moment when Hislop had been in the kitchen announcing the rising of the town and the discovery of the retreat of the Laird of Lamington and his lady by Sir Hugh Janfarie and his followers, an entrance to the house had been forced.

Hislop immediately placed himself at the command of the Borderers, with such an appearance of frankness that

no suspicion was aroused of the deception he was practising.

"Come this gate, gentlemen," he said, proceeding up the stair; "I think the folk ye're seeking are up here."

He led them through every room, leaving the one in which Cochrane was confined to the last. He submitted to many threats and curses as chamber after chamber failed to reward the pursuers with the slightest clue to the whereabouts of their prey.

At last they discovered Cochrane, whose attempts to make himself heard by his friends had been drowned in the wild tumult of voices, the trampling of feet, and the clatter of arms within and without the house.

Cochrane's explanation was briefly given, and by his direction the private door was forced. Then he, with Sir Hugh and several men, rushed down to the kitchen, whilst Richard and the rest of the party descended by the ordinary passage to prevent the egress of their victims, whom they now felt assured were run to earth.

When the Borderers burst into the kitchen by both entrances almost simultaneously, the guidwife raised a skirl of alarm, and seized a broomstick, as if to defend herself.

"Saunts preserve a' body!" she cried, with more of a termagant's rage in her manner than of a woman's fear, "what are ye folk doin' rampaging about like a wheen stots afore a riever? Are ye gaun to ding the biggin' about our lugs? or are ye gaun to harry the hostel that's under the king's ain favour, forbye that o' the Grey Friars and the lord o' the castle? What do ye mean, ye ill-faured loons, breaking into a decent man's house this gate?"

The excited gentlemen and as many of their followers as had been able to crowd into the apartment were brought to a standstill. Cochrane, Sir Hugh, and Richard glared round the place with wrathful chagrin.

The persons they sought were not there.

Besides the hostess they saw another woman and two men. The woman was young, and was standing by the dresser, on which she had been baking cakes, when the sudden invasion of the place interrupted and frightened her. She wore a brown petticoat, and a loose yellow short-gown or body, the sleeves of which were tucked above her

elbows, and her arms were white with barley meal. On her head she wore a "mutch"—a big frilled cap—and what hair was visible had been touzled and so whitened with meal that it would have defied the keenest eyes to have detected its colour by the feeble aid the lamp afforded. One of her eyes appeared to have received some injury, and a red kerchief was tied across it, to the destruction of whatever comeliness her face possessed.

Scared by the uproar, she stood in a shrinking posture by the dresser, holding up the yellow crock in which she had been mixing the meal, as if ready to heave it at the first who molested her. This little trick at the same time served to shadow her features, and to render it almost impossible for any of the men to obtain a clear view of her face, whilst it imparted a certain gaukiness to her figure which none of them could have associated with Katherine Janfarie.

A big clumsy fellow, in the coarse garb of a common hind, was stretched on the wooden settle, and he only noticed the intrusion by a drowsy growl of discontent, as he turned his face to the wall to sleep again.

The other man was standing by the huge fireplace with a mug of ale raised to his mouth, where it had apparently been arrested by his surprise and curiosity at the Borderers' furious entry.

He stood directly under the lamp, and as he wore one of the broad-crowned bonnets used by farmers, the shadow it cast over his face in the position he occupied, rendered his features barely visible. He had the appearance of a drover, and he seemed to have either just arrived from a journey or to have been about to start on one. A large grey plaid covered his shoulders and body, and the ends of it almost touched the top of his high jack-boots. In one hand he grasped a heavy-headed whip, and in the other the mug of ale was poised.

He had a rough rustic bearing, through which it would have been difficult to identify the cavalier who had studied gallantry at the Court of France.

It was rendered unnecessary, and indeed impossible for the drover or the one-eyed cakemaker to speak, by the running fire of complaint and indignation which the hostess kept up with unabated vigour of lungs and words.

"Peace, woman," commanded Sir Hugh, when he had gazed round without observing anything suspicious—"peace, woman, and acquaint us where you have hidden the guests who were with you but now."

"Me hidden them!" exclaimed the hostess, with renewed energy. "My certes, and what would I do that for? I hae enough ado to wait on them without playing bairns' pranks with them."

"Cease your railing, Jezebel, and answer me——"

The hostess interrupted him with a shriek of rage, and flourished her broomstick with so much effect that she cleared a space around her.

"Jessie bell or Jessie pat yersel'—I'm nane," she vociferated. "And I'll no be put upon in my ain house."

The drover gave vent to a guttural "Haw, haw," as if the scene amused him.

Cochrane stepped up to the woman and spoke civilly.

"You mistake, dame; no offence to you was intended; and pray you answer us without fear and without waste of time—where have the lady and the fellow who was with her upstairs gone? If they are in the house, declare it at once; for we will find them, and your attempt to shield them will not be to your benefit or theirs."

"Ye're a civil-spoken gentleman; but I ken nought o' the folk, sae ye may keep your civility for some ither body."

"You must know something of them; so be wise and answer."

"I'll answer that," broke in the drover, speaking hoarsely, and as if he had something in his mouth.

"You!" said Cochrane, eyeing him keenly.

The man stood the inspection unmoved. But the girl at the dresser seemed to be strangely affected by his sudden speech, and also by the fact that Richard Janfarie was staring at her with puzzled looks. The yellow crock dropped from her hands to the floor, and she stooped down to pick up the fragments.

Dame Hislop, observing Janfarie's curious glances, rushed towards the lass, and with affected spleen, assailing her, contrived to take a position which concealed her from the man's view.

"Ye stupid, handless taupie, ye'll hae a' the dishes in

the house broken in nae time," she cried, giving the lass a slap on the shoulder that made her stagger.

She continued to abuse her and to keep beside her, and the anger was so well feigned, that it lulled the rising suspicions which had come so near enabling Richard to penetrate the disguise.

"Ay, me," proceeded the drover, hoarsely, "if ye mean the lady and gentleman wha came out o' that door there—I can tell ye what gate they hae ta'en, for it was me direckit them."

"Say it, fellow," ejaculated Sir Hugh, impatiently; 'where are they hidden?'

"They are nae mair hid than I am, sae far as I ken. The gentleman said he wanted horses, and I told him to gang up the back wynd to the monastery, whare they wad maybe get them."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I think sae; but as they can scarcely hae got to the gate yet, ye had better gang after them and sec."

Sir Hugh turned to his son and directed him to have every door and window of the house guarded, so that no one might leave during his absence.

Cochrane was less satisfied than his friend with the drover's voluntary information.

"Show me your hand," he said, seizing the man's arm; "it seems to me little used to rough work such as your garb would betoken you as accustomed to."

"Od maister, do ye think that? Now, that's just what my friends say; but it has got a hard grip, saft as it looks."

And with that he grasped Cochrane's wrist with a force that would have made an ordinary man wince. When the drover removed his hand it left a blue ring round the wrist.

The consequence of this slight incident might have been fatal to the fugitives, had there not been at the moment a cry raised outside which seemed to shape itself into the words—

"They are found! they are found!"

Sir Hugh rushed out to discover the cause of the new commotion, and if necessary to proceed to the monastery. He was followed by Richard and the men; but Cochrane remained.

"You have a stout gripe," he said, carelessly, and still watching the man narrowly.

"I said that."

"And your boast was truer than boasts generally are. What is your name?"

The abrupt question was made with a purpose. A moment's hesitation would have betrayed the real character of the drover, which his hand had made Cochrane suspect. But he responded on the instant.

"Will Craig I'm called, and whiles Muckle Will."

"I will remember the name. Do you know whom we are seeking?" (Another trial question, abrupt as before.)

"Ye didna say." (Indifferently, and placing the ale mug to his lips.)

"The man we are seeking is called Gordon of Lamington."

The drover finished his draught, and then, wiping his lips—

"Ay, I think I hae heard the name afore."

"Wha said Lamington?" was the unexpected inquiry, made in a deep bass.

Cochrane wheeled about, and looked at the man who had been sleeping on the settle, and who was now sitting up rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his jerkin in a slow, stupid way. Cochrane's movement prevented him observing the sudden start of the drover as he observed the face of the lout.

"I spoke of Lamington," said Cochrane. "Have you seen him?"

The man ceased rubbing his eyes, and looked up at the speaker with an expression of drowsy curiosity.

"I dinna ken you, onyway," he answered in his heavy voice, "and it's nae business o' yours wha I hae seen."

With that he opened his capacious mouth in a long yawn, and when his jaws were stretched to the utmost his eyes lighted on the drover. His mouth closed with a loud snap, and he jumped up, crying—

"The maister himsel'."

The drover thrust him angrily back as the clown sprang to him with an expression of joyous recognition on his broad simple visage.

"Ye hae had ower muckle ale, Will," said the drover,

addressing the man by the name he had given as his own. "Did ye no hear the gentleman saying that here's a brave company of Borderers wha hae raised the Hot Trod against ane Lamington?"

The heavy jaw of the sleepy-headed fellow dropped, and he looked with some bewilderment from the drover to Cochrane. Slowly he seemed to comprehend something, and still in a drowsy way he began to move towards the door. He passed out.

Cochrane, whose conduct in the interview with the drover was that of one who suspects, and who is conscious that his suspicions are baffled at every turn, appeared to hesitate for an instant. Then he followed the man.

"The blundering fool!" muttered the drover, without any of the hoarseness which had disguised his voice; "the addle-pated knave! I doubt not he has been sleeping there since our arrival, and he shows himself now when escape must be made through a thousand dangers. Katherine!"

The lass who had broken the crock, and who during the foregoing scene had busied herself in conjunction with the hostess in the baking, turned to him—

"Speak low," she said warningly; "I have heard everything. I fear he suspects you, and that man who was sleeping here seemed to recognize you."

"He is my follower, Will Craig—the knave whom I expected to find here with horses."

"Cochrane has followed him," was her distressed cry. "He will cajole the secret from him."

"Not with his life. The rascal has only one faculty, but that one is fidelity to me. Dolt as he is in other respects, no torture could force from him a word that might injure me. You might have marked that I gave him warning of our peril the instant I recognized him, and he seemed to understand."

"But if he be so dull of wit, he may forget."

"No; he has a weak head that can only comprehend one thing at a time, but once he does comprehend it he clings to it steadily. He never forgets."

Katherine shook her head.

"I am not satisfied. Cochrane looked strangely at you as he quitted us. It was rash of you to venture upon speech with him at all. I trembled at every word you

uttered more than when my brother seemed about to tear the disguise from me."

"I have had practice in the masques of the Louvre I would what remains were as easily performed. I knew the hazard, and if it succeeded I counted that we were so much the safer."

"Whisht ye, whisht!" muttered the hostess, who was standing by the door listening; "there's some ane coming."

Katherine instantly resumed the pretence of baking, and Gordon again placed himself under the lantern.

The door was pushed open and Hisiop appeared.

"The toon lads are making sport," he said. "They raised a cry enoo that ye were found, and hae drawn maist o' the folk tae the cross. But it's o' nae use to ye unless ye could rin out; and Guid kens how that's to be managed, for there are twenty men guarding the house. I'm clean at my wits' end how to serve you."

Gordon's brows contracted as he bent his head in meditation.

Katherine watched him eagerly, and with pulse quickened to pain.

Every outlet was guarded, and every hope of escape seemed to be extinguished. The only gleam of light which he could perceive in the darkness that had fallen upon them was the presence of his follower, Muckle Will. But even his presence inspired little confidence in the result which was to follow their efforts! It was impossible for two men to stand against the band of Borderers who supported Cochrane; and unless they could pass them, there was no chance of escape.

They might have cut a way through the midst of their foes had they been alone: Gordon had made as bold a hazard before now. But with a woman to conduct in safety such a venture would have been utter madness, even supposing Will had the horses close at hand, which was exceedingly doubtful, seeing that he had neither made himself known to the landlord, as he had been directed, nor had explained why he was there without the equipage.

A few seconds sufficed for him to make this disagreeable review of their position. Then raising his head abruptly—

"Have you seen the fellow who was sleeping here a little while ago?"

"Ay, he gaed out to the stable alang wi' the chiel ye had the tulzie wi' up the stair," said the host.

"He will betray you," said Katherine in agitation.

Lamington took her hands, gazing tenderly in her face.

"You will understand the lad some day, Kate; meanwhile, be assured of this, I can trust him with my life, even as I could trust you."

"The Holy Mother grant that your trust be well placed," she said, still doubting.

"You will find it so," was his confident reply; and turning to Hislop he continued, "When did the knave arrive?"

"About twa hours syne."

"Had he no horses with him?"

"He had nothing; he just came in, took a waught o' yull, and laid himself down there like a muckle sumph, and wadna say a word about where he cam' frae, or where he was going to, or anything ava."

Gordon's countenance lightened as if with some inspiration, and he hastily counted out ten gold pieces on the table.

"Thanks, host, for what you have done," he said, hurriedly; "and here is the reward I promised you doubled. You and your good dame shall hear from me again to your profit for this night's service, if I live."

Hislop iterated his readiness to serve so worthy a gentleman and so fair a lady, and wished that he saw them well through their trouble.

Katherine grasped her lover's arm, looking anxiously in his eyes as she observed him feel under his plaid for his sword, to make sure that it was ready to his hand.

"What are you about to do?" she queried.

"To make another venture; we must risk everything to win safe passage to our destination."

"But the risk need not be rashly made."

"Nothing but rashness can save us now. Have you courage, Katherine?"

"For your sake I think I have courage to dare anything."

"Then for my sake you must bide here for a little

while. Should any one attempt to force you hence, blow upon this whistle; that will let me know your danger, and bring Will to your side."

"And you——?"

"I must go forth; and if I can but raise a riot among the burgesses we may escape unnoticed in the confusion. That is our only chance; and, by the saints, I think Cochrane himself supplies the means to help us to it. Stay you here, and do not stir till I return."

CHAPTER V.

THE COCHRANE PLACKS.

"Then whingers flew frae gentles' sides,
And swords flew frae the shea's,
And red and rosy was the blood
Ran doon the lily braes."

Katherine Janfarie.

HE rushed out, making for the door which opened upon the High Street.

The sturdy Borderer, Fenwick, who was on guard, arrested him.

"You cannot pass, master, whatever your haste may be."

"I seek Sir Robert Cochrane," was the response, in a hoarse, disguised voice, and with a manner of breathless haste; "and I must find him."

"If that be your errand, pass on. He was here a minute ago."

Lamington darted by the guard and speedily joined the crowd of burgesses who were flitting excitedly about the Town House, or standing together in groups, earnestly discussing the events of the night. Many of them carried links or lanterns, and the lights flashing through the darkness, and flickering under the strong wind, which was sweeping up the street, imparted to their disturbed visages a gloomy aspect.

Gordon mingled amongst them, and much to his relief overheard dissatisfied murmurs at the untimely disturbance of the town's repose, for apparently so little purpose as the

hunt after a brace of runaway lovers who could not be discovered.

"Know you who leads the Hot Trod?" said Gordon to one stalwart fellow whom he heard swearing that he believed the whole affair was a trick of the Borderers to harry the town.

"I neither ken nor care," answered the man, surlily.

"It is Cochrane, the maker of the base placks—the fellow who has commanded us to accept pieces of lead and brass for good silver money, and who has ruined honest men by his knavery."

"I wish we could lay hands on the chiel; we'd let him ken what we think o' the Cochrane placks."

"After me, then, and you shall have your wish."

"Hey, lads, here's sport that's worth while turning out for," shouted the man to his comrades. "Wha'll take Cochrane placks in payment for his wark or guidis?"

"Nane of us," was the general yell of execration which rose at the mention of the debased coin.

"Let the maker of them ken that. Here's a chiel says that Cochrane himsel's among us the night. Come on, and gie him a taste of our mettle."

The proposition was greeted with a vehement shout that echoed from one end of the town to the other, and indicated the hearty detestation which was entertained for the king's favourite, in consequence of his ill-advised attempt to impose upon the people, in the matter of the new coin.

The crowd instantly followed Lamington towards the Royal Hunt; and as it passed onward the meaning of the new movement was hurriedly explained to neighbours and friends with all the exaggerations and transformations which a word passing rapidly from lip to lip in an excited mob assumes.

The crowd swelled as it progressed, and the original cause of the rising was entirely forgotten in the present and much more personal source of action.

The people had doggedly refused to accept the coin issued by Cochrane, trade had been interrupted in consequence, and much misery had been felt on that account in every town in Scotland. Merchants would not accept payment in the new coin for their goods, farmers would not

take it for their grain, and labourers would not have it for their hire. The result was ruin to many men, starvation to many more, and discomfort to every one.

For these reasons the people entertained an intense hatred towards the man who had endeavoured to force the false coin upon them. And this sentiment was at any moment ready to assume a perilous expression wherever the king's favourite appeared, and any man bold enough to act as leader stood forward.

The happy remembrance of these circumstances promised now to afford Gordon and Katherine all the assistance of which they stood so much in need, and for which they could not have hoped from any other source.

His heart swelling with the consciousness of triumph, Gordon rushed onward, raising the shout—

“Justice for the people—no more base placks!”

The crowd pressed round the doors of the hostelry in spite of all the efforts to keep them back, made by the Borderers who had been left on guard.

The Borderers, unable to discover the meaning of the riot, formed inside the doorways with spears fixed in close phalanx, thereby checking the foremost of the crowd.

The people surged excitedly to and fro, and, still obeying the guidance of Lamington, called loudly for Sir Robert Cochrane, although they did not make any immediate attempt to break down the spears of the guard and force an entrance.

Suddenly there was a movement amongst the Borderers; they divided, leaving a passage for one man, and Sir Robert Cochrane, bearing a torch in his left hand, presented himself to the people.

The light shone full upon his stern visage, and the air of proud authority which he assumed, combined with the undaunted coolness with which he appeared unarmed before the men who summoned him so furiously, awed them for the moment, and made them silent.

“I am he you call Robert Cochrane,” he said in a sharp, clear tone; “what is it you seek with me?”

A murmur like the distant roll of thunder passed along the crowd; but at first no one seemed to have courage enough to stand forward as spokesman, and singly to brave his contemptuous regard.

Lamington whispered in the ear of the man whom he had first addressed, and he immediately made a step in advance of his companions.

"Will ye tak' back the placks ye hae sent out to us made wi' brass and lead, and gie us guid silver to trade wi'?"

"The day I'm hanged they may be called in—not sooner," was the contemptuous retort.

"There's mony a true word spoke in jest, my lord," said the man threateningly.

"Stand aside, varlet; and all you who hear me, take heed of what you do, for any violence offered to me in this matter is offered to the king himself, whose laws you break, and whose commands you disobey."

A crowd is as lightly moved as a feather, which goes any way the strongest current of wind blows it. Cochrane's calmness and audacity, and the authority with which he spoke, checked the impulse of the mob, which, having no plan of action, was brought to a stand-still by his decisive answer.

There was another murmur and another pause; and during that pause Gordon heard the shrill note of the whistle which he had given to Katherine to sound in warning, if any danger assailed her during his absence. Before the note of alarm had done echoing through the house, his sword was in his hand.

"We shall have your promise, master, to undo the cheat you have put upon us, nevertheless," he shouted, hoarsely.

The crowd caught up the shout with an eagerness that showed their sympathy in it, and their readiness to follow any leader in such a cause.

The whistle was still ringing in his ears, and he gave instant action to his words—an example which he knew the men behind him would follow if he led the way before their reawakened sense of injury received any new check.

With a swift stroke of his sword he swept the torch out of Cochrane's hands. The suddenness of the movement had the advantage of preventing any of the Borderers observing who had struck the blow.

The crowd, now heaving and shouting with the fury of demons, pressed close behind him, and in its irresistible tide

carried Cochrane away from the door. He struggled with might and main, but without effect. His loud cries for assistance were heard by Richard Janfarie, and he, raising the slogan of his father's house, pushed forward to the rescue, whilst his followers made a stout fight to support him.

As the men pushed their way out at the door, Lamington forced his way in. The excitement and confusion was too great for his movement to be observed.

Above all the tumult, his quick ear distinguished the voice of Katherine, and as he burst into the kitchen, he saw her struggling in the midst of half a dozen of her father's men.

Hislop was lying on the floor stunned; the hostess was using her nails furiously in trying to make one grim-visaged fellow relinquish his grasp of the lady whom the men were dragging towards the door.

When Lamington had quitted the kitchen, Katherine had waited in trembling impatience for the result of his adventure. For some minutes she had been undisturbed; but at length she was startled by the sudden reappearance of Cochrane with six men. He had only had time to ask where the drover had gone when the tumultuous summons of the people had called him away.

He bade the men remain, however, and they asked for some ale, being fatigued with their long ride, and ready to make themselves comfortable at the first opportunity that offered.

The host produced a large can of ale, and Katherine, the better to sustain her character as an attendant, handed the mugs round to the men. One of them, being of a jovial mood, caught her hand.

"Come, sweeten the mug wi' your lips, my lass," he said. "I'll barter my jack and spear for a cradle, if yours be not a fine face if that rag were off and both een whole."

"If it was aff ye'd see a face that wad scare ye, maister," she answered, forcing a laugh, and trying to sustain her part, although her limbs trembled under her; for she knew that the man had seen her frequently at Johnstone.

She trembled almost as much at the thought of being detected in such a trivial vulgar way by one of the common

retainers, after she had safely passed before the eyes of her father and brother, as at the knowledge of her helpless position.

"A face to scare me!" he cried, with a loud guffaw. "There's no a face o' man, woman, or imp could do that; and I'll prove it, whether ye are blind or no. I ken a fresh lip when I see it."

He suddenly threw his arm round her neck. She started from him, and in doing so the bandage which had concealed one of her eyes and part of her face was lifted off by his bent arm.

The loud laugh with which the men had greeted their comrade's exploit became abruptly hushed when they heard him exclaim—

"Mistress Katherine herself, or I'm bewitched."

She attempted to re-cover her face, and to laugh the man out of his conviction. But he promptly bade one of his comrades summon the master of Johnstone and Sir Robert Cochrane, whilst he seized her by the arm. She instantly gave the signal with all her might, and Hislop sprang to the door to prevent any one passing. He had a sharp tussle with three of the men until a heavy blow on the head with a spear-staff laid him insensible on the floor.

Meanwhile Katherine, assisted by the dame, had been struggling to release herself, and to repeat the signal. Thus she was when Gordon came to the rescue.

A glance showed him the position of affairs.

Her cry of joy at his appearance turned the attention of her captors to him, and four spears were instantly levelled at his breast.

Parrying the thrust of the foremost, he cut the man down, and springing to one side, gripped a second by the throat, and hurled him over his fallen comrade with such force that his head striking on the floor, he was stunned. The other two made furious lunges, which were dexterously warded, and by another sudden spring he closed with the third man. The fourth, however, as if prepared for this movement, suddenly dropped his spear and drew his whinger, with which he would be able to assist his comrade better at close quarters.

At the same time the man who had recognized Katherine

relinquished his hold of her, and sprang forward with his short sword upraised to strike Gordon on the back.

Katherine screamed as she saw the weapon uplifted, whilst Gordon, engaged with the two men before him, was unaware of his peril.

A huge shadow darkened the doorway, and the uplifted arm fell broken and powerless to the man's side, under the blow of a heavy staff wielded by the muscular hand of Will Craig. Another blow laid the man prone on the floor.

"I heard the whistle, and I thought there was something wrang," muttered Will, without pausing in his onslaught.

Gordon had disengaged himself from his two assailants, and both fell under the sledge-hammer blows of Will's staff. The last man—the one who had retained hold of Katherine—seeing how matters stood, made a bold rush for the door, and just as he was crossing the threshold received such a blow from Will's cudgel on the buttocks as lifted him a step forward on his way, and sent him out of the house howling.

"Where are the horses?" cried Gordon.

"On the ither side o' the water. The brig's guarded, but I hae a boat. Come on. They're fechtin' like deils outside, and winna see us."

Lamington took Katherine by the hand; her strength had been severely tried, but she was able to hasten with him out of the house and run to the river-side, as the Borderers under Sir Hugh Janfarie galloped down from the Grey Friar to the rescue of Sir Robert Cochrane.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIOT.

"My blessing on your heart, sweet thing,
Wae to your wilful will;
There's many a gallant gentleman
Whae's blood you have garr'd to spill."

Katherine Janfarie.

THE clamour of the riot rose upon the night like the roar of an angry sea. The clang of arms, the tramp of horses' hoofs, the wild shriek of the death-smitten, the infuriated

yell of the avenger, the loud shouts of the Borderers, and all the confusion of noises which a tempest of the fiercest of human passions produced, merged into one long thunderous roar.

The tide surged wildly, as now the Borderers were beaten back and again made good their ground with the dogged valour of men whose trade is strife.

The sound of the tumult echoed along the valley of the Nith and startled the monks of Lin-Cluden in their midnight vigils, and possibly alarmed a few of the good men who were softening the austerities of their order with some stolen indulgence.

In the town, lights flashed everywhere. Presently the beacon fire on the tower of the castle was kindled, and was soon answered by signals from the surrounding heights and peels. The petty riot, which had been so lightly raised, had now swelled into the proportions of a battle.

Sir Hugh Janfarie, with the main detachment of his followers, rode down upon the combatants. He encountered Musgrave, who explained as clearly as he could the source of the quarrel; and Sir Hugh, sensible of the danger of the Hot Trod being arrested in consequence of the brawl, and of the probable reprisals the townsfolk would make for what harm befel them, rode into the hottest of the fight, endeavouring to allay its fury.

But his words were unheard in the prevailing turmoil, and his purpose was misunderstood. The result of his attempted peace-making was to increase the blind rage of the burgesses.

Nicol, with the emblem of the Hot Trod, rode close by his father. But the spear was wrenched from his grasp, and the burning sod was trampled underfoot; at that the townsfolk raised a deafening cheer, renewing the assault more vigorously than before.

They had many old scores to settle with the Borderers, and they were not sorry to find so favourable an opportunity to settle some of them. Besides, blood had been already spilled on both sides, and Janfarie's mediation, which might have been of service a little while ago, came too late when the men were heated with action and thirsting to avenge fallen comrades.

There was nothing for the Borderers to do but keep

close together and beat as dignified a retreat as the circumstances permitted.

Sir Hugh and Nicol cut their way through the crowd to the side of Cochrane and Richard, who were receiving rough usage from a band of stout fellows, and were being dragged towards the Town House.

The rescue was effected by a bold dash and a fierce hacking down of every man who attempted to bar the way of the old knight to his son and friend. One fellow, who wielded a Jeddart axe with strength and address, made a sturdy stand, and several times planted his blows with such force, that, but for the careering of the horse, he would have stricken the knight to the ground. As if determined not to be foiled, he sprang at the horse's head, gripped the bridle, and swinging the axe, brought it down with violence. But Sir Hugh, bending forward, avoided the blade of the axe by receiving the blow of the shaft on his shoulder. The blow had been given with so much force that the shaft snapped in twain, the blade falling harmlessly to the ground.

Before the man could regain his balance, or do more than utter a howl of chagrin at the adroitness which had foiled his effort, Sir Hugh pierced him through the neck, and he fell with a groan beneath the horse's feet.

"My father!" shrieked a voice as the man fell. The next instant a youth of about eighteen years sprang with the agility and fury of a wild cat upon Sir Hugh, and with a sharp souter's knife, stabbed him under the sword arm, which was at the moment upraised.

The youth was beaten down by the prickers' spears, and trampled upon by their horses.

At the spectacle of this swift retaliation on both sides, there arose a yell from the townfolk, wilder and more terrible than any that had yet added its discord to the raging elements of the night. There was a pause, too, like the momentary stillness which precedes the crash of a thunderbolt. Then it came; a body of men drew close together, and at a swinging trot, with arms in rest, advanced upon the Borderers. Steadily they moved with teeth set, and in silence that seemed more terrible than the wildest outcries.

Sir Hugh, on receiving the wound, had fallen forward

on the neck of his horse, and would have fallen had not Richard struggled to his side in time to steady him in the saddle.

"You are hurt, sir," he said agitatedly.

"Avenge me," was the grim answer of the knight.

Richard sprang upon the horse behind him, and taking a firm hold of his sword belt, contrived to hold him on the seat whilst he snatched the sword from his father's now powerless hand, and with it met the determined onslaught of the townsmen.

"Steady, lads," shouted Cochrane, "and withdraw to the bridge. There you will be able to hold your ground against the whole town of rebellious loons."

The Borderers formed in double line and began to move slowly backward, contesting every inch of ground.

"It is my father's sword," muttered Richard Janfarie between his clenched teeth; "and this night I will prove myself worthy to bear it."

Instead of retreating with his company, he touched the horse with his heels, and burst into the midst of the advancing foe, hewing them down right and left with such fury that he cleared a space and threw them into some confusion.

But the crowd formed a circle round him, cutting him off from his friends, who were unaware of his danger.

Observing this, he made the horse wheel round, and again fought his way through the mass, wielding the long sword of his father with all the pith his thirst for vengeance inspired.

The people fell back more astounded by the strange sight of the double burden of the horse—one man apparently dead, and the other animated as if with the rage of a demon—more awed by this even than his prowess.

They fell before him, they shrank from him, and the confusion caused by his single assault materially aided the Borderers in reaching the bridge with unbroken line.

There the conflict was brought to a sudden cessation by the appearance of a band of the Grey Friars, who, headed by their Superior, and each carrying a flaming torch which revealed his holy order, marched boldly between the opposing lines of Borderers and townsmen, at the moment when, exhausted and wounded, Richard Janfarie rejoined his comrades.

Mad as the people were with the events which had transpired, they came to a halt before the stern glances of the Friars.

The Superior commanded silence, and the uproar gradually subsided like the diminishing sound of an ebbing tide.

When silence had been obtained, the monk demanded an explanation of the outrage upon the town's repose.

Twenty voices attempted to answer him at once, but the Superior motioned them to silence as Sir Robert Cochrane advanced and made himself known.

He briefly explained the purpose of the Borderers' entrance into the town, and the manner in which the riot had been raised by some foolish demands of the people, made to him as a servant of the king at that inopportune time, and with unmannerly threats.

"How his Majesty may think of this matter when it is explained to him," he added in conclusion, "I cannot say. But this much I may tell you, that I believe that the disturbance was raised in the first place by the rascal we are pursuing, in order to cover his own escape."

"Who is the man?" queried the monk.

"Bertrand Gordon, called Laird of Lamington."

"Have you arrested him?"

"No; but he cannot be far hence, and we must crave your protection whilst we continue our search, and leave our wounded to your care."

The Superior bowed in acquiescence, saying—

"As you know the man, you will be able to make him answer for his share in this disturbance."

"By the Sacred Mother of Heaven," cried Janfarie in a hollow voice, "he shall answer that to me. My father is dead, and to Lamington I look for an account of his fate."

The young man had lifted the body from the horse, purposing to staunch his wound, when he had discovered that no aid of his could serve him, and he was now kneeling over his dead father as he made his vow of retaliation.

Nicol was by his brother's side. Grief choked him, and he could not speak; but he pressed Richard's hand, in token that he shared in his resolve.

The torches flickering and wavering in the wind shed

a red glare over the crowd, and gleamed upon the breast of the rapid flowing Nith as it sped onward to the Solway, the stream beating against the arches of the bridge as they impeded its course, and murmuring a melancholy song, that at the moment seemed like a dirge for the dead knight.

The light shone upon the grey-hooded monks; upon the gloomy visages of the defeated Borderers as they stood wounded, holding by the croups of their saddles, or sat motionless in their seats with thoughts of dire vengeance in their hearts. The lights flashed on the now anxious faces of the townsfolk as they stood in breathless awe at the weird sound the man's voice had made, and already abashed by the memory of what had occurred.

The sudden pause in the uproar which had been rampant only a moment before, the unsteady light cast over all by the flaming links, and the stillness of the night—for the very wind seemed to have become hushed—imparted a solemnity to the wild scene, and to the vow which had just been spoken that subdued the passions of the men, and held them as if spell-bound.

The eerie pause was broken by Richard Janfarie starting to his feet, and directing his followers to carry their chief to the monastery.

In grim silence a litter of spears was formed, and the body of the dead knight placed upon it. In grim silence the men with their sad burthen, headed by four monks as torch-bearers, passed through the crowd which made way for them, and marched up the street to the monastery.

Then the people slowly turned to the mournful task of seeking their wounded and dead friends. Low moans and bitter shrieks of anguish disturbed the night, as wives, mothers, and sweethearts, now rushing forth from their homes, encountered friends bearing the lifeless remains of those who were dearest to them, or recognized the mainstay of their households lying disabled on the street. It was a sad night's work for the bonnie town of Dumfries; and many hearts ached with the memory of it long afterward. One of its saddest incidents was connected with the man who had so desperately assaulted Sir Hugh, and whose fall had been the main instrument of the knight's death. His wife found her husband and son both slain and hideously disfigured by horses' hoofs. With shrieks of despair she

threw herself upon the mangled bodies, kissing their clotted lips, and calling to them by name to rise,

She had to be forced away by some kindly neighbours, who said that her reason was affected. The man had been a good husband, and the son who had wrought such swift retribution for his father's fall had been her only bairn.

As soon as the body of Sir Hugh had been lifted up, Cochrane grasped Richard's arm.

"We cannot halt in the pursuit," he said; "we must leave till we return what marks of respect we owe your father."

"I am ready," answered Janfarie, dourly.

"Pick a dozen of your best men, then, to accompany us. The fewer we are the more lightly we will follow the track. I will not pause in the chase till he is captured."

"I shall not pause in the chase till he is dead," was Janfarie's hollow response.

"Let it be such a death as he merits—not that of honourable folk, but the gibbet of a felon."

"It shall be the worst that I can find for him when the hour comes."

Cochrane clasped his hand, peering in his face with a strange vicious glitter in his eyes.

"Let me guide your choice," he said, greedily. "I know his spirit, and I know where to strike him deepest. Let me guide your choice in the atonement you would wreak upon him, and I promise you that you shall see him degraded, spurned, and mocked at by those whose esteem he values most—ay, by Saint Andrew, even by Mistress Katherine herself. Then let him swing on the highest tree at hand."

Janfarie caught the venomous glitter of the man's eyes, and he did not altogether relish it, embittered though he was to the last degree against the subject of their conversation.

"Such retribution as you purpose would be worth tarrying for; but I can promise nought save this, that there is no torture I would not put him to."

"Enough. The memory of your father will keep your purpose steady."

"That memory will feed my hate while I have power to lift a hand."

Here Nicol, who had been scouring the streets for stray or wounded followers, rushed up to his brother.

"We have missed them again," he shouted. "They have crossed the river in a boat."

"Who gave you these tidings?"

"This fellow who has had a tussle with Lamington, and who followed them to the river bank."

"Get your men together," said Cochrane hastily to Janfarie; "we may have them before the night is out yet. You, Nicol, must hie to Linlithgow with tidings of this treachery to his Majesty. We shall have the highest authority of the land for what we do."

"By your leave, I would rather continue in the chase," rejoined Nicol, disappointed by the prospect of being removed from his share in the pursuit.

Cochrane answered him with an air of persuasive confidence, which flattered the youth and modified his disappointment.

"Nay, but you must submit to this for all our sakes. There is no other I can trust to bear my message to the king, and it is from him only that I care to seek assistance in this matter. There are other reasons besides that his Majesty should have early knowledge of this outrage."

"Musgrave or Fenwick might go," said Nicol, still hesitating; "they are my seniors, and therefore better qualified to report the affair to his Majesty."

Cochrane placed his hand on Nicol's shoulder and whispered—

"Ay, but there is a missive that must be placed in the king's own hand, and I would trust it to none other save you. Will you serve me?"

"Since there is no help for it, I will."

"I shall owe you much for this service, and I may have the power to pay it sooner than you hope—trust me."

A few minutes sufficed for Cochrane to give his now willing carrier the needful instructions and the packet of which he had spoken. By that time Janfarie had selected his men, had got the leash of hounds together, and arms had been examined.

When Cochrane joined the party the gates of the bridge were opened, and they rode across in double file at a smart canter. The pale starlight gleamed upon their

steel caps, and the bridge gave out a hollow sound under the horses' hoofs. They rode steadily, and without a word passing amongst them.

Every man was conscious that he was engaged in a hunt which was to end only at the death at the quarry.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRIORY OF KELLS.

“Sublime is the faith of a lonely soul,
In pain and trouble cherished ;
Sublime the spirit of hope that lives,
When earthly hope has perished.”

PROF. WILSON, *Isle of Palms.*

THE riot had been at its height when Lamington, with Katherine, had followed Will Craig to the bank of the river where he had the boat moored at a point nearly opposite the water-gate of the monastery. They were unaware that any had observed their flight. But the man who had received Will's last blow had seen them, had followed them at a safe distance, and so had been able to give intelligence of their route.

They embarked; Will pulled across the stream, his giant arms making the oars fly through the water, and carrying the boat a little way up the stream in spite of the strong current.

He pulled to the shore through a thick bed of rushes at the western end of a short row of houses which formed the nucleus of Maxwelltown.

The motion of the boat and the keen breeze blowing upon her cheeks had revived the lady, and she was able to spring lightly to the land. Lamington led her up the bank and then waited for Will, who had stayed to make fast the boat to a huge stone, having explained that he had found it there, and “didna want the owner to be ony the waur for the liberty he had ta'en wi' his cockleshell.”

The tumult on the other side was ringing in their ears, and Katherine clung closely to her lover, disturbed by the wild sounds she heard, although she knew that they insured their present safety.

"Come on this gate now, maister," cried Will, taking the direction of Lincluden.

"Where are the horses?" queried the master.

"Stark's got them safe eneuch."

Almost as he spoke, he darted into a thicket of trees; and in a small open space the fugitives saw two powerful horses tied to the branch of a tree, whilst a huge black hound sat on his haunches gravely watching them.

That was Stark. The hound sprang up joyfully at the sight of Will, and encountered him with wagging tail.

"It's a' richt," muttered Will. "Stark never wags his tail when onybody has been interferin' wi' him."

As Gordon looked to the girths of the saddles he angrily inquired why the man had left the horses there instead of bringing them to the hostelry.

The big, simple-looking fellow, who had the heart of a brave gentleman and the mind of a child, scratched his head, looked puzzledly at his master, then looked imploringly at Katherine, and, last of all, gazed down inquiringly at the upturned face of his dog.

"Now, what would ye say to that, Stark?" he said, scratching away at his head. The hound cocked his ears and bent his head a little to one side, as if, with a species of human intelligence, he were considering the problem set before him.

At any other moment Katherine would have been amused by the equal degree of gravity on the faces of man and dog.

"Now, I juist speir at you, Stark," Will continued, "what would ye say? He tells me to be siccar and secret, and I thought that I couldna be half sae secret wi' twa horses at my heels as I could be my lanc. Sae I leave ye here to tak' care o' the brutes, and that's siccar; and syne I gang mysel' ower the watter, stealing a boat to do that, sae that nae questions should be speired at the brig, and I wait at the hostel without saying a word to mortal body, and I count a' that secret. But what do you think, Stark, for a' that he is angry wi' me, and says I am a gouk?"

"Tut, man," said Lamington, who, knowing his servitor's ways, could barely restrain a smile even at that moment of peril, "the horses would not have told any one your business."

“Na ; but folk would hae seen them and speired about them, and would maybe hae kenned what airt they cam’ frae. Eh, Stark ? ”

The hound wagged his tail as if in assent, and Muckle Will—as he was called on account of his huge frame—closed one of his eyes with an expression of great cunning, but it was a very simple sort of look for all that.

“Do not blame him,” said Katherine ; “he has served us well despite his mistake. We owe our present safety greatly to him.”

“Will is not afraid of my anger, and in truth there is more reason in his explanation than I expected. I am glad you have so soon come to know his worth ; for, after you, Katherine, there is no one I would not rather lose than this simple fellow. Come hither, Will.”

The tall, broad-shouldered simpleton advanced at the bidding, the hound marching beside him.

Katherine laid her hand on his arm.

“If your master is not in the humour to do it, Will, I thank you for the good service you have done us.”

The giant hung his head, abashed by her earnestness, and removing his bonnet, began to swing it awkwardly in his hands.

“Look up, Will,” said his master ; “look well at this lady that you may know her, for you must serve her as truly in all things as you would serve me.”

As every sentiment, as well as his service, was at the command of his master, Will’s bashfulness disappeared. He looked steadily at the lady’s face, which the starlight revealed to him. Then he said shyly—

“Ye are a bonnie lady, and Stark and me will serve you truly. See what he says ; speak for yoursel’, Stark. Speak to the lady, and tell her ye’ll do her bidding.”

The hound walked round Katherine twice, and then, stopping beside her, laid his head on her hand. She patted him, and the dog wagged his tail in joyful acknowledgment.

“That’s a’ richt,” said Will ; “Stark and you will be great friends, and by the same rule you and me will be great friends.”

Apparently satisfied with that compact, the giant led the horses out of the thicket.

Lamington wrapped the drover's plaid round Katherine, assisted her to mount one of the horses, and sprang on to the other himself.

"Follow, Will, with what speed you may, to the Priory of Kells. You know our pursuers; take heed that none of them lay hold of you."

"Aye, weel, they wad just hae to let go again," was Will's resigned response.

The horses started, and Will with his hound watched them until they had disappeared amongst the black shadows of the wood which belted the road for several miles.

Then he gripped his heavy cudgel tightly, and followed at a swinging pace, sustaining a lively conversation with Stark all the time. It was like the prattle with which a child is accustomed to commune with its pets; but through it all there were flashes of shrewdness which would have suggested that the man was amusing himself, rather than giving vent to his natural character.

The horses upon which the fugitives were now mounted were fresh, and stretched to their work with spirit. They swept by the Abbey of Lincluden in which the vestal light was burning and shedding a spectral gleam through the trees. They sped down the valley, and through the glens by Lochinkit. Then skirting Upper Bar and Crogo, they rose upon the high land; and the white crested heads of the Galloway hills became visible against the horizon.

The country stretched like a rolling sea before them. Now they rose upon the brow of some bare height, with the dark highlands looming up before them; again they were closed in the hollow of some bossy glen, the darkness lending fantastic shapes to jutting boulders of rock, or waving ash, or stunted thorn, with the sound of gurgling water making a weird melody in the night.

But over all there was an eerie sense of silence caught from the grand solitude of the hills.

There were streams and rivers to cross, morasses to avoid, and treacherous precipices, whose lips were concealed by furze and heather, to evade. But a keen eye, a steady hand, and sure-footed horses, carried the fugitives safely through all the journey.

At length the dim outline of the Forest of Kells became perceptible. The forest had been erected into a royal

hunting-ground by the Bruce, and was a favourite resort of the Scottish monarchs for the pleasures of the chase. The memory of its ancient glory is still preserved in several of its local names. Tradition, too, has much of interest to tell of the Druid stones which lie upon the surrounding heights; the murder holes which are found in the table lands, and which were anciently used by the barons who had the right of putting offenders to death by pit and gibbet—that is, by drowning and smothering them in the pits, or hanging them on the nearest tree—and of the old wall called the Deil's Dyke.

The Priory of Kells was a small establishment, which had been given in free alms to the Archdeacon of Galloway by Robert Bruce, and which obtained some importance as an occasional resting-place of the royal party when engaged in the chase. The building stood at one of the mouths of the forest; it was square and bare, but it had the strength of a feudal tower.

When the fugitives drew rein at the gate, the bell was sounding for early matins; but it was some time before Lamington's summons was answered.

The gatekeeper at length showed himself, and Lamington announced that he was there by tryst with the Abbot Panther. That name having been repeated, the man opened the gate. The visitors were conducted across a grass court to the entrance to the Prior's house.

There the mention of the Abbot's name had the effect of procuring them immediate admission. They were conducted to a small waiting-room with bare walls and a small grated window. It was lit by a small cruzie, standing in a niche in the wall, and furnished with a couple of chairs and a reading-desk. They had not to wait long. A hooded monk appeared, and led Gordon to the presence of the Abbot, whilst Katherine was left alone.

The same monk again entered the waiting-room after the lapse of a little time, bearing a lighted cruzie in his hand. He beckoned the lady to follow him, and she obeyed.

They passed along a narrow corridor, the bare grey walls of which, feebly illumed by the lamp in the monk's hand, looked so cold and dismal that it was more like the hall of a prison than that of the residence of a church dignitary.

They ascended a narrow staircase and entered another passage similar to the first. At the farther end of this passage the monk threw open a door.

"This is your chamber, sister; here you may rest for the present," said the monk.

He handed the light to her, and without waiting for any thanks or question, departed with noiseless steps.

Although Katherine was sorely bewildered by the manner of her monkly chamberlain, and by the continued absence of her lover, she made no effort to satisfy her curiosity; for she was too much fatigued by her journey and too much awed by the grimness of the place and the solemn stillness pervading it—a stillness broken only by the subdued chant of the monks at their morning exercise in the Priory Chapel. She entered the chamber and closed the door. Like the other apartments she had seen, the walls were bare; the furniture consisted of a table with a missal, a priedien and a crucifix, and a low narrow couch. After an earnest supplication for pardon for whatever error she had committed, and for the happiness of those from whom she had fled, she laid herself, dressed as she was, on the couch. Sleep soon brought a blissful oblivion to all the anxieties and fatigues of the night.

* * * * *

The sun gleamed in through the narrow window of Katherine's chamber and she wakened wearily from her sleep. She had been dreaming of her brother Richard—dreaming that he had come to her dressed in a shroud, and had stretched forth skeleton hands towards her warningly.

She lay half awake now, her eyes twinkling under the ray of sunlight that was crossing them, and fancying that she heard her brother's voice pronouncing her name. The sound echoed strangely in her ears, and in a half-conscious way she tried to argue with herself that the sound existed only in her dream. But it was suddenly repeated with such sharp emphasis that with a smothered cry she sprang from the couch.

Her startled eyes became fixed upon Richard Janfarie, who stood by the door, pale and worn by exertion, but with a stern, relentless expression that chilled her blood. More,

however, than his stern visage, more than the surprise of discovering him there, her eyes were attracted and her mind appalled by the black badge which he wore on his right arm. A thousand wild fancies flashed upon her mind at once, but none explained the meaning of that grim badge; her heart beat quick and her limbs trembled as she gazed alternately upon it and the man's face.

He remained silent, as if conscious of her torturing doubts, and willing to leave her to them for a space.

She roused herself with a violent effort, and pointing with trembling finger to his badge, she spoke in a terrified whisper—

“Why do you wear that?”

He advanced a step into the apartment, and halted in a position which permitted the rays of the sun to fall directly on his arm.

“I wear this for our father,” he said, slowly.

“My father!” she cried, while she sprang towards him and grasped his arm; “is he dead?”

Richard shook her hand from him with the scorn of one who feels that he is polluted by a touch.

“Ay, he is dead—he has been murdered; and you, mistress, and Lamington are his assassins.”

The scorn with which he had flung her from him made her shrink back a pace with tingling cheeks. His scorn she would have resented, but the accusation he had made struck her speechless. She stood mutely gazing at him, unable to realize the full import of his words.

Her silence enraged him.

“Are you so callous that you are not moved even by the tidings of the foul work which has been done? Are you so heartless that even your father's murder cannot make you sensible of your shame?”

“My father dead—and by foul work!” she muttered, absently, and in a low tone of anguish; “and you charge Lamington with the crime—oh, you are mad, Richard! or you are trying to frighten me that you may force me to yield myself to Robert Cochrane.”

And she sank upon the couch, covering her face with her hands and sobbing bitterly.

“I have no need to frighten you to yield to your husband. He is here with power to enforce his right to

control you; and I am here to conduct you to the Abbot's court, where you will learn your duty from fitter lips than mine, and where you shall have proofs of Lamington's guilt."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUMMONS.

"Upraise she trembling frae her seat,
And tottered like to fa';
Her cheek grew like the rose, and then
Turned whiter than the snaw."

Lady Jean.

DISTRAUGHT by the declaration of her brother, doubting its truth, and yet compelled to give it credence by the bitter earnestness of his manner, Katherine sat dumbly looking at him. Her sobs had ceased now; for, although the first sharp pangs the intelligence of her father's death caused her had wrung from her a woman's tears, the grave charge which accompanied the tidings, and the intimation of Cochrane's presence for the purpose of enforcing his hateful claims, stirred the spirit of resistance within her, and for the moment grief was overcome by indignation.

Still there was an undercurrent of contending emotions which she could not control. Her heart revolted from the bare thought of the guilt attributed to Lamington, whilst it was filled with anguish at the consciousness that by whatever hand her father had fallen, her flight had led him to his death. Besides, Gordon had been some time away from her while they had been at the hostelry in Dumfries, and sorely pressed by her father's followers, obliged to strike for his own life, it was possible that in the darkness or in the confusion of the struggle his hand might have stricken the fatal blow. That was the doubt which lingered in her mind and constrained her indignation. It weakened her, notwithstanding the strength she obtained from her conviction of Lamington's innocence in intention at least, and from the shuddering repugnance with which she had now come to regard the very name of Cochrane.

She rose slowly from the couch, her hands clasped, and her features fixed. But she made no movement to approach

her brother. She spoke in a low soft tone, in which there was a piteous chord of pain.

“You give me sad news, brother—the sadder in that if it be true my father is dead, I am robbed of the hope I held that one day I would satisfy him and our dear mother—and all of you, that in my disobedience I had spared you much misery.”

Her evident distress was not without its effect upon him, for Janfarie had a kindly regard for his sister, although he could not pardon the measure she had taken to thwart the designs and aspirations of their house. He had all his mother's ambition, and Cochrane had proffered him the opportunity to carry that ambition to its highest bent. His mind had been dazzled by the prospect thus presented to him; and in proportion to the brilliance of the prospect he was blinded to the real nature of the magician who presented it, whilst he became insensible to the tenderer and nobler feelings which had driven his sister to rebellion. He saw in her conduct only the perversity of a silly woman, and so he made answer harshly—

“Then you will satisfy us that we have all been fools, and yours the only head with a grain of wisdom amongst us. Your shame will serve us to good purpose if it can do that.”

She winced; her brow became flushed and her eyes kindled, but she spoke sadly—

“You have driven me to what error I may have done. You counted it no sacrifice to make me the price of a knave's favour. In spite of every prayer and appeal I made, you dragged me to the altar. You took no thought of the years of agony to which you were dooming me; you took no thought of the death to which you condemned me when you told me I was his wife; for if my loathing for the bonds you had thrust upon me—if Robert Cochrane's touch had not been enough to kill me, my own hand would have released me.”

“I would have pitied you had you been released so; but now you have made yourself a thing of scorn.”

“You will learn to think otherwise yet, Richard. At present you are smarting under the memory of our father's death; you do not see that Cochrane has cajoled you—that he is fooling you.”

"By the saints, if I thought that," muttered Janfarie, frowning darkly, and then checking himself; "but shame upon me to give ear to such words from a mad wench who has disgraced her family for the sake of a popinjay. Attend me, mistress, to the Abbot's court without more delay."

"I will attend you presently," she answered, quietly; "give me a moment to prepare myself for this trial—for such I count the interview to which you command me is to be."

Janfarie turned on his heel and withdrew, taking his stand outside the door to guard against any attempt of his sister to elude him.

After a moment's pause, during which she looked dazedly at the closed door, she threw herself upon her knees on the priedieu, and bowing her head low she raised her clasped hands in supplication.

She had maintained her composure during the presence of her brother; but now that she was alone all the contending emotions of her breast struggled for utterance, and overwhelmed her. The death of her father, the accusation of Lamington, and the consciousness of her own share in these miserable events, supplied her with bitter thoughts, for which there was no outlet save in prayer.

She seemed calmer when she regained her feet, and able to think of the more immediate necessities of the occasion. She hastily removed the garments which the friendly hostess of the Royal Hunt had supplied for her disguise; and as they had been only thrown over her own dress, she had merely to cast them aside to appear in apparel more becoming her position, although its bravery was still in sad contrast to the circumstances surrounding her.

She adjusted her bodice, and the skirts which had been tucked up. Then with her hands she smoothed her hair as well as she could with such primitive toilet instruments, and without a mirror; for, woman-like, she wished to present herself in as becoming a guise as possible before the Abbot, upon whose word all her future happiness and the very life of her lover seemed at this moment to depend.

Slight as the change was, it was enough with her natural charms to transform a rustic lass into a dignified lady. She had need of all her courage to meet the emergency calmly. When she joined her brother, it was with

a bearing of quiet dignity that was not without its effect even upon him.

He conducted her to the basement of the building, and as she passed along the hall, one of the windows permitted her a glimpse of the horses and the Borderers waiting in the square without.

She experienced a thrill of dismay, as this discovery reminded her of the power against which she had to do battle.

Her brother, however, was not permitted to observe anything of the alarm she felt. Her features remained pale and almost rigid.

The chamber in which the Abbot had appointed to hold his impromptu court was the principal one of the Priory; and as it belonged to the suite set apart for the king during his sojourn in the forest, it was furnished with some taste, and even with a degree of luxury. It had six windows of a larger size than any others in the building, and the recesses which they formed displayed the great thickness of the walls. In these recesses, and immediately beneath the casements, were stone seats long enough to accommodate three persons. The walls were hung with tapestry, and a number of couches and chairs covered with velvet gave the apartment a rich and comfortable appearance, which was almost enough to have caused one who had been tarrying in the other apartments of the Priory to think that he had suddenly stepped out of the cold regions of poverty into those of wealth.

Between the central windows was placed, on a slightly raised platform, a huge oaken chair, curiously carved and surmounted by a mitre and a crown. The seat and back were covered with ruby silk. As if to subdue the light admitted by the first windows on the right and left of this chair, heavy curtains were drawn across them. By this means the face of the person who might occupy this seat of honour was almost entirely concealed from those who might stand before him, whilst every change in their countenances would be revealed by the light which fell full upon them.

Entering this apartment from the dim passages which he had traversed, Katherine's eyes were dazzled by the sun's rays, so that for an instant the place seemed to be

unoccupied. But presently her eyes became accustomed to the light, and she observed a man advancing towards her from the shadow of one of the curtained windows.

She drew back as she recognized Cochrane.

Her movement was one of repugnance, not of fear; and Sir Robert noting and comprehending it, halted with brows knit, and his cunning eyes fixed searchingly upon her.

"You have given us a long ride, madam," he said, politely, but with an air of severity; "I trust that you may be sufficiently fatigued by this time to be in a humour to listen to the counsels of those whose honour you are debasing, and to whom you are bound by most solemn bonds."

With a shudder of disgust she turned sharply upon her brother.

"You summoned me hither to meet the lord Abbot," she said, haughtily, "and your trick has served you so far that it has brought me unprotected into this man's presence; but it can serve you no further. Stand aside, Richard Janfarie, and let me pass."

She spoke with so much dignity and authority that her brother appeared to hesitate.

"Stand aside," she repeated; "you are no friend of mine. I now understand the lies with which you have alarmed me; and my word upon it, brother, I am as full of sorrow to know you the base instrument of this man as I am full of shame for the extremity to which you have forced me."

"I have spoken truth in all that I have said, as you will soon discover," he answered, gloomily.

Before she could make any comment a signal from Cochrane caused her brother to retire, closing the door behind him and locking it, as she knew by the click the bolt made in shooting into the lock.

"Richard—brother, do not leave me—for the Sacred Mother's sake do not leave me with him," she cried, running to the door and vainly attempting to force it open.

Her efforts to escape were futile, and her cries were unanswered.

Cochrane, as if perfectly secure in his position, waited patiently until she had exhausted attempts to open the door. Then he advanced, and courteously, but with firm bearing, conducted her to a couch and bade her be seated.

She saw that opposition was useless, and she submitted, waiting with considerable trepidation the upshot of this interview into which she had been trepanned, but wearing upon her brow a flush of indignation which concealed her fears and rather added to the beauty of her countenance than otherwise.

CHAPTER IX.

AT BAY.

“And he has gained my mother’s car—
My father’s stern command;
Yet this fond heart can ne’er be his,
Although he claim my hand.”

Lady Jean.

COCHRANE paused, as if to give her time to collect herself. His manner was that of extreme courtesy, and the sneering smile to which his lips were so well accustomed had entirely given place to an expression of grave concern. He remained standing before her, his hands lightly crossed behind him, whilst he scanned her features narrowly.

“Now, madam,” he said at length, “now that our game at hide-and-seek is brought to a close, and that we are alone together, we have an opportunity of coming to an understanding.”

He spoke in a very low tone, as if afraid of any one overhearing him; but indeed it was his custom at all times to speak in a very mellow, persuasive voice.

“That understanding is soon reached,” she rejoined, firmly. “You have forced upon me an honour, Sir Robert Cochrane, which you were well aware was loathsome to me. I have surely proved my scorn for it; and now I seek only an audience of the Abbot to obtain release from whatever bonds my helplessness permitted you to fasten upon me.”

She partly rose, but a movement of his hand warned her to remain seated.

“The bonds you speak of, mistress, are not so lightly broken as you would seem to think. That you will test for yourself. His lordship will be here presently, and you shall learn from his lips the truth of what I say.”

"Till then, sir, spare me your presence."

"I have no wish to intrude it upon you further than the circumstances warrant. But before his lordship comes—before you compel me to use the last measures to bring you to a sense of duty, I would fain try gentler means to make you feel that your own happiness, and that of those who should be dear to you, is endangered by your wilfulness."

"I have decided, sir, which way my happiness lies, and no words of yours will move me."

Her contempt, expressed in every tone and look, did not disturb him; he remained to the last degree resolutely polite, and he even affected a tone of regret which made his conduct appear less cruel than it otherwise would have done.

"It is, madam, because I respect your judgment that I have insisted upon this interview. You must hear me."

"Since your courtesy leaves me no option, I listen," she said, sarcastically.

"That is well for all our sakes. You must first understand my real position in the events which have so stirred your ire against me. Since it is likely to displease you, I would say nothing of the regard for you with which you—will you permit me to say it?—beauty inspired me, and more even than that, the deep respect with which I was filled in discovering the high qualities of your mind. Of all this I would say nothing, so anxious am I to spare you any annoyance, were it not that it must be referred to in order to show you the real extent of my blame in what has passed."

She inclined her head haughtily, but did not speak. He continued—

"Your father sought my aid to rescue his possessions from escheatment. I rendered him that service, and he desired to requite me. In that desire your family was united; and I told them that they could make no requital save with your hand. That was readily promised to me, and, indeed, my offer was accepted as in some measure a further advantage to your house, by all save yourself."

"And I gave you reasons which should have satisfied a man of honour."

"They would have satisfied me had they not been

answered by the counter reasons of your friends. You will forgive me when I say that the passion you had roused made me perhaps too willing to accept any explanation which would permit me to persevere in my suit."

His iteration of the nature of his esteem for her became unbearable.

"You mean that the purpose you had to serve made you resolute to persevere, indifferent to what sorrow a mere woman might endure."

"Purpose!" he exclaimed, raising his heavy eyebrows; "what purpose could I have other than yourself presented to me? You had no wealth of lands or gold to bring me."

"But my father had kinsmen, had followers whose arms might be of valuable service to you in the crooked paths through which your policy winds to favour."

The clearness of her vision into his motives and the sharpness with which she laid them bare, produced a pause, but he was too well skilled in the command of his countenance to permit it to display the least change.

"I see your prejudice enables you to misconstrue me at every turn. Had I sought only a powerful ally, I think a more powerful one than the Janfarie's might have been found in Scotland—with the hand of a dame more kindly to my deserts."

There was a touch of injured honesty in his manner, but Katherine's repugnance was too keen for her to be deceived by it.

"I am content to wish your choice had been made more in accordance with your merits, sir," she responded; "and so beseech you to proceed with what brevity you may, and release me from this thralldom."

He bit his lips and bowed.

"Your wish, madam, shall be obeyed. I yield then to my own desire and the arguments of your family. I became persuaded that your attachment to a ruined and absent gentleman was a girlish fancy which would disappear as soon as you became aware that your parents were bent upon our union."

"Because you would not release them from a hasty promise given in the heat of gratitude."

"Again you misinterpret and compel me to remind you

that the marriage was as much desired by those to whom you were bound to render obedience as by myself."

"Say on."

"These were the grounds on which I, unhappily for myself, rejected your appeal, and permitted the matter to go forward. I am still convinced that had not your gay gallant appeared upon our bridal day you would have been content to bear the honours it was in my power to bestow on you as Lady Cochrane."

"You are mistaken, for I had prepared a means of release should I be driven to the last extremity."

"And pray what were the means which were so well concealed from all others?"

"Death."

"Tush!—that is the merest babble of a silly child. You would have been wiser, credit me."

"I pray that you may never have it in your power to put me to the test."

"I trust that ought I may do will never form so harsh a test of your obduracy, madam, for it can have no better name. Had I known in time my person was so hateful to you I would have held myself in poor esteem if I had prosecuted my cause. Even now I would freely release you were it not that all Scotland knows you as my bride. To relinquish you now would be to present myself to the world as a coward and a fool—to be laughed and jeered at as a dishonoured man unworthy of the name and title he bears."

Her heart palpitated, for he spoke in a cold hard voice, indicative not only of his resolution but also of his power to enforce it.

"What would you do?" she asked, bending forward with anxious gaze.

"I would first endeavour, for the love I bear you, to persuade you from the mad course on which you have ventured."

"And that failing?"

"Then, madam, I must compel you, for my own reputation's sake, to renounce your present folly, and to go with me to the home I have provided for you. There I will endeavour to forget your escapade, and will adopt such measures to prevent a repetition of it as your conduct may render necessary."

"You think it is in your power, then, to compel me?"

"I am sure of it."

Her cheeks were tingling with the mingled sensations of shame and rage.

"And I am as sure that you will fail."

"Sick children and the insane, madam, dread the physician who labours to save them," he retorted, with a cold smile.

"But I am neither a sick child nor an insane woman."

"Then you will be guided by reason, and you will resume something of the discretion you have so far set at defiance. If you be sane you cannot wish to remain longer under the protection of one whose treachery has destroyed your father."

"It is false."

"You wish to believe it so; but you cannot surely deny the testimony of your brothers and your kinsmen, Musgrave and Fenwick, however lightly you may value mine."

"It cannot be true," she murmured in a low voice that was like a moan, and pressing her hands on her brow, overcome by the calm assurance with which he made the assertion.

"It is sadly too true," he proceeded, eagerly taking advantage of her distress in the hope that it would help to bring her to submission: "the guilt rests wholly on Lamington's head, and he will speedily have to answer it, and other matters, before the Lords of the Council."

"Ah!" she cried, her face brightening, "he will prove himself blameless."

"It is impossible, unless crime can change its nature. He will be condemned."

"It will be by forsworn judges, then, and I will know where to find their instigator."

"Would you have your father's assassin escape? Is there no drop of the Janfarie blood in your veins that calls out for vengeance?"

"No; I seek no vengeance. I am content with justice."

"And that you shall have, I swear to you; but you must yourself render justice to others."

"In what, and to whom?"

“To me, whom you have so bitterly wronged, that a whole life’s submission would be poor atonement. You owe justice to me, whose head is bowed under the disgrace you have wrought me.”

He spoke with an affectation of frankness and injured dignity which was sufficiently effective upon an honourable nature such as hers to make her keenly sensible that the man had suffered some wrong at her hands.

She was abashed and silent.

He saw his advantage, and was not slow to avail himself of it to the uttermost.

“I have explained our position,” he continued, in the same strain. “I have told you why I must persist in thrusting upon you a duty which seems so little to your liking, and from which I would therefore gladly release you, but that in doing so I must go and hide my head in some obscure corner of the earth, and forego the brilliant prospect which is almost now within my grasp. Surely, madam, you cannot blame me for my persistence under these circumstances?”

He paused, as if expecting her to speak; but she could not yet. She was too much confused and troubled by the new light in which her conduct appeared to her; and she averted her face to conceal the agitation expressed there.

As he observed this a scarcely perceptible glimmer of triumph crossed his face, and he went on—

“I am aware that I am no dame’s chevalier, and that I am perhaps too abstracted—too deeply busied in the great affairs of state ever to make a wooer who will tickle a romantic girl’s ear with honeyed mouthings. But I am no goblin either, I trust. There is no deformity in my person, no cloven hoof to shock the eye; and if I cannot make soft speeches, I can at least render you honourable services.”

“I do not doubt it, sir; but——”

“Nay, do not qualify so small an admission. I am prepared to forget what has passed, and I will use what skill I may command to stifle the rumours which have already got afloat to your discredit. I will stand between you and the tongue of scandal; I will win honours for you that shall place you so high that no envious breath shall tarnish your good name. I stand so well in the king’s

favour, that there is no dignity your heart can crave that I will not obtain for you."

"Enough, sir, enough; these are things to move an ambitious mind, but they cannot change a faithful heart."

But he would not be stayed; he believed she was yielding, and that her protestations were the surest indications of it.

"Already the first earldom of our nobility—the title which stands next to the throne itself—the earldom of Mar, which the king's younger brother bore, is at my disposal. Within a few days it will be mine, and you shall share it. As Countess of Mar you will forget the childish passion which has made you so indiscreet, and in time, Katherine, you will learn to think of me even with some small favour."

Moved by the fervency of his own speech, and misinterpreting her confusion, he approached her and attempted to take her hand. But with a half-smothered cry of alarm she sprang away from him.

"Do not touch me," she cried, breathlessly, her eyes flashing indignation upon him. "All that you have said serves no better purpose than to show me how little you can esteem a woman's nature. Were it in your power to elevate me to the throne itself, so near to which you offer to place me, I would reject your proposal. I have told you that nothing can move me from my resolution to share the good or ill fortune of him to whom my troth was pledged long ago; and you, sir, must hold my fidelity at slight value in thinking that you can purchase it with titles that would be to me only the badges of my own falsehood."

His features were for an instant distorted with rage and chagrin; but the next instant his countenance was calm.

"You are determined, then, to force me to my last resource?"

"I would ask you to pity me, but I see that it would be useless. Do your worst, then, and I will trust to a power greater than any of earth to give me protection."

With his eyes fixed steadily on her, he approached, and in spite of her efforts to avoid him, he grasped her wrist.

"You will not yield to any persuasion," he said, deliberately. "You would still defy the sacred rights that

made you mine; you would still link yourself to the man whose hand is red with your father's blood; and you would leave me to the mockery of the world."

"You hurt me, sir," she said, defiantly, and endeavouring to wrench her arm from him.

"Be calm, madam, and hear me. Since nothing that I have said can influence you to your own benefit, or to justice to me, I must deal with you as the wayward child you are."

"Help, Richard Janfarie—help, brother, help!" she cried, raising her voice, and struggling with all her strength to free herself.

But neither her cries nor her struggles disturbed the implacable resolution of his dark visage.

"You shall be taught submission, mistress, by means of the mad humour which has driven you to such desperation."

She made no other answer, than by continuing her call for help; and she fancied that the heavy curtain which screened the recesses of the central windows were agitated.

"Be silent and listen," he said, sternly; "if you have any heed for the safety of Lamington—but it may be your care for him is as false——"

He paused, seeking a simile, and she filled up the blank.

"It is as true as my contempt for you is deep."

"You shall prove that. The Abbot is coming hither presently, to consider the appeal I have lodged with him for the arrest of Bertrand Gordon, of Lamington, and for his authority to support my title to carry you hence by force."

"No good man will give his authority to such a project."

"I am content to hazard that, for you yourself shall weigh the balance down in my favour."

"I?" she gasped, becoming suddenly still, so much was she confounded by this new effrontery. "Your cunning will work marvels indeed if it can make me say aught save that you are no true man in having tortured me thus."

"You are heated, mistress, and I take no count of your words. The Abbot will, most like, ask you to decide whether you will go with me or not."

“And I will tell him that I will only accept the protection of Lamington.”

With a malicious glimmer in his eyes, Cochrane brought his face close to hers.

“And at the moment you make that declaration Lamington will be stricken dead at your feet.”

She started back with a cry of fear and horror, but he still held her tightly.

“I will denounce your villainous intention.”

“No, you will not do that, for it would only hasten his doom. You will see that I am prepared for every emergency.”

He dragged her to the first screened window, and he drew the curtain aside.

In the recess two men were standing with swords drawn as if ready to rush forth at a given signal to execute the treacherous design which Cochrane had revealed to the unfortunate lady.

“You know the signal,” said Cochrane, as if taking a fiendish delight in showing her how carefully his mine had been laid.

“We do,” answered the men, stolidly.

He dropped the curtain, and then drew her to the next window. There also she saw two men with their naked swords glittering in the sunlight. The same question and answer were repeated; and again the curtain covered the hidden executioners.

Cochrane surveyed her dumb consternation with apparent satisfaction. Then, after a pause, to permit her to realize the full terror of her situation, he said, slowly—

“Are you satisfied that your resistance cannot help yourself, and will bring destruction upon him?”

“I am satisfied that you are a demon,” she ejaculated, passionately.

“Say rather a man who never allows his resolution to be balked. They are coming—remember Lamington’s life depends upon your word; and the slightest movement of your hand, or the faintest glance of your eye that would betray me, is his death-warrant.”

He released her at the moment when the approaching footsteps which had warned him that the Abbot and his company were at hand, halted at the door. Jaufarie, who had been on the watch, threw open the door.

The Abbot, David Panther, entered first. He was a tall, stoutly built man. His features were massive, and of a rather ruddy complexion, as if he were one accustomed to good living, although the gravity of his bearing accorded well with his position, and dispelled any irreverent reflections which a first glance at his face might have inspired.

His eyes were large, and twinkled with an expression that seemed to be composed equally of shrewdness, cunning, and good humour. They were eyes to dance at a good jest without being over particular as to its character, and at the same time they were eyes to penetrate motives, and quick to sum up the real nature of any one who might be brought directly under their observation.

In brief, Panther was a man who could buckle on the armour which his position in those days privileged him to wear, and who could do good service in the field for his own cause; a man who could compete in policy with the cunningest courtier of the period, and who could be royally merry when occasion served, whilst no Churchman could better uphold the dignity of his order.

The Abbot was followed by the Prior, a sharp-featured man, whose body seemed to be worn by the austerities he practised. After him entered Lamington, whose face was singularly pale, and whose eyes moved restlessly round the chamber until they rested upon Katherine. Then they brightened, as if his mind were relieved of some doubt, but he did not approach her.

She remained where Cochrane had left her, on the right hand of the chair of state, transfixed and bewildered between her terror of the treachery which threatened her lover, and her doubt of the consequences to him and to herself, if she should attempt to save his life by suppressing the truth. The dilemma was so terrible, and the necessity to decide one way or the other so imminent, that she was distracted. She could neither speak nor move, but only stand with pallid face bent toward the floor, striving to collect her sadly confused thoughts.

The Abbot eyed her curiously as he passed to the chair of state, and observed that she made no movement to salute him. He took his seat without a word, and the Prior, as next in authority, occupied a chair on his right. Twelve

monks ranged themselves round their superiors: and Richard Janfarie, who had entered last, with moody brow and slow step, took his stand near Cochrane. The latter saluted the Abbot with grave courtesy, and, bonnet in hand, stood calmly awaiting the issue of the trial.

CHAPTER X.

THE ABBOT'S COURT.

“ Quhat waefou wae her bewtie bred,
 Waefou to young and auld;
 Waefou, I trow, to kyth and kin,
 As story ever tauld.”

Hardyknute.

As soon as the Abbot had taken his seat he bowed gravely to Sir Robert Cochrane in recognition. The latter acknowledged his courtesy with less of his usual extreme politeness than he had ever displayed to one at whose hands he expected a service of any kind. Cold and calculating as the man's nature was, Katherine's fair face had obtained some influence over him that was not altogether due to his speculations as to the number of troopers her kinsmen could bring into the field to support his cause whenever he might need them.

This influence, strengthened by his chagrin in being made the fool of such a trick as that by which Lamington had carried the bride away, and still more heightened by her resistance and dislike, was urging him forward in his course with a degree of passion which somewhat interfered with the policy that in all other matters had guided his steps surely to preferment and success. His was one of those stubborn minds which only persevere the more in the attainment of an object as the difficulties surrounding it increase.

Under these conditions he had been so far affected by the interview which he had just held with Katherine that it quickened to anxiety his desire for the successful issue of his appeal to the Abbot, and rendered him fearful of any inopportune discovery of the ruse by which he hoped to influence Katherine's decision. Hence his somewhat

stiff acknowledgment of his lordship's courtesy. Slight as was the indication of his mental disturbance, the Abbot noted it; but without making any sign that might reveal his observation, he proceeded at once to the business in hand.

"You have made a sudden call upon me, Sir Robert Cochrane, to a singular duty," he said; "but the emergency will excuse its abruptness. Besides, untimely as the call may be, as you have made it in the name of the king—a name we all respect and are bound to serve to the abandonment of all other claims save only those of Heaven—I attend here to review the subject of your complaint, and to render you justice so far as it is within human power to do so. Speak, then, and let us know your wrong, that we may right it if that be possible."

The Abbot's voice was of a deep bass tone, which added to the authority of his presence, and which, in the almost breathless stillness of the audience, sounded upon their ears with peculiar solemnity.

The words reached Katherine where she stood in mute stupefaction, at first as if spoken in the distance, but gradually the sound became more distinct, the meaning penetrated her mind and recalled her to a shuddering sense of all the peril of her position; and filled her at the same time with a sensation of new dread, for she fancied that the Abbot was disposed to favour her persecutor. She listened with wildly throbbing pulse, but she did not raise her head.

Cochrane advanced a pace nearer to the judge by whom he had elected to have his cause tried.

"I crave your lordship's indulgence," he said suavely, and bowing low, "for intruding my pitiful affairs upon you at a time when doubtless you are much occupied with the weighty matters of your holy office. But accident has led me hither, and for that I am thankful, since it has brought me within the hearing of so wise a judge. My cause needs only the impartial review of such an one as your lordship; and indeed it falls within the very palm of your sacred office to do me justice."

"Proceed," rejoined the Abbot, inclining his head slightly. There was a momentary twinkle in his eyes as if he fully appreciated the depth of Cochrane's sincerity in the compliments he offered.

“Yonder lady is the source of my complaint. Briefly, this is the whole matter:—Yesterday, by the wish and consent of her parents and kinsfolk, she was wedded to me. A holy man from Carlisle performed the ceremony with all due rights. But before night had fallen the lady fled from me and from her father’s house with the gallant who stands there so pale before you.”

“She fled from bondage that had been forced upon her and that was hateful to her, as you, sir, were well aware,” interrupted Lamington, haughtily.

“I charge you, Gordon, be silent,” said the Abbot, sternly; “we must hear this matter from him who seems most wronged; and as you shall have unbridled speech when he has done, he too must have his say without check from any here.”

Lamington bit his lip, but made no attempt to reply.

Katherine trembled, for the rebuke her lover had received seemed to indicate still more clearly the favour with which Cochrane was regarded.

“For this protection I give your lordship thanks,” continued the wily courtier, with a mock air of humility; “but I need not try the patience even of an enemy in this matter. You are already acquainted with it in some measure from my appeal, which has moved you to summon us to your presence here. Wherefore I have only to repeat those charges on which the justice of my complaint depends.”

“That will suffice.”

“This lady, then, being newly bound to me in bonds of wedlock, fled. Her father and his kindred pursued her and her gallant to Dumfries. The town was alarmed, the burgesses rose, and Lamington by some base trick deceived them, so that they set the lawful symbol of the Hot Trod at defiance, and assailed our party. Sir Hugh Janfarie, eager to pacify the rioters, rode into their midst, and whilst seeking to explain our purpose there, he was set upon and treacherously slain, if not by the hand of Lamington, by his connivance; wherein the guilt is as much his as if he had struck the blow.”

Katherine with startled eyes gazed at Lamington, and he made a hasty movement as if he would interrupt the speaker; but he was checked by a motion of the Abbot’s laud.

"We shut our sorrow in our breasts," Cochrane went on, "and turned sternly to the duty that lay before us. We rode with all haste to the tower of Lamington, and failing there to find any tidings of the fugitives, I, having learned that your lordship was at present here, came to seek your aid in arresting a traitor, and in rescuing a foolish lady from her own ruin. At the gate we learned that fortune had favoured us, and that in coming to seek your help we had lighted upon those whom we pursued."

"Your charge is grave against the man and woman both," said the Abbot, deliberately; "what proof have you to hold it good?"

"So please you, here is the lady's brother, Richard Janfarie, who will confirm me. He is now chief of his house; and next to her husband is the guardian of the dame, holding all the authority of his kinship to direct her steps. If that be not enough to prove my charge good, I will attest it with my life."

He flung his glove down in front of the state chair, and Lamington sprang eagerly forward to pick it up.

But the Abbot, rising quickly, planted his foot upon the glove, and gazed frowningly at the challenged and the challenger.

"Stand back, Gordon; and you, Cochrane, take up your glove again. You have made appeal to me in this matter, and you insult my judgment by challenging its justice before it is spoken. Take up your gage, and hold it for more fitting time and place."

The Abbot gave the command with a dignity and authority that could not be opposed.

Lamington drew back, with lips clenched tightly, indicating the disappointment he felt at losing the opportunity of defending his honour with his sword.

Cochrane, sensible that he had made a false step, endeavoured to retrieve it by obeying the command with a submissive bow.

The Abbot resumed his seat.

"Answer you, Janfarie," he said; "so far as your knowledge goes, has Sir Robert Cochrane spoken truly?"

"He has spoken truth in all that he has said. I own it with shame, for it is my sister who has played the wanton, and it is our father who has fallen in striving to

rescue her. I, too, call for justice upon yonder man; and I, too, crave your lordship to deliver the woman into the keeping of her husband."

The Abbot turned to Katherine.

"If it be true, madam, that your father has fallen under Gordon's hand, I cannot think that you would wish to consort with him, however strong may be your reasons for shunning him who seems to have the right to call you wife."

"But he is guiltless, my lord," cried Katherine, stretching out her hands appealingly; "if my father has fallen, Lamington had no share in the ill fortune. I alone merit the blame, for it was my act that led him to his doom."

"Speak, then, and acquaint me by what means, by what temptations, you were persuaded to the rash act which has had such sad results."

Katherine related simply in what manner she had been forced to the altar with Sir Robert Cochrane, despite her plighted troth to Lamington; how, even at the altar, she had refused her consent to the union; and how the priest had been compelled to perform the ceremony, notwithstanding her refusal to make the usual responses. She would have told him, too, how she had resolved to die rather than live the wife of one who had so cruelly taken advantage of his position to force her to the marriage; but all the time she had been speaking her heart had been quivering with the knowledge that the assassins were lying in wait, and that any word she uttered might be the signal for Bertrand's destruction. Therefore she omitted much that she might have said in condonement of her own offence.

The Abbot, however, seemed to pity her unhappy circumstances.

"A marriage so forced," he said, "cannot be prosperous, and it is scarcely lawful. Still you erred, madam, in resisting the authority of your parents; and in a measure they erred too, in seeking to compel your inclination when it was so much opposed to your wishes in this especial matter; for it is one in which the child's inclinations should be consulted, seeing that upon it so much of her future welfare is dependent. But most of all, you erred, Cochrane, in taking a wife where you found so little favour. I would have deemed you wiser than to risk the perils of such a bridal."

"I could not know the lady's dislike was so fixed," rejoined Cochrane, placidly; "but as we stand now I must insist upon my claim. Thus far I will yield, however, that you may let her choose between me and the assassin of her father."

Katherine's blood became chilled, and she felt as if her heart ceased beating. She would have made instant appeal to be spared such a test, but the cold glittering eye of Cochrane was upon her and arrested her.

"It is a fair proposal," said his lordship; "but first let Gordon answer to the charge you have made of his part in the death of Janfarie."

"By what mishap the knight has fallen," said Lamington, calmly, "I am ignorant. Till the foul charge was made against me I knew nothing of his fate. I have had little reason to be the friend of Janfarie; but for this lady's sake I would a thousand times rather have given my own life, than that his should have been harmed. Cochrane makes this charge to serve his own ends, and Richard Janfarie supports him in it because his passion blinds him to the truth."

"You swear that by no direct act of yours you were a party to the deed?"

"I had no further part in this mishap than you may account due to me, since it was in pursuing me he fell. I own it was by me a cry was raised against Sir Robert Cochrane, but in doing that I sought no more than to spread confusion amongst his party so that we might escape them; and when the cry was raised, Sir Hugh Janfarie was at the monastery of Grey Friars. What followed after I do not know, and how far I may be answerable for it I leave your lordship to decide."

"Then I decide against you ——"

"We may arrest him, then," cried Cochrane, eagerly, "and bring him for trial before the barons and wardens of the Marches."

Katherine grew sick and faint, for it seemed that she was to be left in the power of the man she dreaded, whilst he was to drag Gordon before a court over which he had so much control as the king's favourite. There could only be one result: he would be doomed.

But the next words of the Abbot thrilled her with hope.

"You are too fast, sir; I have not done. I decide against him in so far as I recognize in him the immediate source of the quarrel in which the knight fell: but as he meditated no harm to Janfarie, we must take into account preceding causes, and they seem to me to justify Lamington's effort to elude your vigilance."

"How, my lord?" exclaimed Cochrane, astounded by this sudden adverse turn of the judgment.

"I mean that as you cannot prove it was his hand which struck the blow, and as I can well believe that he would for the daughter's sake avoid doing such harm to the father, we must attribute Janfarie's fate to the accident of the riot rather than to his premeditation. Wherefore of this charge he stands acquitted."

Katherine with difficulty restrained a cry of joy.

"I protest against this decision," said Cochrane, maintaining a polite bearing despite the wrath he felt; "and I will make appeal to a higher power."

"To whom, sir?"

"To the barons of the Marches—to the King."

"That will be as you please; and I would say take the matter straight to the King at once, for I doubt the barons will give you little satisfaction, seeing that it was your name which caused the good folks of Dumfries to forget their respect for the symbol of the Hot Trod."

"Your lordship speaks impartially in this at least," was the suave rejoinder. "I will take the matter straight to the King, and meanwhile I will arrest Gordon."

"Nay, by my faith, sir, that would be carrying your contempt for my decision a little too far. None shall touch him here."

"Who, then, will answer for his appearance?"

"I myself will answer for it," broke in Lamington. "I pledge my troth to meet the charge whenever and wherever my accusers may appoint."

A cold smile of distrust passed over Cochrane's features.

"I fear we need better surety than that you proffer us."

"Then you must hold my desire to prove your falsehood at slighter value than the passages that have taken place between us might warrant you."

"Be satisfied, Cochrane," said the Abbot, somewhat

impatiently, "and let us proceed. If his pledge be not enough for you, take mine also."

"I cannot further object, my lord; your word would suffice for a troop of malefactors."

"Your compliments smell something of satire; sauce may be at times too highly flavoured."

"The sincerity of my respect must plead my excuse for the high seasoning of my words," was the answer, with the ease of one accustomed to turn even a rebuke into a means of flattery.

His lordship, without affecting to observe the remark, proceeded—

"Your claim to the lady has now to be disposed of; and that might have been a more troublesome question to settle than the other, had not your own generosity provided a ready way out of the difficulty. You, madam, shall decide the claims of your suitors."

"Again I crave your lordship's indulgence," interrupted Cochrane; "my claim is that of a husband."

"Give it what title you will, sir. But before she answers, this lady must understand that I, holding important office in the Church, do not regard as binding the ceremony through which she seems to have been dragged, and which was performed by a man who forgot the sanctity of his order in the terror of his life. If she decide against you I will not hesitate to declare your marriage void, feeling assured that his holiness the Pope will sanction my decision."

Cochrane inclined his head slightly to hide the angry flush which rose to his countenance, and which for once he was unable to control. The proceedings had opened so much in his favour that he had counted upon an easy victory: but now the favour seemed to have so completely changed sides that he deemed the judge more than partial to his rival. As, however, he had provided for the decision in the event of its being left to Katherine, according to his apparently frank proposal, he was content to abide the result, watching her narrowly the while.

CHAPTER XI.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

“ But fare ye weel, my ae fause love,
 That I hae loosed sae lang ;
 If sets ye chuse another love
 And let young Benjie gang.

“ Then Marjorie turned her round about,
 The tear blinding her e’e—
 I darena, darena let thee in,
 But I’ll come down to thee.”

Young Benjie.

THE test which she had feared so much had come at last. There was no loop-hole of escape from it—she must either suppress the words she was yearning to speak or hazard Gordon’s life. If she had only had any means to warn him; if she had only had the least chance of putting him on his guard against the sudden assault which she knew would be made upon him, and under which he must fall before he had time to place his hand upon his sword—if the least opportunity to shield him had offered itself, she would have spoken outright, and declared how much she hated Cochrane, whilst she denounced his treachery.

But she saw no outlet of this kind from her pitiable position; she must leave Lamington to mistrust her, or she must sacrifice him. She had no other alternative. She felt the gaze of Cochrane fixed upon her; she knew that he understood the struggle of her mind, and that at the least symptom of her intention to defy him, he would give the fatal signal.

“ Come, madam, the matter lies in your hands now,” said the Abbot, after a pause, as if he had been waiting for her to speak; “ you have heard my verdict as to the bond by which Sir Robert Cochrane claims you as his; but I charge you think well before you speak, for remember that the wishes of your parents demand as deep and earnest consideration from you as your inclination in this affair should have received from them. Say, then, do you persist in your determination, and will you go hence with Lamington ? ”

She stood mute and motionless, as if she had not heard, but the cruel anguish of the moment was to her more excruciating than if all she had hitherto endured had been concentrated in one bitter blow, and it had fallen now. Her eyes were fixed in terror upon Cochrane, and he stood implacable as fate, confident of victory.

She seemed like one suddenly transformed to stone, and was incapable of speech or motion. But she was painfully sensible of all that was passing around her. She felt that Lamington was gazing upon her, marvelling at her silence. She knew that the Abbot was eyeing her in astonishment, and that all were wondering at her strange manner. Yet she could not break the spell of terror that transfixed her.

"We wait your answer, madam," said the Abbot, encouragingly, thinking that some modest fear constrained her, "and you may give it freely, for here you are under the protection of the Church."

Still she was silent, and indeed she scarcely heard the words.

"Katherine!" exclaimed Lamington, vague doubts beginning to mingle with his wonder, and affrighting him, "why do you not speak? Is the question so hard to answer?—nay, you can have but one answer, since you have braved the wrath of kindred and the scorn of unthinking minds for your love's sake. You cannot hesitate to tell them that you will go with me, and with me only."

She made no response yet.

The silence which ensued was like that in which people listen for the last breath of one dying. None but Cochrane and the woman herself knew the meaning of her pause.

The Abbot observed upon whom her eyes were fixed; and authoritatively—

"You seem to be in fear, but you have no cause. I gave Cochrane liberty to speak with you, as he urgently desired, before the court was held; but if he has taken advantage of my license to practise upon you by any undue threat to compel your will, he shall find that I have power to protect you in spite of all his art—ay, in spite of the king himself."

The calm dignity of his speech affected her, and she trembled visibly; but still, bewildered by contending

emotions and alarmed by the results which depended on her words, whatever they might be, she could not reply.

With mock humility and apparent anxiety to clear himself of all suspicion, Cochrane spoke—

“I beseech your lordship, give the lady time. I own that I have warned her of certain issues which depend on her, but I will abide by her decision.”

The latter words were uttered with a significance that only Katherine comprehended.

The Abbot rose to his feet.

“You have heard what he has said, madam; I charge you, therefore, answer without more delay—go you with Cochrane, as your kinsfolk would have you, or go you with Lamington, as you seemed inclined?”

She made a hasty movement, and her face flushed as if she were determined at all hazards to declare the true sentiment of her heart; but at the same moment Cochrane bent forward, raising his hand slightly. His change of posture seemed to all except Katherine merely indicative of his anxiety about her determination; but to her it signified that he was ready to call the hidden assassins to their foul work.

The impulse to which she had been about to yield was arrested, her heart seemed to be clasped by a hand of ice, and a moment longer she stood quivering and bewildered. Then wildly she flung herself at the feet of the Abbot, and raising her pallid face she cried in piteous agony—

“My lord, my lord, I cannot go with Lamington.”

Then she bowed her head to the ground as if to hide her shame and anguish.

There was a moment of speechless wonder, during which Cochrane resumed his ordinary position—a smile of satisfaction on his countenance. Lamington was like one stunned by the unexpected nature of her response. Perplexed as he had been by her hesitation, he had not been at all prepared for this blank rejection of his suit. Wholly unsuspecting of the real motive which inspired her words, he was unable to divine the meaning of the sudden change in her regard for him.

“Is this final, madam?” said the Abbot, much amazed that she should revoke her preference for the man with whom she had taken flight.

His voice roused Gordon.

"Katherine," he cried with passionate vehemence, "you do not know what you have said—you have rejected me, Bertrand! Look up, look up, Katherine, and say that we have misunderstood you—say that our ears have been deceived; say that it was not my name you meant to pronounce."

He had sprung to her side, he bent over her, with the great love he bore her shaking his frame, and making his voice tremble, conjuring her to recall her words.

But she did not raise her head. Trembling with the violent emotions which were torturing her, and sustaining herself with the mental exclamation—"It is for his sake"—she answered him in a voice half stifled by her sobs—

"I cannot go with you."

"Oh, this is some frenzy which has seized her," he ejaculated wildly; "or I have been so basely maligned that she has learned to hate me. If that be so" (raising himself and fiercely confronting Cochrane), "look you, sir, well to your affairs, for you shall not live to enjoy the triumph you have so treacherously won!"

"We agreed to abide by the lady's decision," was Cochrane's complacent response.

"It has been forced from her by some cursed trick. I will not believe that she could be of so fickle humour as to turn from me now. Katherine! Katherine! rise and make known to us by what base means these falsehoods have been wrung from you—for they are false—as false to your own heart as they are false to me."

Low heart-burning sobs were the only response to his passionate appeal.

He staggered back, his eyes starting in their sockets, his hands clenched desperately. There was no sound in the chamber save her stifled murmurs of distress, but in his ears there was a din as of a thousand fiends shouting in mockery the answer she had given—"I cannot go with you!"

Confused by these weird sounds, dazed by the sudden shock he had received, he could not yet believe that she intended to forsake him. He could find no clue to her sudden change. He could have understood it had she believed him to be the guilty cause of her father's death.

But she did not credit that; her own lips had declared him as innocent of it in fact as he had been in thought. It could not be either that she had not cared for him, for she had given him too great a proof of her regard.

What, then, could be the meaning of her rejection?

It remained for Cochrane with his oily, venomous tongue to suggest a cause as base as he knew it to be untrue.

"I beseech your lordship," he said with an anxiety which was not altogether assumed, "let me remove the lady. You see how she is afflicted by this interview. She risked much for this man's sake, knowing too little of his circumstances, and now that she knows him to be a bankrupt adventurer, she would spare him and herself the misery which must result from adding another burden to his beggarly estate."

Katherine did not hear his words; her distress deafened her to the calumny which was being spoken.

Lamington heard, and a thrill of pain quivered in his breast and overwhelmed his dismay in scorn for the mind which could at such a moment make such sordid calculations. He had been striving vainly for some explanation of her conduct, and in his blind passion he accepted the first that offered itself.

"Merciful powers!" he exclaimed, gazing upon her, doubt mingled with his despair, "can this be so? Is this why she hides her head from me, and cannot raise her face to mine? Speak, woman; if your fair looks have not cheated me with the thought that you had as fair a heart—let me know if this knave has spoken truly, so that I may turn from you so full of scorn, that I shall feel no pang for all the hopes and love you have trampled under-foot!"

"It is for his sake that I am silent," she again murmured to herself, and still she gave him no reply.

With a species of frenzy he stooped down and seized her arm.

"Have you lost all sense of hearing and of touch? or is this no more than another trick to feign a distress that is a mockery to me? Oh, madam, if these be your reasons for your new humour, you might have spared us all much trouble had you declared them sooner. I am not so poor

but I can thank Heaven for rescuing me from the false smiles of one who balances her affection with the stock of a larder or the stuff of a gown. I deemed you worthy to share with me the honourable struggle to win back the name and fortune of my father's house—I find you now a weak, pitiful creature, unfit to bear a true gentleman's name."

Katherine suddenly clasped the Abbot's knees, and looking up to him imploringly, with tearful face, but not daring to glance towards her lover, she cried—

"Spare me, my lord, spare me, and take him away."

Lamington laughed bitterly as he drew back.

"Oh, be content, madam; I will relieve you of my presence without his lordship's interference. There is your treasure, Cochrane; take her and be as proud of her as you may. By my faith, I thank you for having rescued me from the shame I sought so eagerly; for sad shame it would have been indeed to have found her later what I know her to be now."

"Let me take her hence," said Cochrane again to his lordship; "this madman's raving is unfit for her ears."

"She has heard the last of it," cried Lamington, with the cruel laugh of despair that pierced her to the quick, more on account of his suffering than of her own, great as that was. He went on—"She need never heed me, for I will be the first to congratulate her, and wish her all the joy that she deserves."

"Peace, man," interrupted the Abbot, who had been watching this strange scene with curious eyes, and who began to suspect that Katherine had some deeper reason for her conduct than appeared on the surface. "Peace, and retire."

"Since your lordship commands it, I obey; but it was not needed. Trust me, I would have seen you join the hands of this brave couple with as fair a laugh on my lips as you could have wished. Since they would have me gone, I will humour them in this as in all other things. Fare you well, Mistress Katherine—or Lady Cochrane, I ought to say, although the name sticks in my throat. Farewell, and when you think of me"—here his affected tone of raillery broke down, and his passionate agony found expression—"oh, woman, think of me as of one whose life

you have marred—of one who cherished your image above all else on earth—of one whom your falsehood has hurled down the black depths of misery and despair; and yet of one who thanks Heaven that he knows your baseness even while he falls.”

“Spare me—spare him,” moaned Katherine to the Abbot.

The latter motioned to the Prior, who rose hastily from his seat, and prevented Lamington saying more by dragging him from the chamber.

The door had scarcely closed upon them when the Abbot proceeded—

“I presume, madam, from your rejection of Lamington that you accept the proffered protection of Sir Robert Cochrane?”

“Undoubtedly that is her meaning,” said Cochrane, advancing lightly to raise her from her kneeling posture.

But with a cry of dismay and horror she shrank from his touch, and clung desperately to the knees of the Abbot.

“No, no, my lord, keep him away—his touch would kill me. I throw myself on your mercy—I implore your protection, and I will accept none other.”

“In good faith, madam,” ejaculated his lordship, a little impatiently, “your conduct is somewhat of the strangest. Explain to me; what does it mean?”

“Her brain is crazed,” said Cochrane, hastily; “she does not know her own mind; she will be cured in time, *but the danger is not over yet.*”

The latter words were spoken with a significance which Katherine understood too well. Her impulse had been to answer the Abbot by denouncing Cochrane’s treacherous trick, but his warning checked her. She felt that until she had an opportunity to make Lamington aware of the position it would be madness to imperil his life anew by declaring the truth after she had sacrificed so much to save him.

“Be merciful, my lord, and give me your protection,” was all she dared to say.

“But I demand your lordship’s recognition of her husband’s authority by yielding her up to me. Nay, more; here stands her brother, the head of her house, and I

demand that you recognize the authority of her family beside my own."

"Rise, lady," said the Abbot, slowly, and assisting her to her feet. "You shall have my protection, since you claim it so earnestly."

She hung, trembling, on his arm, and watching Cochrane's dark visage suspiciously.

"Surely your lordship cannot deny my claims upon her after all that has passed," he said with some uneasiness.

"I deny nothing, Cochrane; but until the lady has had time to recover from the excitement of this trial she shall remain under my charge."

"Then your lordship compels me to warn you that you exceed the powers of your position. You have no right to hold her back from those who are her guardians by law and nature."

"It is my privilege, sir, to protect the weak. You have yourself said that her mind is unbalanced: until she find the balance again I will care for her."

"And I deny your right to do so."

"Your denial is of small account to me; but since your objection is made so strongly, I will place her under the charge of one to whom you cannot object."

"Then you will carry her straight to Lady Janfarie."

"No, I will carry her to the Queen; and whilst she is under her Majesty's protection, you will have opportunity to move her mind to your favour if that be possible. Meanwhile, you may ride with us and see that I discharge my duty faithfully. Come, madam, I will conduct you to a chamber where you may prepare for our journey."

Cochrane, gnawing his lip, but bowing with affected submission, drew back as the Abbot led Katherine from the apartment.

CHAPTER XII.

SNARES.

“ Here maun I lye, here maun I die,
 By treachery's false gyles;
 Witless I was that faith e'er gave
 To wicked woman's smiles.”

Hardyknute.

ON the way to the apartment which she had occupied during the night, Katherine felt herself too much depressed and confused to be able to speak. She had warded off the danger which had threatened the life of him to whom her whole heart was devoted; but she had done it at the cost of excruciating torture to herself and to him, and the exhaustion which ensued naturally left her weak and sick. Besides, there was the bitter consciousness that, notwithstanding all she had suffered and risked, the safety it had secured was only temporary.

She now knew to what cruel extremities Cochrane was prepared to proceed in order to possess her, and to redeem the discredit which her flight had thrown upon him; and she dreaded the power his cunning and position afforded him to carry his determination into effect.

Indeed, she had been so much impressed by the peril that must be encountered in braving such a man as Cochrane, that even when she had reached her room, and the Abbot was about to leave her, she hesitated whether or not it would be well to hazard what might happen on her acquainting him with the trick with which she had been controlled, and which had rendered her conduct so singular and inconsistent.

“ Here you will rest, daughter,” said his lordship, kindly, and dropping into the paternal form of address befitting his character of a Church dignitary; “ and I will see that refreshment is provided for you. You will be free from interruption till I send for you, and by that time you may have recovered the calmness of mind which has been so much disturbed.”

Still hesitating whether to reveal her secret now or to

delay until she found more fitting opportunity, she bowed her head and spoke falteringly—

“My words are feeble, good father, and cannot make known to you as I would wish the gratitude I feel.”

“Gratitude is always deepest, child, when it is voiceless. But why have you sought my protection since, having rejected that of Lamington, it would seem more natural for you to have accepted Cochrane’s or your brother’s guardianship?”

She glanced around her in a quick, affrighted manner, and spoke in a whisper.

“Where is he now?”

“You mean Lamington?—he is in the private chamber of the Prior, waiting for me. Why do you look about so strangely? No harm can reach you here.”

“Who can tell that?” she sighed bitterly. “Last night I thought that within this holy house we were safe, but this morning I have learned that even here treachery and the hand of the assassin can reach us.”

“Your manner and your words are so strange, daughter,” said the Abbot, slowly, and with a passing doubt that her mind had become slightly crazed, “that I am perplexed exceedingly. Life is at best uncertain, but in this house it should be safe at least from the dangers you point at.”

“But it is not so. Oh, good father, you saw the anguish I endured whilst refusing the man I had made choice of in despite of all my kindred. You saw the horror with which the touch of Cochrane thrilled me, and you could not understand the contradiction of my words and looks. But you shall know my reason now, if I may speak in assurance that no ears save yours can hear my words.”

The Abbot, wondering, walked to the door, looked along the passage, and saw that it was clear. Then he returned to Katherine.

“Speak, daughter, and have no fear. I pitied your distress when your conduct was a riddle to me; be sure that you will have all the aid it is in my power to give, when I have learned the motives which have prompted your behaviour.”

Rapidly she related to him the manner in which Cochrane had threatened her, and compelled her to deny

the impulse of her heart in refusing to accompany Lamington when the matter seemed to be left entirely to her option.

The Abbot, as he listened, was first surprised by the boldness of the trick which Cochrane had played them, and next indignant.

"I understand you now, daughter, and I may tell you I divined that you had some hidden motive for your conduct. I was blind not to have seen at once that there was knavery at the back of it, knowing Cochrane as I do. His affected generosity should have betrayed him to me at once, for there is no kindly spark in his whole nature for other than his wretched self. But he shall answer for every pang he has caused to you."

"I implore you, good father, do not let him know yet that I have revealed his treachery; and give Bertrand instant warning, for this man has power and is remorseless."

"Keep a light heart, child, on that score. We have hunted foxes before now, and it shall go hard but our experience will outwit this one."

"Thanks, thanks, father. Keep Bertrand safe, and you will find me wanting neither in courage nor patience."

"I will bear your message to him, and will contrive that you shall see him, so that he may learn your truth from your own lips."

"He will not blame me when he knows all?" she said, with timid doubt.

"He shall not—rest you satisfied. Meanwhile, bar your door, and keep all out whose company may not be agreeable to you."

Therewith he pronounced a paternal benediction and withdrew. Katherine immediately followed his directions and barred the door, for she feared, and with some reason, that, disappointed in the decision of the Abbot's court, Cochrane might seek her, either to persuade her to remain silent as to his knavery, or to force her away with him, notwithstanding his apparent submission to his lordship's authority.

The Abbot Panther, pondering upon what he had just heard, and upon other matters with which it was more or less associated, made his way along various corridors to the private chambers of the Prior.

He entered a species of ante-room, at the farther end of which was a small door covered by heavy hangings. Through this doorway he passed into a square apartment which was furnished with some degree of comfort.

There he saw Lamington, with flushed face and excited manner, pacing the floor; whilst the Prior, who had apparently exhausted all the persuasion at his command, sat gravely silent, watching him.

On the entrance of the Abbot, the Prior rose, and in obedience to a whisper, noiselessly retired to the ante-room, where he remained, evidently for the purpose of insuring the safety of his superior from any interruption or eaves-droppers.

Lamington halted abruptly.

"Well, is she gone?" he queried, with quivering lips, although he tried to speak lightly.

"Gone!—no, nor does she mean to go except under my care."

Lamington glowered at him, unable to comprehend the answer.

"What new whim is this?" he said bitterly. "Has her fickle brain already repented the wrong she has done me?"

"She has done you a service, not a wrong. We are blind creatures, all of us, and do not see the good which comes to us often in the form of affliction."

"You count it a service, then, for her to have renounced me?"

"Under the circumstances it was so. Come, sit down and listen to me. You shall learn that Mistress Katherine was most kind when she seemed most cruel."

Lamington drew back with an exclamation of pain.

"I will not listen to you or any man who comes to tell me that she has not been fooling me. Fair opportunity was given her to decide between the man from whom she had fled and myself. She has made her choice, and so let her abide by it. For me, I will not seek to compel any woman's humour, although I suffered all the tortures the arch-fiend could invent by the loss of her."

"You are too hot, my son," said the Abbot, quietly; "the lady had no choice save to appear fickle to you or to sacrifice your life."

"Am I then so poor a wretch that she feared my capability to defend myself against a knave like Cochrane? That is the sharpest sting of all."

"Be calm, man, and listen. In a fair and open struggle no one, and she least of all, would doubt your prowess. But the strongest is weak against a secret foe."

"Cochrane makes no secret of his enmity."

"But he hides the means wherewith he seeks to strike at you."

"Let him do his worst."

"Ay, let him do it; but let us be prepared to meet it. Sit down, I say; and when you have heard her explanation, if you do not pity her, and take prompt measures on your own, and her behalf, you cannot care so much for the lady as you seem to do."

With an impatient gesture, as if to intimate how little satisfaction he expected from the explanation, Lamington at length seated himself opposite his friend. The Abbot had laid aside his mitre and surplice, and with the removal of these insignia of his office his manner seemed to change insensibly. He spoke now without any of that dignified composure which had characterized his speech whilst he had been holding the court. His words were uttered with a quick and sharp enunciation, and his observations were those of a man experienced in worldly ways, and of one whose mind was occupied with many schemes. In fact, the Churchman had disappeared and the politician had taken his place.

Astounded by the revelation which was made to him, Lamington sat for a moment breathless; then starting to his feet with hands clenched, he moved towards the door.

"By every saint in heaven he shall answer for this treachery before he is many minutes older. Shame upon me to have blamed her as I have done—to have heaped my mad maledictions upon her while she was trying to save me!"

His hand was on the door.

"Come back, come back, hot-brained and short-sighted mortal. I expected that this intelligence would move you to pity for her and shame for yourself; but, my faith, I did not expect you to act so blindly."

"How, blindly? Would you persuade me to forego my vengeance or to pause in it?"

"Nay, I would not have you forego it; but I would have you pause that it may be the more complete."

"Show me how that may be done—show me how I can whip his heartless nature into some part of the agony she has endured, and I will wait for years. But be sure that you give him no chance to escape me, or I will hold you my enemy."

"We shall not have to wait long, I trust, to bring the knave to account, and you shall see that the course you were about to take just now would be the clearest way to give him the chance of escape which you fear he may obtain."

"Read the riddle to me. I listen with what patience I have left."

"Come nearer, then."

Lamington approached slowly, as if he were still doubtful whether or not his best course was to seek Cochrane at once.

The Abbot, with a pawky smile, proceeded—

"I have already told you something of the purpose for which I trusted you to meet me here. Now, in all these unexpected events which have transpired, I see a direct means of assisting our project and of satisfying your desire for retribution."

"You will work a marvel indeed if you can turn these miseries to so good account."

"You will see. First, you know the power which this knave Cochrane and his fellows have obtained over the King. They have played upon his Majesty's weakness and upon his good nature, to the ruin of all honest men, and the degradation of our country."

"All that I know—a set of mountebanks govern the State and make us bow our heads in helpless wrath."

"They must be removed; and the chief of them must suffer first. His Majesty's brothers, the Duke of Albany and the Earl of Mar, have determined upon this as much for their brother's sake as for their own. They have the support of every noble who still attends the court, besides the devoted services of the many who have been banished and deprived of titles and lands by the influence of this

Cochrane. The people are groaning under his oppression, and you yourself have proved at Dumfries with what good will they would rise to expel the tyrant."

"But how can the treachery which has tortured Katherine and distracted me help forward this purpose?"

"In this way: I am to place Mistress Katherine under the Queen's protection. She will tell her Majesty the story of the persecution with which Cochrane has assailed her, and of the villainy by which he attempted to force her to submission."

"But he will deny it all when he is charged with it."

"Ay, but trust me, Margaret of Denmark is a lady of as clear vision as of warm sympathy. She will be interested in Mistress Katherine's misfortunes, and she will recognize her truth, no matter what Cochrane may say to the contrary."

"But the King will not believe so readily."

"Well, then, it is a question of the Queen's influence upon his Majesty opposed to that of Cochrane; and if she take up the matter in the earnest spirit which I calculate upon, then I will weigh a wife's skill against the cajolery of a hundred favourites."

"And if it fail?"

At the question the Abbot leaned back on his chair, folding his hands complacently before him and smiling incredulously.

"If it fail," he answered, in a low, cautious tone, "if the Queen does not depose an unworthy favourite, then I am afraid that the King himself will pay the penalty of his obstinate fidelity to the harpies who surround him."

"And that penalty?"

"Will be his crown."

Lamington started and drew back.

"How say you?—this is treason of the boldest flight."

"It is justice to the people and to the King himself, only you choose to give it an unpleasant name. We have no intent to disturb lawful authority, but we are resolved that the greedy cormorants who surround the throne, sapping its honour, and making it a thing of contempt for the world, shall be driven thence. The cry of wrongdoing swells on every side, and it has grown too loud ever to be hushed until the cause of it is removed. His Majesty's

own safety demands that the parasites who are batten-
ing on his weakness shall be removed, and the outcry of the
people commands it."

"But let them be removed without danger to the
King."

"So much we hope to do; but even kings must take
physic sometimes."

"I will have no hand in aught that threatens the safety
of our sovereign," said Gordon, resolutely.

"Why, who is there makes such a threat? Albany and
Mar are his brothers, and they seek only to insure his
safety, which his own folly has so far imperilled that a
breath would rouse the country to arms against him."

"Pledge me your word that there is no other object,
and I am with you."

"Most faithfully I pledge myself; for, as I understand
the matter, we seek to serve the King, not to harm him.
Surely, you have little reason to be dainty about the means
by which Cochrane and his fellows may be swept from the
height which gives them power to ruin honest men."

That reminder of his own wrongs stirred anew the
passion of Lamington, which had been for a moment
chilled by the boldness of the conspiracy now revealed
to him.

"There is my hand," he responded, impulsively. "You
shall not find it falter until justice shall have wrought its
work upon Robert Cochrane."

The Abbot grasped his hand tightly.

"Your word is pledged," he said, hastily, his eyes
glistening with satisfaction, "and the misery Katherine
has endured should hold you to it steadily. For her sake
I trust you to be discreet and watchful."

"Name her when you see me hesitate, and the memory
of her suffering will make me remorseless."

"Remember, then, that she is the prize for which you
struggle; and remember, too, that justice must be done to
your father's name."

"Ay, these are motives to fit a man for desperate
deeds."

"Enough, then; our course is clear. It was to explain
these things to you that I wished you to meet me at this
place. Now go see the lady, and make what amends to

her you can for the blame you unjustly cast upon her. Poor dame! your wild charges hurt her more than all the rest."

"I will make atonement, if it be in the power of man to expiate such wrong, by the faithful service of a life. Heaven knows I, too, suffered something. But I will explain that to her," he continued, with an attempt to shake off the depression which had weighed upon him since that stormy meeting; "and you, most reverend father, when you have donned your canonicals again and forgotten that you are a courtier—ay, and one of the cunningest, too—you will see that the ceremony which was performed at Johnstone is declared null."

The Abbot gave a quiet but jovial sort of laugh at the reference to his double character. As has been seen, when performing any of the duties appertaining to his position as a Church dignitary, he acted with a solemnity that inspired respect; but with his badge of office he laid aside the Churchman, and in his second character he schemed and intrigued with an address which earned for him a high place in the estimation of the courts of England, France, and of his own country. He made little attempt to conceal these contradictory traits of his nature, and he could enjoy a joke at his own expense with any man. In this respect, at least, he was no hypocrite, although he was by no means particular as to the stratagem by which he might outwit an opponent.

"Away you to the dame," he said, still laughing, "and if it will comfort her, say that the ceremony shall be annulled before three days have passed. But bid her beware lest by any look or sign she should permit Cochran to know that we have discovered his treachery before we have reached Linlithgow. Till then you must bid her adieu, for you must not speak to her again during the journey. Go; the Prior will show you her chamber."

Lamington, with a light step and a relieved heart, hastened to seek Katherine; and he had no presentiment of the dire events that were to bar their meeting.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE WOOD.

“I lo’e Brown Adam, weel,’ she said,
 ‘I trow sae does he me ;
 I wad na gie Brown Adam’s love
 For nae fause knight I se

Brown Adam.

KATHERINE remained half an hour undisturbed in her apartment after the Abbot had quitted her. She experienced an immeasurable sense of relief now that she had unburthened her mind of the wretched secret by which her actions had been controlled, and by which she had been made to appear so fickle in the eyes of the man whose esteem she valued most.

Every moment she expected to hear Lamington knock and demand admission. Her mind became concentrated upon that expectation, and her sense of hearing was strained to catch the sound of his approaching footsteps.

At length, a light tap on the door.

She sprang toward it with a subdued cry of joy.

“Who is there ?” she asked, with her hand trembling on the bar, ready to withdraw it.

“Open, sister ; I bear a message to you,” was the answer, in a low voice.

She was disappointed and chagrined ; for an instant she even felt a shaft of spleen at the laggardliness of her lover. He should have been as eager as herself, she thought, for the reconciliation which was to atone for the affliction they had both undergone. Reflection, however, soothed her, for doubtless he had sent this message to announce his approach.

“A message from whom ?”

“From one, sister, who waits eagerly your presence and forgiveness.”

She opened the door.

A friar, with bowed shoulders and cowl drawn closely over his head, concealing his features, which were still further hidden by his eyes being sedulously bent upon the ground, stood on the threshold.

"Is he coming?" she questioned eagerly.

"Nay, sister," was the answer, in a still lower tone than before, and with an oddly guttural utterance. "You are to follow me, and join him. I have no knowledge of his reasons for this strange conduct; but he told me that you would understand when I said that it was needful for your safety and for his that you should pass hence unseen."

"Said he so? I will go with you instantly."

And without pausing to speculate upon the motives which could have prompted this sudden flight after the Abbot had promised his protection, she hastily snatched up the plaid her lover had placed round her on the previous night, threw it round her shoulders, drawing it over her head, and followed the friar.

He had turned his back on her the moment he had observed she was prepared to accompany him. When she whispered, "I am ready," he moved noiselessly along the passage.

At the top of the staircase he half turned his face toward her.

"Step quickly, sister," he said under his breath, "and lightly, for we must pass the chamber of one whose eyes we are to avoid."

Holding her breath, she descended the stairs after him with the lightness and rapidity of a fawn. When they entered the second passage from which the one leading to the royal apartments diverged, she trembled lest Cochrane or her brother should break out upon them and bar their progress.

But although she heard footsteps in various directions, no one crossed their path. Uninterrupted they reached a small side door, which her guide opened quickly, and they passed out to the garden square of the Priory.

In this square the monks of the establishment at stated hours took exercise, walked and meditated upon the affairs of the small world to which their devotion limited them, and upon the great future for which they were preparing themselves. Round the walls were niches and seats for the promenaders to rest when they were so disposed. Above the niches were carved images of saints and allegories of good and evil, to help the thoughts of the holy men when

they were tempted to stray from the high purpose of their devotions.

As it wanted yet an hour to the time of the forenoon promenade, the square was unoccupied, else the appearance of a woman in the garb of the world in that place would have attracted attention and excited curious questioning probably from some of the brotherhood.

Evidently afraid lest anything of this kind might happen, and lest his character might be affected by discovery, Katherine's guide said hurriedly—again only partly turning his face toward her—

“Hasten, good sister, and keep close to the wall, as you observe me do.”

“I will keep pace with you, make what speed you will.”

“Once outside the square, and we are safe.”

“We?”

His shoulders jerked as if he had stumbled.

“Ay, we,” he added quickly, but without looking round at all, “for I risk something, sister, in serving you and your friend.”

“I understand, father, and I am grateful.”

Keeping close to the wall, which ran on a line with the main wall of the house, so that they could not be seen unless some one thrust his head out of a window, they, at a pace accelerated almost to a run, made for the end of the square. They reached it, still apparently undiscovered.

A small oaken door, studded with massive iron bolts, was opened by the friar with a key which he held ready in his hand.

They passed through the doorway and stood on the outside of the Priory.

Katherine looked round: the black forest was looming before her, its trees waving and sighing in the wind, and down below, the Ken was glistening in the sunlight as it rippled slowly through the dell.

But Lamington was not there, and she turned with some disappointment to her guide.

He was relocking the door, and when he had done so, he threw the key over the wall into the square, as if he had no intention of returning.

That seemed curious; but she was too anxious to learn why Lamington was not waiting there for her, as she had

been led to expect, to give immediate attention to the circumstance.

"Why is he not here?" she queried, wonderingly.

"There was too much danger of being observed for him to tarry here."

"Where is he, then?"

"He is on before us. I will guide you safely to him, do not doubt."

There seemed to be, or her fancy betrayed her, a shade of impatience in the friar's manner, and she almost started at the tone, for it was abrupt, and struck some chord of her memory that roused vague and perplexing suggestions that the voice was not unfamiliar to her, although she could not associate it with any person.

He began to move rapidly across the open space which lay between them and the forest.

Katherine followed, keeping close behind him. Before they had made many paces she spoke again.

"At what place has he appointed to wait for me, father?" she said with some little trepidation, for she feared that her repeated questions annoyed her guide.

"He rides on before, and we are to overtake him," he replied in a more modulated tone than that he had last used.

"Then you go with me?"

"Yes, till I have placed you under his charge. That was my promise. If you doubt me, we will return."

"No, no; I beseech you go on, and pardon my anxiety. But it seems strange that he should desire to depart in this secret fashion when the good Abbot pledged himself to guard us until he had placed me under the care of the Queen."

"His lordship's intention was sincere, no doubt; but you should know that, with all his power, he could not insure you the safety which you and your friend need."

"I have had bitter reason to know that too well, but I thought that when aware of Cochrane's treachery he could take means to thwart him for the present."

"Such a man as Cochrane is not easily thwarted. It is the Abbot's wish that you should reach the Queen as speedily as possible, and the course you are taking seemed the surest and swiftest,"

"Did he indeed think so? Ah, then Cochrane's power must be great indeed when even the good Lord Abbot must stoop to such means as this to overreach him."

"His power is great; but pause or go forward as it may suit your pleasure. Only decide now, for in a little while return will be impossible without exposure of the whole stratagem."

"Hasten on; I will not pause again."

By this time they had entered the forest at a point where three footpaths joined. There the friar hesitated an instant, as if he were not well acquainted with the route, and as if he were not sure which path to take.

At length, with a half-smothered ejaculation of discontent, apparently at his own indecision, he chose the path to the right. That led them along the skirt of the wood in the direction of the Ken.

Katherine's guide evidently did not mean to penetrate the forest. He had rather accepted the shelter of the trees to hide them from observation. This object became clear when, after half an hour's brisk walking, and they had descended into the vale, he suddenly diverged towards an open plain which dipped down to the bank of the river.

Katherine was again wondering how far they would have to go before they overtook Lamington. The recent conversation had satisfied her for the time; but as they progressed without discovering any trace of her lover, she was beginning again to feel surprised that he should have left her to traverse such a distance under the guidance of any one save himself. She did not like to express this feeling, because already the guide had been displeased by her anxiety, which seemed so like doubt of his fidelity.

They were within a few paces of the glade when the friar halted and bowed his head towards the ground, as if listening.

She watched him anxiously, and she too listened. In the distance a faint halloo was heard, and as the sound was repeated it seemed to grow louder and nearer, as if approaching them.

"Your absence is discovered," said the friar, in a quick undertone. "We are pursued. Speed now, if you care for safety. We will find horses a few steps farther on."

Katherine's doubts were dispelled by the excitement

which the peril of capture inspired, and she followed him without any thought beyond that of eluding her pursuers.

As they passed out of the forest she saw a second friar waiting with three horses. She was not permitted time to make any close observation of this new attendant.

Her guide hastily assisted her to mount, and then sprang into the saddle of the second horse with an agility which only one accustomed to the exercise could have displayed. His comrade being already in the saddle, the horses started immediately. As if by pre-arrangement, Katherine's horse was placed between those of the friars, and a leading-rein was held by the one who had brought her from the Priory.

This arrangement she did not at first perceive; and even if she had perceived it she would not have been disturbed at the moment. But when they reached the river, and their pace was necessarily slackened in order to cross the ford, she became aware that she rode more in the character of a prisoner than of a willing companion.

In mid-stream she cast a troubled look backward, and for the first time a serious doubt arose in her mind as to whether the pursuers were friends or foes.

Her guide observed her expression and seemed to divine her thought.

"Your danger is nearly passed, sister," he said, softly; "once we have crossed the river we may defy pursuit."

"But where is Lamington?"

"Safe, safe. Be patient; you will see him soon enough."

"Why do you lead my horse?" she queried again, agitated by the evident irritation of his last response, and that vague memory of its tone returning to her.

"It is a wayward brute, and must be led for your sake. But waste no more time in questioning; all your doubts will be resolved presently."

She uttered a cry of alarm, for she had recognized the voice at last.

It was that of Sir Robert Cochrane.

As she uttered the cry, she gave the reins a quick jerk, and attempted to turn the horse's head, to recross the stream. But the leading-rein, which Cochrane held firmly, rendered the attempt futile.

Discovering the failure, and without reflecting upon what she was about to do, she made a movement to leap from the saddle into the water. But Cochrane's companion, as if prepared for such a desperate measure, grasped her round the waist, and held her tightly on the seat.

She turned upon the man furiously, and tore the friar's hood from his head, revealing the stern features of her brother.

"Shame upon you, Richard Janfarie," she cried, "to lend yourself to this black scheme. But it shall not serve you. We are followed by those who will give you prompt payment for your falsehood."

She struggled with him violently, screaming with all her strength, in the hope that the pursuers might hear and come to her assistance before her captors were able to start the horses again.

"Be still, madam," said Cochrane, fiercely, at once throwing aside all effort to disguise his voice or to conceal his purpose. "Your cries will avail you as little as your struggles. Those who follow us are our men. I told you that they were pursuers only to quicken your pace. It was no more than another part of the stratagem which your obstinacy has compelled me to use to make you sensible of your duty. Be silent, I say, or we must use means to still your tongue that I would fain avoid."

Her heart sank at the revelation of the device by which she had been betrayed; but as she heard the shouts of those who followed, a faint hope presented itself.

He was capable of any deception, and it might be that he was deceiving her again in saying that the pursuers were only the men of Johnstone.

Acting upon that suggestion, she redoubled her efforts to release herself, and to attract the attention of any who might be within hearing. But Janfarie held her fast; and Cochrane urged the horses out of the water and up the embankment.

Then he halted, and with a cold smile watching the effect which the discovery might produce on her, permitted her to look behind.

The small troop of Borderers had just appeared from the wood, and were galloping down the hill to the river,

only ceasing their continuous halloo when they took the ford and saw that their leaders awaited them.

In a few minutes Katherine was surrounded by the Borderers, and she comprehended then with what dexterity her persecutor had arranged his plans; for by the simple means of causing the men to follow he had guarded the retreat, and by the alarm which the idea of pursuit had caused her, she had not been permitted time to reflect upon the manners of her guide or to entertain more than a passing suspicion of his purpose. She had, in fact, become a willing companion in the flight with the man whom of all the world she would have most avoided.

She ceased her struggles now, for she was bitterly satisfied of her helpless position. She would have been hopeless too had not her indignation sustained her.

"You have done brave work, gentlemen," she said, contemptuously; "and you have won great honour in your treacherous triumph over a defenceless woman."

"I regret, madam," answered Cochrane, suavely, "that you have forced us to adopt these measures; but if they offend you, the blame rests with yourself. You will learn by-and-by that in what we have done we have studied your welfare more than our own desires."

"You interpret baseness finely, Sir Robert Cochrane; but you shall not make me accept your reading of it."

"There is the more to be regretted, since you must be guided by it."

She turned to her brother.

"Are you so much this creature's slave that you will not stretch forth your hand to protect me from him?"

"He is your husband," answered Janfarie, dourly.

"You would have me so," she cried with flashing eyes; "but iterate the claim until your tongues are palsied you shall not find me submit to it. Out upon you both—if you were not conscious of the injustice of your claim, why have you entrapped me thus? Why have you snatched me away from the protection of the Lord Abbot, who pledged himself to test your rights by the judgment of the King himself?"

"That I will answer," broke in Cochrane, coolly, whilst he adjusted his feather cap which had been brought to him by one of the men to whom he gave the friar's habit that he had hastily taken off.

"Speak, then," said Katherine, viewing him haughtily; "and speak honestly, if you can."

The desperate position in which she was placed, the mental anguish she was enduring, whipped her into a species of frenzy, so that she spoke passionately, and without any regard for the consequences of redoubled watchfulness which would ensue upon her further irritating her persecutors.

"I have removed you from Abbot Panther's care, mistress," said Cochrane, frowning, but still with a degree of politeness, "because he is no fit guardian for one so fair, and because he is too partial a judge of your position."

"He acted as a worthy man should have done; he was merciful to the weak, and he was just to you, who deserved it so little. He offered you fair opportunity to prove your truth."

"You do not know him as I do," was the perfectly cool response. "You are too rash, and in too high a temper to understand these matters now; but I promise you that before long you will be in a better mood. As for the opportunity Panther offered to me, it was one he had no power to deny me, or he would have done so."

"It is your evil nature that sees all hearts as black as your own."

"You are wasting words, mistress; but I will give you no reason to complain of my courtesy, and I will satisfy all your inquiries. I have already given you several of my arguments for removing you from the Abbot Panther's patronage. The most important argument of all, however, remains to be told. Powerful as he may have seemed to you in the isolated Priory of Kells, he holds no place of credit in the estimation of their Majesties; and your presentation by him would have been a disgrace to you and to me."

"I am willing to take that risk. If he is in disgrace at court it will be so much to your advantage. Let me return to him, since I accept the risk of what harm his protection may do my cause."

"But I do not accept it, madam; and you must permit me to present you to their Majesties, since I, who suffer most at your hands, have the best reason to cry for justice. I will do so in a manner that even you shall not dare to impugn."

Katherine held her breath; she could scarcely believe that she had heard him aright; for she could not comprehend how he, by whom she had been so wronged, could be willing to place in her hands the means of obtaining justice from an authority to which even he must submit.

“Will you take me to the Queen?” she asked; “will you take me without halt or delay?”

“As fast as horses can carry us,” he said, with the same tone of injured dignity in which he had last spoken, “we shall ride to Linlithgow.”

“You will permit me to see the Queen alone?”

“If such is your pleasure—yes.”

Janfarie spoke with a degree of relief, as if his conscience, which had been burdened by his share in his sister's present predicament, were lightened—

“It was on these conditions,” he said, “that I consented to take part with Cochrane in the trick by which you have been placed under our control.”

“Dare I trust you?” she asked, regarding the men doubtfully.

“You must,” retorted Cochrane, “for you have no resource. But I pledge my credit that you shall be carried to Linlithgow without delay; and you may trust me the more readily when you learn that my own position is involved, and that for my own sake I desire no better issue to the unhappy misunderstanding between us than that which the King may direct.”

“Ride on, then,” she said, firmly; “since I must trust you so far, I will be no hindrance to your speed.”

Cochrane inclined his head coldly, and made a motion with his hand to Janfarie. The latter appeared to understand the motion as a signal, and quietly fell behind, retaining with him four men.

Katherine, surprised, and rendered, if possible, more uncomfortable than before by the retirement of her brother, observed that amongst the four Borderers whom he retained was one of those who had been engaged in the struggle with Lamington at the Dumfries Hostelery.

What was their purpose?

She had not far to seek for an answer to that question. Their purpose was to cover the retreat, and probably by

foul means to prevent Lamington ever appearing at Linlithgow to uphold his own cause and hers.

Her heart beat quick at the suspicion; but she was calmer now, and she saw that any outburst on her part only served to render her the more helpless in the hands of her callous captor by increasing his watchfulness. Therefore she remained silent, although she sickened at her own fancy of what might happen should Richard Janfarie, burning with desire to avenge his father's fall, and madly attributing that misfortune to her lover, encounter Lamington.

Cochrane, without appearing to observe her anxiety, directed the men to ride close; and then grasping the reins of his own horse and the leading-rein of hers tightly in his hand, he urged the animals forward at a rapid canter. He cast no look behind, and he did not seem to give any attention to his companion. His eyes appeared to be fixed on the road straight before him, but all the while with cunning side glances he was noting every change of her countenance.

She rode beside him silent, angry, and yet afraid.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN CHASE.

"Gae, saddle me my coal-black steed,
Gae, saddle me my bonnie grey;
An', warder, sound the rising note,
For we have far to ride to-day."

The Tweeddale Raide.

LAMINGTON was conducted by the Prior to Katherine's dormitory. The door stood wide open, and the chamber was untenanted.

The first thought which occurred to Lamington was that the Abbot had conducted her to some other apartment, and that the Prior had not been made aware of the change. He recalled the latter, who, without having entered the room, was moving away.

The Prior, as soon as he had been made aware of the absence of the lady, hastily went in search of the Abbot. He returned immediately, the prelate accompanying him.

"This was the chamber in which I left her," said the Abbot, looking round him in perplexity and amazement; "and I bade her bar the door that she might not be disturbed."

Inquiries were instantly made, and it was discovered that the Borderers had quitted the precincts of the Priory only a few minutes before; but no information as to Cochrane could be obtained.

On examining the gatekeeper, they learned that Richard Janfarie had departed half an hour before his followers, taking with him two extra horses. Further, one of the men, who had been the last to pass through the gateway, had left a scrap of paper for Bertrand Gordon.

Lamington snatched the paper from the man's hand. It was neatly folded, superscribed in a clear, clerkly style of penmanship, and it was sealed with Cochrane's signet. He tore it open, and read—

"The lady has been wiser to-day than she was yesterday. She acknowledges the proper authority of her husband, and accepts his protection of her own free will, as she was bound to do by the most sacred law. Renounce her: cease your mad persecution of her, if you wish for success in any venture that you make. Do not seek to mar her peace again with your presence if you wish to live.

"ROBERT COCHRANE."

On reading this intimation that all their efforts had been foiled, Lamington knew that Katherine had been trepanned by Cochrane's cunning; but when he remembered that the Abbot had advised her to bar the door, and so keep out unwelcome intruders, he remembered also that this letter was corroborated by her treatment of him in the morning, and a doubt disturbed him.

But he flung the doubt from him with a furious exclamation.

"No, I will not believe it. I will not doubt her again until I learn from her own lips that she has been deceiving us all. She has been betrayed; and he would foist this lie upon me, to make me halt in the pursuit."

"Right," muttered the Abbot, who had taken the letter from him and was reading it with frowning countenance—

“right; it is a lie that he would foist upon you. But how has he managed to hoodwink her again?”

“No matter how the trick has been accomplished, we must follow with all the speed horses can make.”

“Ay, follow,” continued the Abbot, apparently busy with some other thought. “But in what direction?”

“We will discover.”

“He has a band of men to guard him, and you are alone.”

“I cannot stay to count these hazards. When I reach him, I will consider in what way to outwit him.”

“Ay; but stay,” muttered the Abbot, reflectively; “there is more in this than the mere question of rescuing the lady—much more than concerns your safety and hers.”

“What is your meaning?”

“This. He has got the start of us; he will reach the King before us, and his representations being the first made, as he is the first in the King’s favour, will weigh so heavily against us, that it will require the strength of giants, and the subtle craft of the magician, to enable us to steer our way through this storm that is breaking over us.”

“He will not dare to present such a cause to his Majesty.”

“He will dare anything; it is the very boldness of his flights which, astounding all men, and leaving them inactive, have permitted him to reach the eyry he now occupies. You must not judge him by any common rascal, for whilst you watch for him creeping stealthily to his purpose in the dark, he will dash at it—ay, and attain it—in the broad light of day.”

“You have read his character closely, I can believe; but in what manner will your knowledge of it serve us in the present strait?”

“I fear that it will serve us little; but it will, at least, direct us in the course we should attempt.”

“Then that is to pursue the reptile, and strike him down without remorse.”

“And be yourself doomed to forfeit life, or to be a hopeless fugitive from the land. We must meet him with his own weapons—courage and cunning; the first, to dare any charge that he may make, and to seize upon it as an

instrument to strike him back ; the second, to guide the weapon to the vulnerable part of his armour."

"In the saints' name, what part is that?" cried Gordon, impatiently. "Since you will not touch his life, how and where can you harm him?"

"In his disgrace. Once degrade him in the King's eyes—once assure his Majesty of the real character of his favourite, and Cochrane will fall beneath our feet to be trampled upon and crushed out of memory, as a worthless wretch deserves."

"And if you fail?"

"Then we will pay dearly for our temerity; and, in faith, there is much danger of our losing what little hold we have at present; for if he reach Linlithgow before me, you will find my presence at court forbidden. Give him that triumph, and he will sweep every other obstacle from his path. Albany and Mar themselves may then have reason to dread his power, for their nighness to the throne may readily be made the means of alarming the present wearer of the crown."

"He has not obtained that triumph yet, and swift action on our part may place it for ever beyond his reach."

"We will try it. You follow him, and delay his progress by any means you can find, short of running him through. Take this signet, and if you show it to any of our friends on the route they will give you what assistance you need."

"Who are the friends?" queried Gordon, placing the ring on his finger.

"I will give you a list of them; any one of them will place twenty men at your command at an hour's warning."

The Abbot retired to prepare the list of gentlemen, whose service he knew might be counted upon. Lamington proceeded to the stable to saddle his horse. This task he performed rapidly, for a knight, whose career in those times was fraught with so many surprises and dangers, was bound to accustom himself to every duty that the accidents of war or feudal strife might require of him.

In a few minutes he led the horse out to the court, and was ready to start. He was presently joined by the Abbot, who placed a small tablet in his hand containing more than a dozen names of nobles and barons.

“Master this list as you ride forward,” said his lordship, “and then destroy the scroll; for although it would be difficult to make it hurtful to any of our friends in its present form, we cannot calculate what harm it might do them if it fell into the hands of one clever enough to give it the appearance of treason.”

“I will have it by rote before I have ridden ten miles.”

“That is well; but do not slacken your speed, for Cochrane must be stayed at any hazard.”

“And you?”

“I ride hence on the instant and make for Linlithgow without halt or pause. Away, and Heaven speed you, for the fortunes of a State may depend on your success or failure.”

“If I fail to bar his passage, and to be ready in answer to your summons to appear before the King, reckon me amongst the dead.”

The gate was thrown open; the keeper indicated in what direction the Borderers had ridden, and Lamington galloped away from the Priory with heart strung to desperate resolution.

The sun had passed the meridian: the bright tinge which gilds the fields and trees in the morning, had faded, and a dull shade was creeping over grass and leaves. The change was a delicate one, and only perceptible in certain moods; but in that mood the mind becomes keenly sensitive to the dulness which succeeds the glitter of the morning light, when nature assumes an appearance like that of a polished mirror which has been breathed upon. The wind, too, seems to become chiller and to whisper through the woods with more melancholy voice—all with an inexpressible subtlety suggesting the approaching shadows of the night; and to a mind influenced by circumstances, suggestive of the shades of fortune. There was, besides, a quietude in the atmosphere, disturbed only at intervals by that sad murmur of the wind, the lowing of kine, or the baying of a hound, which oppressed the man with a sense of weakness. He had sufficient of the fanciful in his nature to feel these things, but his present mission was of too high import, and his desire for retribution too strong, to permit them to obtain entire sway over his mind.

He thrust all fancies aside, and setting himself firmly on his seat galloped forward, skirting the wood, and, led by instinct or by fate, proceeded directly towards the ford of the Ken where those whom he pursued had crossed.

He had covered something more than half the distance between the Priory and the river, when his pace was suddenly checked by the sound of a loud and anxious halloo, proceeding from amongst the trees.

He drew rein, for the voice sounded familiarly in his ears, and presently a large black dog bounded out from the wood towards him, followed immediately by Muckle Will. The hound danced sportively round about the horse's feet, and Will, with long swinging strides, ran up to his master.

The big, simple-looking fellow was very red in the face at this moment; his cheeks were swollen, and he was panting for breath as if he had been running some distance. He rested his hand upon the horse, the while he looked eagerly in his master's face, making signs towards the river and uttering some sounds which were at first unintelligible.

"Take time, Will, take time," said the master, with difficulty controlling his impatience so that his follower might not be farther excited; "take a long breath, and let me know what your grimacing means."

"The leddy, man, the leddy," gasped Will, waving his hand in the direction whence he had come.

Lamington's blood tingled with hope.

"You have seen her," he said quickly.

"Ay, doon yonder at the ford," rejoined Will, still panting, but rapidly regaining his breath.

"When—how—with whom?"

Will stared a minute as if trying to fix the questions in his memory, and then—

"Whan?—it was just as lang since as it has taken me to run frae the water to here. I was coming to ye at the Priory as ye direckit me last night, but I gaed roun' by the tower to warn the auld folks that ye was coming——"

"Yes, yes; but the lady?"

"Weel, I'm gaun to tell ye. I was comin' doon by Balmaclellan to join ye, when, just as I got near the ford, I heard a woman skirling like a kelpie, and syne, when I

got down to the hough, I saw the leddy—your leddy—among a wheen doomed scoundrels, and no a sowl to help her.”

“Did you make no attempt?”

“What could Stark and me do among mair nor a dozen? We’d just have gotten our crouns cracked, and ye wouldna have heard a cheep about the business. Na, na; we havena muckle wit, but we have enough to keep whole bones when there’s no chance of winning onything by broken anes. So we just got cannily by, and syne ran on to give ye warning.”

“What road have they taken?”

“The straight road through the Glenkens. They’ll pass within bowshot of the tower.”

“Hasten on to the Priory, seek the Abbot, and acquaint him with what you have discovered. Then ask him to give you a horse, and follow me.”

“Ye dinna mean that ye are gaun on yoursel’ to tackle a’ thae loons with your ain hand?”

“I must pursue them. I have means of obtaining help when it is needed.”

“Ye’re daft. They’ll murder ye without speiring whether ye like it or no.”

“Do as I have told you, and overtake me if you can. They are sure to halt at some stage of their journey.”

“Let me gang wi’ ye enoo,” pleaded the fellow.

“You must have a horse—you cannot keep pace with me on foot.”

“I might lift a brute at the first house we came to.”

“How, sirrah? Do you propose that to me? Do as I have told you; it will be the quickest way in the end, and your information will be of service to the Abbot.”

“Let Stark gang wi’ ye onyway; he’ll keep ye on the right road after them. They’re no riding unco fast, and maybe they’ll be taking some by-roads; but Stark will match them.”

“Yes, let him go with me, and you come after us without delay.”

“I’ll be with ye before ye hae gotten muckle farther than Black Larg”—then addressing himself to the dog and making excited gestures to help his words, he went on: “Here, Stark, take the road and follow the leddy,

man. Doon, doon! I'll soon be wi' ye. Be a guid dog and show the maister where the ledly is. Awa' wi' ye."

The hound, as if understanding every word, gave vent to a loud yelp; and with nose bent to the ground, set off at full speed to the ford.

Lamington galloped after his strange guide, and Muckle Will started at a run for the Priory.

The dog led the way across the ford, and up to the mound on which Cochrane had halted to permit Katherine to recognize the Borderers, and to realize the helplessness of her position. Stark paused a moment there, and then with a short yelp continued the route, taking the road through the Glenkens which Muckle Will had suggested as the one Cochrane and his company had intended to follow.

The dark irregular line of Black Larg raised its giant form high above him, and the grim summits of the lesser mountains—grim in their bareness of vegetation, and with their dark brows of rock—seemed to gather around him as he advanced. At one point of the road his own tower of Lamington lay at only a short distance to the east, nearly at the foot of the Larg, which overshadowed and protected it. But he had no time to give a thought to his ancient home, to which, only a little while ago, he had hoped to lead a bride. It was a desolate enough place for a bride's retreat, but he had thought only of the brightness her presence would make there, and of the strength her love would give him to win back the lands and honour of his family.

But these thoughts were far removed now. He was like a hunter in full chase, and he had no heed for anything save the quarry.

At the base of the Larg, the road made a sudden and sharp ascent, and a spur of the mountain closed the view of the path he had to follow. Passing round this spur, he suddenly came upon a man in friar's garb, standing in the middle of the way, so motionless that he might have been a figure of stone.

The hound sniffed at him, and with a growl passed on.

Lamington was guiding his horse so that he might pass without injuring the friar, and in acknowledgment of the office of which his hood and gown were the symbols, he

inclined his head. The friar abruptly raised his hand, warningly, and seemed desirous of speaking.

The rider halted, for at the movement the idea occurred to him that this man might be able to give him some information about Katherine and her captors.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DRUIDS' CIRCLE.

"The rugged mountain's scanty cloak
Was dwarfish shrubs of birch and oak,
With shingles bare, and cliffs between,
And patches bright of bracken green,
And heather black that waved so high,
It held the copse in rivalry."

SCOTT

BEFORE it could be brought to a stand, the horse had passed the friar and left him several yards behind. Lamington waited for him to approach, and the man, observing this, advanced slowly, with an appearance of stiffness in his gait.

The moment he had reached the side of the horse the animal swerved from him, but the rider, with a firm hand, checked this eccentricity; at the same time the hound, which had gone on before, came running back and gambolled in front of the horse, barking sharply, and making an occasional run along the road, as if inviting its temporary master to follow.

"Quiet, Stark," said Lamington.

The dog ceased barking and hung its tail, but it began to move round and round the friar, growling as if dissatisfied, until again reprovved, when it sat down with its large clear eyes fixed upon the stranger suspiciously.

"You would speak to me, father?" said Gordon, respectfully; "and I have a favour to crave from you."

The friar answered in a husky voice, so evidently assumed that nothing save his impatience to push forward, and the concentration of his thoughts on the one subject, could have prevented Lamington from observing it. There was even a gruffness in the friar's manner, as if the civility with which he spoke was feigned much against his will.

"I seek nothing for myself, Sir Knight," was the slowly pronounced answer; "but I have passed a party of men who seemed to be carrying a gentle lady prisoner. What harm she may have done I could not learn, but she looked too young and fair to be very guilty."

Lamington's pulse bounded with exultation.

"Good father, you give me the tidings I am seeking for," he cried eagerly. "In the saints' name, tell me speedily—how long is it since you passed them? Speak, father, I pray you."

"Barely half an hour gone. They had halted in a retired part of the glen, the lady having been taken with sickness."

"Quick, direct me to the place."

"If you will help the lady, I will guide you thither."

"Heaven will bless you for the kindly office. I accept your offer with all the gratitude that a despairing man can give to one who saves him from uttermost agony."

"Follow, then."

"Stay, father; you shall mount and I will walk, for I am swifter of foot than you can be."

"Keep your horse, Sir Knight; you shall have no cause to complain of my pace."

Subdued as his manner was, he made this response with a degree of dogged resolution which prevented Gordon from pressing his courtesy. He, however, dismounted, and walked by the horse's head, the rein thrown across his arm. He was induced thus to place himself on an equality with his guide, first by his respect for the man's apparent profession, and next by his sense of his own inability to control his anxiety without some more muscular action than he could obtain by sitting on the horse whilst it moved at a pace sufficient to keep him abreast with his guide.

Slight as the exercise was, it helped him to maintain a degree of calmness, and to reflect upon the course of conduct he should adopt when he found himself within reach of his enemies.

He was neither so vainglorious nor so deficient in common sense as to imagine that he, unaided, could possibly cope with a dozen determined men with the slightest prospect of success. He knew that stratagem

must be his chief weapon in the contest he was about to wage.

The friar made no comment upon Lamington's respectful arrangement, and taking the opposite side of the horse, strode forward with a rapidity which would scarcely have been expected from him if he had been judged by the gait of his first approach.

The guide presently struck off the road and entered a small glen, through which a burn whimpled with a clear sharp song, and sparkled like crystal as it leapt over the stones lying in its course, worn smooth by its constant flow, or formed into green balls by the moss which clothed them. The fir with its brown cones, the ash, the thorn, and the dwarf oak, flourished in the den, and imparted to it an appearance of luxuriant herbage that contrasted picturesquely with the bare-browed mountains which gazed in frowning grandeur down upon it from all sides.

Following the friar, Gordon crossed the burn and advanced towards the head of the glen. As he was still leading the horse, his progress was interfered with by the thick growth of the trees, and the guide consequently out-paced him. The glen was closed in, at the end they were approaching, by a steep hill, over which the burn leapt in a silvery line of spray, forming a miniature waterfall and a prism through which the sunlight was reflected in bright colours.

At this point the sides of the glen were also scarplike, and Gordon observed at once that it would be impossible to take his horse by that route to the height above.

He was perplexed for an instant, and gazed eagerly around, fancying that he must be near the end of his journey, and that Cochrane's party was probably lurking somewhere near, concealed from him by the intervening foliage.

The guide paused until his companion had reached his side; then pointing to the steepest part of the hill, which was covered with whins, he spoke—

“We must ascend there.”

He began immediately to make his way up through the brushwood without waiting reply.

“I must leave the horse here, then,” said Lamington.

“You can tie it to a branch; it will be safe enough,” answered the friar, without looking back.

"Are those I seek near?" queried Gordon, subduing his voice, and of necessity following the suggestion made to secure his horse.

"Very near. You will see them when you have crossed the hill yonder."

Lamington sprang up the brae after him, clearing his way and keeping his footing on the slope with the ease of one accustomed to such feats.

It did not occur to him that the point they were approaching might have been attained by another path, and without the necessity of leaving his horse behind him. Neither did he reflect that should emergency arise it would be almost impossible for him to lead the animal out of the thicket which now enclosed it, without the loss of much time and the expenditure of some trouble. His present object was to reconnoitre, not to attack. He had no reason to doubt the fidelity of his guide, and consequently he could not suspect that he had been purposely conducted in this direction in order to be deprived of the service of the horse, should it become necessary to attempt an escape from unequal foes.

But Stark, the hound, moved by some mysterious instinct, was suspicious of the whole proceeding from the first, and showed by every sign short of speech its anxiety to lead its present master away from the danger on which he was rushing blindfold. His distrust of the friar was marked from the beginning, and several times he caught the edge of Lamington's cloak, attempting to drag him back. But the knight would not attend to these mute signals of peril. He trusted to the man, and he failed to understand the hound, which seemed to be sensible from the moment they quitted the regular road that they were not following the track of the lady, in whose footsteps Stark had been directed by Will to lead the master.

Repeatedly Gordon bade the hound keep down, and the poor brute, submissive to every command, would slink back for a few minutes, and then renew its attempt to attract attention and to alter the course, but only to be again repulsed.

When Lamington quitted the horse and began to climb the steep brae, Stark uttered a low growl that was half a whine, and instantly leapt up to the top of the hill and

planted itself in the knight's path, as if to prevent him proceeding farther.

The friar, who had by this time gained the top, darted a quick angry glance at the dog and paused, after moving a few paces from the brow of the den. He watched with apparent eagerness for the appearance of Lamington, and, when the latter rose out of the glen and thrust the dog aside from his path, the friar's lips twitched, whilst a smile of satisfaction overspread his features.

At the moment an eagle swooped over the heads of the men, seemed to stoop toward them, and again rose into space.

The shadow of the broad wings appeared to lower upon Lamington like an omen of coming evil.

But he neither observed the shadow, nor would have heeded it even had he perceived it, so intent was he upon the object of his journey.

The dog embarrassed him by leaping upon him and trying to drag him back, so that he spoke sharply; and Stark, hanging his tail between his legs, fell behind, but continued to watch the guide.

The friar, as soon as he saw his companion ready to follow him, moved westward into the wildest part of the Glenkens, and appeared so eager to push forward that he gave Lamington no time to ask questions.

The route they traversed was wild and picturesque; its solitudes were evidently rarely disturbed by human footsteps. Wild-fowl sprang from their nests, the fox scoured across their path, and the eagle, lord of the bird tribe, was startled from his eyry by the intrusion of man. Around them lay the dark dens and the wooded gullies of the Glenkens, with rivulets like threads of silver marking the hill-sides. Above them were the dark peaks of the mountains tipped with the sunlight, but still wearing a sombre brow, and rising like dumb giants keeping watch and ward over the romantic and solitary passes beneath.

"The course is longer than I bargained for," said Gordon, as he stalked beside his silent conductor.

The latter raised his hand, pointing to a narrow pass which they were approaching.

"The end of your journey lies yonder," he answered in a low tone, which seemed to obtain a peculiar significance from the place and the speaker's manner.

The pass was formed by two jutting boulders of rock which seemed to have burst out of the hill-sides, and to have been abruptly arrested in their career toward each other by some sudden freak of nature. The space between them would barely have permitted three men to walk abreast, and the pass might have been kept by one stout man against fifty.

This narrow cleft made a natural portal to a scene of solemn grandeur. The pass opened upon an amphitheatre of hills, which formed the colossal frame of a plain of considerable extent. In the centre of the plain were seven huge boulders of rock, placed at regular intervals, and marking a perfect circle. The stones were so large that it was difficult to imagine how they could have been placed there by human effort—how they could have been carried across the mountains and placed in their respective positions with such mathematical accuracy.

That they could not have been placed thus by any eruption of nature was evident from the character of the foundation, and the fact that they were clearly not linked to the soil in any way. The regularity of their arrangement was also an argument that they had been placed there by artificial means. More marvellous still, a large centre rock was so nicely balanced on a partially rounded base that it could be moved to and fro by the touch of a man's hand, although the united strength of twenty men could not have shifted it from its position. This was known as the "rocking-stone," and several similar stones have been found in the Glenkens, to this day bearing testimony to the strange powers possessed by the ancient Druids.

The seven stones marking the ring was called the Druids' Circle; and their grim forms studding the plain combined with the grand silence of the hills to impart an atmosphere of mystery to the place.

Another peculiarity must be noted; outside the Druids' Circle, and indicating the cardinal points of the compass, four pits had been dug. A fifth pit had been made within the circle, near the rocking-stone; this one was half full of water when Lamington was led to the place.

The pits were of the kind which have become known as murder-holes, for the reason already explained that they were used by the barons, who had power of pit and gallows,

to punish malefactors summarily. The number of these holes spread over the district, and still visible, suggest that at one period there must have been a good deal of prompt justice or vengeance executed.

The place was known to Lamington, but at this moment its weird aspect affected him with an unaccountable sense of depression, and the total absence of any sign of Cochrane's party perplexed him exceedingly. He had expected to have been brought within view of those he sought the instant he emerged from the pass, and here was nothing but a solitary space with its silent guardians looking grimly on.

The friar advanced straight to the rocking-stone and there halted, wheeling round and facing his companion.

"We are at the end of our journey," he said, morosely.

Lamington looked round hastily to assure himself again that there were none save themselves within the range of the Druids' Circle. Then, turning to his guide, sternly—

"How, sir? You promised to conduct me to the halting-place of a party of Borderers, into whose hands an unhappy lady had been betrayed. If this be a trick to delay me in my course, it is one for which your hood will barely save you a whipping."

The friar deliberately removed his hood, and revealed the person of Richard Janfarie.

Lamington for a second was confounded by this transformation. The trick, of which he had been made so readily the dupe, was plain to him now; and the vain efforts of Stark to warn him of the deception recurred to him with bitter regret that he had been so blind—so obstinately blind—as to have refused all heed to the warning, when there might have been time to take advantage of it.

But regret was of no service, and he roused himself immediately to action.

"By the saints, Janfarie," he cried, angrily, "any other than you would have paid dearly for having duped me in this fashion."

"I am ready to pay the forfeit—readier perhaps than any other might have been," Janfarie responded dourly; "therefore be at ease; your rage shall not lack a butt to strike at."

"I cannot find that butt in you," said Gordon, troubled

by his thoughts of Katherine, and of the prolongation of her anguish by his failure to overtake her captors, "and there is no time for words to reprobate your treachery—ay, and your cruelty to one whose happiness you should have been the first to defend."

"My hand shall never be raised to protect a false wife, and the wretch who has made her false."

Gordon's blood tingled and his eyes flashed fiercely, but he checked his rising passion with a mighty effort, and answered calmly, although his lips trembled slightly.

"You are her brother, and therefore you know that you are safe from me; but you shall discover yet how villainously you have belied your sister and me."

"I, safe from you!—then, by my sword, you shall learn speedily that you are not safe from me. You should have stayed your hand in time, if kinship to her had any sanctity in your sight. Fix your eyes on this," he said, pointing to the mourning badge on his arm, "and then you will understand why I have brought you here, and how little your professions of amity will help you against my vengeance for my father's fate."

"You know that I am blameless of his fall—you know that I would have protected him with my own life had I been near when danger threatened him; but your mad rage, and your blind faith in Cochrane, render you as incapable of comprehending my motives as of seeing that you are befooled by a knave."

"You think so," he muttered, sneeringly.

"Some day, when it is too late to save yourself, you will learn that he has betrayed you as he has done all others. But I have no time to reason with you. Farewell; when we meet next I trust that you may know me better."

Lamington made a movement to retrace his steps, but Janfarie sprung forward and planted himself in his path.

"I told you that we had reached the end of our journey here. Only one of us can leave this place alive."

"Stand aside, madman. I cannot draw on you."

Janfarie pointed again to his badge and unsheathed his sword.

At the same time from behind four of the huge Druid stones appeared four Borderers, and Lamington saw that he had fallen into a carefully planned ambush.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COMBAT.

“ I will not fight with you, MacVan,
 You never me offended ;
 And if I aught to you have done,
 I'll own my fault and mend it.’

“ ‘ Does this become so brave a knight ?
 Does blood so much surprise you ?
 And if you do refuse to fight,
 I'll like a dog chastise you.’ ”

Sir Niel and MacVan.

THE men made no movement to advance upon their victim. Acting evidently on the command of their chief, they only stepped forth from their hiding-places, and halted with arms in readiness for action. The object seemed to be to make him aware of his position, and of the impossibility of escape rather than to assault him suddenly, and so take advantage of his surprise to despatch him before he could use any strategy in his defence.

This purpose was certainly accomplished as satisfactorily as the framer of the scheme could have desired. Lamington instantly became conscious of the whole peril in which he stood, and bitterly enraged with himself for having fallen so blindly into the trap.

Janfarie waited to note the effect of this revelation of his power, and his followers stood like dark executioners of a dire purpose—silent, motionless, and ready to do their fell work at the slightest signal from their leader.

Lamington having surveyed the men, turned with a scornful look to his betrayer.

“ Your treachery has succeeded,” he said, calmly ;
 “ and now that you have caught me in this ambush, what is your purpose ? ”

“ My purpose you already know ; as for the treachery, as you call it, none would have been used against you had not your nice sense of kinship rendered you so averse to cross weapons with me, that no choice was left save to place you in a position from which nothing but your sword could rescue you.”

“And it shall do so, since there is no help for it. But stand you aside; for Katherine’s sake do not force me to the risk of staining my hand with your blood.”

“It is with me alone you have to deal.”

“Stand you aside, I say, and let your four cut-throats do their worst upon me; but at least let me fall by any hand save one so near to her as yours.”

This earnest appeal only roused the angry nature of Janfarie to contempt.

“If you are worthy to bear a sword—if you have any claim to be called a man, you will draw and defend yourself, without further words.”

“But not against you.”

“Ay, against me; for, by Heaven, and by the vow I pledged to my dead father, you shall fall by no other hand than mine. You call me traitor, but I give you a fair chance of life.”

“A chance you know I dare not accept.”

“I give you the chance and you must accept. You see those men—at any moment during our journey hither any one of them might have struck you to the earth; even now, where you stand, they might rush upon you, and if you escaped them, they would be clumsier fellows than they have proved themselves. But that would not satisfy me.”

“What will satisfy you?”

“Nothing but your fall under my hand—there is no other way to redeem the pledge I gave my father; there is no other way to atone for his fate. Draw, then, for I am your only foe. Over my dead body you may pass freely, for yonder fellows have strict commands to lay no touch upon you if I fall, and to give you free passage, unless you attempt to fly before you have proved yourself against me.”

The Borderer spoke with a proud, passionate utterance; and it must be understood that his deadly hate and his apparently unreasonable persistence in attempting to wreak vengeance for his father’s fate upon Lamington was a characteristic of the feuds of the times. If a man fell in fight his friends declared feud, not only against the man who had actually struck the blow, but also against his kin; and more especially against the one who might be

presumed to have been the originator of the quarrel in which the first blood had been shed.

Thus Richard Janfarie was simply obeying the barbarous law which regulated feuds when he persistently sought to retaliate upon Lamington the death of Sir Hugh; but his rancour was heightened and goaded to a species of frenzy by the cunning suggestions of Cochrane. Something of this Lamington was conscious of when he made a last attempt to pacify the foe with whom he would so gladly have made terms for Katherine's sake.

"I hope the merit of my sword has been proved too often," he said, almost sadly, "for even a foe to doubt my right to bear it——"

"By the Sacred Mother I shall doubt it much," cried Janfarie, hotly, "if you do not show it to me speedily."

"Not yet, Janfarie—at least, not till I have spoken. You have for the last hour or more had my life at your mercy—any of your fellows might have taken it whilst I was passing through the glen. You have not availed yourself of that treacherous advantage, and I recognize some generosity in your forbearance despite the hatred with which you pursue me."

He spoke rapidly and earnestly; but he paused to note the impression his words made upon the hearer.

He was disappointed, for Janfarie only frowned and muttered impatiently—

"Well?"

"Well, give me time to satisfy you that you have judged me wrongly; give me time to save your sister from the hands of the knave whose counsels have poisoned your mind; and if I do not prove to you how false are all his pledges, and how base are all his motives, then call upon me when you will, and where you will, and denounce me as a coward if I do not meet you."

Janfarie was not apparently affected in the least by the sincerity of this appeal. He listened with the restless bearing of one whose mind is quite made up, and whose resolution cannot be altered.

"Have you done?" he said.

"All that I can say is said," answered Lamington.

"On my soul, I am glad of that; for now, perhaps, you will show yourself better than I begin to think you are."

Be Cochrane what he may, I have pledged myself to him whose sword I carry, that when you and I should meet, one of us should bite the dust. No more words, then, for they will be useless."

Lamington slowly unfastened his cloak, and permitted it to drop to the ground. Janfarie, with an ejaculation of satisfaction at seeing him prepare for the combat, rested the point of his weapon on the sod, and waited eagerly for him to cry "Ready."

Gordon found himself placed in a cruel dilemma.

Already denounced as an accomplice in her father's fall, how could he ever look in her face if it should happen that her brother's fate also should be laid to his charge? Yet how could he help himself? The very necessity to speed on his way to her aid had led him into the trap, and left him no alternative save to draw upon Janfarie or leave her at the mercy of Cochrane.

"Not ready yet?" muttered Janfarie, exasperated by the slow movements of his antagonist; "by the Sacred Mother, I never knew a man so slow to defend all that was most precious to him!"

Lamington, with a reluctance he had never before experienced, unsheathed his sword.

"One moment," he said, coldly, for the relentless fury of Janfarie was beginning to quicken his pulse; "one moment—if you should fall, will it be necessary for me to make way through your guards also?"

Janfarie shouted to the men—

"Hearken, lads!"

They made signals of attention.

"I have given you my command, that if I fall this gentleman is to pass without let or hindrance from you. Pledge him your word that you will make no attempt to bar his way."

"We promise, since you command it," answered the men.

"You hear," continued Janfarie, turning to Gordon, "and you can trust a Borderer's word."

"I accept the pledge."

"You are prepared at last, then?"

Lamington inclined his head sadly, and the swords were crossed.

There was a pause, during which the combatants, foot to foot, eyed each other narrowly, and appeared to await the first movement to ward or to thrust.

Lamington's gaze was calm, steady, and sorrowful; he had no humour for the contest, and the chances of the issue seemed to be all against him in consequence.

Janfarie's eyes glittered with a sort of ferocious resolution; but he maintained a steadfast bearing. His passion was intense, but it did not render him unwary; his thirst for vengeance was deep, but it did not make him so hasty in seeking its achievement as to give his opponent the advantage—at least, whatever advantage his excessive eagerness might have afforded, was more than counterbalanced by the other's unwillingness to take action.

At length Janfarie slowly, but with a giant's power, pressed down the weapon of his antagonist—pressed it down until it nearly touched the ground, and the breasts of both were left uncovered. He made a rapid feint as if to strike the sword arm of Lamington, and followed it by a vigorous thrust at his heart.

But the feint was understood, and the thrust was parried with perfect calmness, and with a force which for an instant left Janfarie at the mercy of his generous foe.

Uttering a sharp, short exclamation of rage, he renewed the attack with more vigour and with no less skill than before. But with superior skill Lamington maintained his defensive tactics; and once more he broke down the guard of his enemy with such force that he might have run him through; and again he would not avail himself of his fairly won opportunity of deciding the victory.

This generosity had anything rather than a soothing influence upon Janfarie. Instead of serving to open his eyes to the malignance of his own course, and to the kindness of that of the man who was so unwillingly opposed to him, it quickened his rage to a degree of frenzy.

He was rapidly losing the self-possession with which he had opened the combat, and which placed him on equal terms with Gordon; he was even losing the control of his weapon, and cut and thrust with a blind wrath, which with any other person opposed to him would have cost him his life before many minutes had elapsed.

"You are playing with me," he shouted, passionately, whilst he continued his fierce assault. "Strike, when you can, for by my father's soul you shall have no mercy from me. Take your fair vantage, then, and save yourself—you shall go scathless for the deed."

"That cannot be," answered Gordon, calmly; "for when you fall beneath my hand, the same blow which cuts you down severs the bond which links your sister to me."

"Curse her—curse you for the woe you have both wrought our house! Guard well, for I will strike at you whilst I have power to raise my hand."

His passion seemed to give him new strength, and he broke down the guard of his opponent repeatedly; but despite his strength and fury he was not able to thrust or strike before the guard was resumed. He, however, succeeded in inflicting several slight wounds, one upon the sword arm, and the other upon the left shoulder of Lamington.

The latter now began to move backward, still defending himself dexterously; but the movement was such an apparent sign of weakness, that Janfarie gave vent to a short cry of satisfaction.

His satisfaction was excited not only by this sign of yielding on the part of his foe, but also on account of his observation, that he was moving back upon the deep pit, or murder-hole, which was half filled with water, and into which Lamington would certainly stumble if he did not presently observe his peril.

That he had no chance of doing, for he was obliged to devote his whole attention to his defence, and Janfarie redoubled his exertions, in order to render it impossible for even a momentary glance to betray the peril which was to relieve him of one whose skill kept him so completely at bay, in spite of all his efforts.

Defending himself at every step, Lamington continued to move backward, direct toward the pit, which seemed to be yawning to receive him.

His object throughout the combat had been to exhaust his foe; and that object seeming to be near attainment, he now sought to lead him beyond the range of the four Borderers, so that he might disarm him and escape.

He was within three paces of the mouth of the pit,

when Janfarie, too eager to seize the opportunity which was offered to him, made a furious lunge at his opponent, but Lamington swiftly carried down the point of his sword, which struck upon a stone, and being pressed upon by all the weight of Janfarie's body, the weapon snapped and broke near the hilt.

For an instant he stood glaring in dumb fury upon the remnant of the sword which he still grasped in his hand. Then he hurled the useless hilt from him, and it fell into the pit, splashing amongst the water. Before it had sunk he had drawn a large Spanish poniard—a gift from Cochran—and sprang madly upon Lamington.

The latter had no time to weigh consequences, but with the instinct of self-preservation raised the point of his sword, which penetrated the descending arm of his foe, and diverted the deadly thrust, aimed at his heart. The dagger dropped from Janfarie's hand; and Lamington quickly withdrew his weapon from the wound.

Janfarie instantly with his left hand clutched at his opponent's throat and endeavoured with one mighty effort to accomplish his purpose by hurling him into the pit.

Lamington dropped his sword and grappled with the frenzied man. The fingers had closed upon his throat, he felt their grasp tightening like a vice, and he knew that a few minutes would suffice to stifle him. There was a short, sharp struggle: but the Borderer was exhausted by his passionate exertions, whilst his antagonist was still calm and vigorous. They approached the very edge of the murder-hole, and then Lamington, making a desperate effort to relieve himself, flung his antagonist from him.

The man reeled an instant, made a wild effort to regain his balance, and then pitched head foremost into the pit, the dark, muddy water closing over him.

There was a shout of dismay and wrath from the men who had been mute spectators of this fierce combat, and they hastened from their posts to the spot where their leader had fallen.

But they had not made more than a dozen paces toward him before Lamington had recovered from the surprise with which he had been affected by the unmeditated fatality of the struggle. Calling to the men to hasten, he leaped

into the water, and having noticed the spot where his foe had sunk, he soon grasped the insensible body and dragged it to the surface.

The sides of the pit were straight and slimy, and the depth of the water being probably twelve feet, Lamington could neither obtain a footing nor climb out of the hole with his burden without assistance.

He kept afloat, however, by considerable exertion, and at length the Borderers bent over the edge, looking down on him as much in wonder at his singular attempt to rescue his foe, as in anxiety for the fate of their chief.

“Reach down the shaft of one of your axes and draw us up,” cried Lamington.

Two of the men immediately obeyed this command. Kneeling on the edge of the pit, they reached him the stout pole of a long halberd, which the knight grasped tightly, and the men dragged him slowly up with his apparently lifeless companion.

The Borderers, with gloomy countenances, gathered round him as he laid their chief upon the sod; and when they observed a red gash on the brow of the insensible man, and the bloody marks on the sword arm, they muttered angrily amongst themselves. The promise which they had given to let the victor go scathless, threatened to be poorly observed, if observed at all.

Lamington paid no attention to these unpleasant symptoms of a breach of faith. His eyes were fixed upon the ghastly form at his feet, begrimed with mud, the face and a portion of the clothes discoloured with blood. He was himself dripping wet and besmeared with ooze; but he had no thought for his own discomfort—no thought even of the mission which had been thus unhappily interrupted; he saw only the ghastly face of Katherine’s brother, and his only thought was that by this act he had placed her for ever beyond his reach.

Evidently, in falling into the pit, Janfarie’s head had struck against some stone, which had caused the wound on his brow, and his present insensibility.

“He is badly hurt, but not dead,” cried Lamington, dropping on his knees beside him, and seeking anxiously for some indication of life.

He drew a long breath of relief when he discovered that

the heart was still beating, although very faintly. He hastily directed one of the men to run to the nearest streamlet and fill his steel cap with water. Then he thrust his hand into the pouch of his jerkin and drew out a fine silk handkerchief, with which, when the Borderer had returned with the water, he bathed the brow of the wounded chief, and finally bandaged it.

The men looked on in gloomy silence.

Janfarie presently began to show symptoms of reanimation by breathing heavily. As soon as Lamington perceived that, he sprang to his feet.

"You have your horses at hand, I suppose?" he said, in a quick undertone, addressing the men.

One of them—he who had gone for the water, and who seemed to be the most good-natured, as well as clearest-headed of the party—answered—

"Ay, master, they are close by."

"Convey your leader, then, with all gentle care to the tower of Lamington, which stands near the Ken, and to the south of Craigdarroch. Give those in charge this token, and they will attend to your master as faithfully as he would be cared for in his own home."

He had cut from his belt one of the small silver ornaments, on which was stamped the ensign of his house—a boar's head—and that he handed to the Borderer.

"You think he is likely to come round, then?" said the man.

"Assuredly, or I should be ill-contented in leaving him. Look, he is moving—he must not see me when he recovers. Here are four gold pieces to help you all to think better of me than as your master's foe. Look well to him, on your lives."

The presentation of the money was a species of generosity which the rough troopers could thoroughly appreciate; it immediately altered their view of the transaction they had witnessed, and the upshot of which they had been disposed to resent, notwithstanding their pledge to the contrary. Three of the men bluntly expressed their satisfaction, but the fourth—one of those who had received a drubbing at Dumfries—accepted his gift in surly silence.

But Lamington was indifferent; he was only anxious

now to escape before Janfarie recovered sufficiently to be able to make any effort to stay him.

He hastily searched for his sword, hat, and cloak, and having found them, cast one last glance toward Katherine's brother, and hurried away from the Druids' Circle, to seek his horse and continue his journey. It was not until he had reached the den that he discovered the absence of the hound Stark. He whistled shrilly for the dog and called it by name, but without effect; and at last he was obliged to conclude that Stark, annoyed by the neglect with which its repeated warnings had been received, had deserted him.

He soon regained the road, and there he mounted his horse. After pausing a few minutes, and listening for any sound that might indicate the approach of Muckle Will, without being gratified by any such indication, he urged his horse forward.

He was too eager to regain some of the time so disagreeably wasted to think anything of the discomforts of his wet and soiled habiliments. He proposed obtaining a change at the first hostelry or friendly house which he might reach. The change would add to his comfort, and would at the same time serve as a useful disguise until he reached Linlithgow, where he might obtain garments suitable for his appearance at the palace.

He was disturbed by many conflicting thoughts, and it was not until he had ridden several miles that he remembered the tablet containing the list of friendly names with which the Abbot had entrusted him. He hurriedly searched his pouch for the list, and to his dismay he discovered that it was gone.

He remembered the warning and solicitude with which the Abbot had presented it to him, and, with a jerk of the rein, he brought his horse to a sudden stand, uncertain whether to proceed or turn back.

He searched his pouch again; he searched every corner in which he might have stowed the tablet, but it was gone; and it became clear that in the recent struggle he must have lost it.

His only hope was that it might have fallen—as was, indeed, most probable—into the pit during the struggle at its edge; but in any case it was too late to turn back now,

for the tablet would be by this time in the hands of the enemy, if they were to find it at all; and Katherine's safety was of more importance to him than that of all the world beside.

CHAPTER XVII.

LINLITHGOW.

“Of all the palaces so fair,
 Built for the royal dwelling,
 In Scotland, far beyond compare,
 Linlithgow is excelling;
 And in its park in jovial June,
 How sweet the merry linnet's tune,
 How blithe the blackbird's lay!
 The wild buck-bells from ferny brake,
 The coot dives merry on the lake,
 The saddest heart might pleasure take
 To see all nature gay.”

Marmion.

UNDER any circumstances the ride from Kells to Linlithgow was a long and tiresome one to be performed without a halt for proper rest; but it was especially wearisome to Katherine, whose mind was distracted by the terror of the purpose, for which her brother had remained behind, and by the companionship of Cochrane.

She glanced backwards repeatedly, but her eyes were not relieved by any sign of following friends. Her pulse quickened at every sound of approaching horses; but only to relax into a state of sickening weariness as the sound faded away or a stray horseman appeared in the opposite direction. The fatigue of the journey was a merciful hardship to her, for it helped to stultify the poignancy of the pangs which her reflections inflicted. Otherwise the dread of what might be passing amidst the dreary Glenkens, and the dread of what might be the upshot of this excursion, would have proved too much for her to hold up against with any degree of calmness. And that was the quality of which she felt most in need at this crisis.

Cochrane was true to his word so far that he showed no inclination to tarry on the road; indeed, he had good reasons for desiring to stand in the presence of his royal

master at the earliest possible moment. First, that his version of the recent events might obtain the advantage of forestalling any other which might be laid before his Majesty; this he knew would be a considerable advantage in the present instance, for King James was apt to form an opinion on the impulse of the moment, and to adhere to it obstinately afterwards in spite of any proofs to the contrary that might be offered to him.

His second reason for haste was one of graver import, for it related to certain intrigues involving the honour and lives of high personages, and the arrival at the palace of the Abbot Panther before him might prove fatal to the schemes on which his ambition had ventured its boldest flight.

On these grounds he was as eager to push forward as Katherine could have desired. He maintained toward her a coldly respectful bearing, scarcely addressing a word to her except when at several halting-places he requested her to partake of some refreshment. But although she could take little food of any kind, he used no persuasion; he left her as freely to her own humour in that respect as on the road he left her free to her own thoughts.

He still carefully retained the leading-rein, but otherwise he did not attempt to interfere with her. By the time they were nearing Lanark, the fatigue had begun to tell upon her, and displayed itself in an unusual pallor and a sunken, worn look in the eyes.

This effect he observed, and he was well pleased even in such a petty way as this to punish her for the scorn she had cast on him. Besides, with a wearied body, and an exhausted mind, she would be less formidable when presented to the King than she might have been with all her faculties fresh and alert.

At Lanark it became necessary to change horses; and as only four could be procured, after an hour's halt, Cochran and Katherine, followed by only two of the men, continued the route to Linlithgow. The remaining Borderers were quartered at the Lanark hostelry for the night, under commands to ride forward in the morning, by which time their nags would be sufficiently rested.

It was late in the evening when they rode into the town, and in the darkness they passed along the main street with

its irregular lines of buildings, the gables of which fronted the thoroughfare, without much heed being paid to them by the burgesses, who, during the residence of the court at the palace, were accustomed to the sound of traffic at all hours.

The city—for so it was legally designated—was of much higher importance, although somewhat less in extent in those days than in the present. The convenience afforded by the surrounding district for the sports of hunting and falconry had rendered the town a favourite place of resort for Majesty and its troupe of attendant courtiers. The armorial bearings of the city represent a black greyhound bitch, tied to a tree, and suggest at once the origin of the place. Tradition, however, ascribes the emblem to another and less pleasant source—namely, to a witch who was in the habit of assuming the form of a hound the better to carry out her evil intents upon the inhabitants, and who at length, being caught in her unnatural form, was firmly bound to a tree by a cord which had been dipped in sanctified water. After that the beldame was unable to release herself, notwithstanding her friendly relations to the powers of darkness, and she had been left to perish whilst the city prospered.

A Celtic explanation of the emblem finds its meaning in the name of the place—that is, *lin-liath-cu*, the Lake of the Greyhound. But a famous historian claims a Gothic derivation for the name—that is, *lin-lyth-gow*, or the Lake of the Great Vale. Be that as it may, the beauty of the district, with its undulating and wooded plains, coursed by glittering streamlets, traversed by the Avon, and bordered by the Forth, whilst northward rise towering and snow-covered mountains, renders it one of the most picturesque straths in Scotland.

The palace stands on an elevated promontory, the foot of which is lapped by the loch. The building was originally nothing more than a square pile, or peel as it was called, and was merely used as a place of defence. In 1300 it fell into the hands of Edward I. of England, who, after causing it to be strengthened by numerous repairs, garrisoned it as one of the citadels by which he hoped to retain dominion over Scotland.

The stratagem by which the sturdy farmer, William

Binnock, introduced a number of armed men into the stronghold under the disguise of a cart-load of hay, and wrested the fortress from Edward's soldiers, forms one of the most interesting episodes of the Bruce's struggle.

In 1414 the town and palace were accidentally burned down; the former having undergone a similar calamity only three years previously. The reign of the Stuarts had then begun, and the palace, with its royal chapel, were rebuilt with greater magnificence than ever. Successive Stuarts added to the architectural beauties of the building, and in the time of James III. it was one of the best appointed of the royal palaces.

On this account, and also because the lordship of the town had been settled upon her, it was the favourite residence of Margaret of Denmark; and King James III. so far approved the taste of his queen as to spend much of his time at the same place. The palace when completed—which was not until the time of James VI.—formed a square with an interior quadrangle, which was overlooked by the principal windows. In the centre stood a fountain, one of the many which gave rise to the old rhyme,

“Linlithgow for wells,
Stirling for bells.”

Late as the hour was, Cochrane advanced to the palace with the air of a man who is confident of his reception. He approached by the ancient entrance at the eastern side, where his summons was immediately answered by the warder, who, recognizing him, gave his party admission without question.

They rode into the court, and halting near the fountain, Sir Robert leaped to the ground and proffered his assistance to Katherine; but she, although tired enough in body and mind, still shrank from his touch, and hastily slipped from the saddle unaided.

Without appearing to notice this fresh sign of repugnance, Cochrane turned to the men and directed them to take the horses to the stables, and then proceed to the guard-room to wait his further orders.

“Now, madam,” he said, “I will conduct you to apartments where you can prepare yourself to attend the presence of his Majesty.”

He spoke with cold politeness, and did not offer his hand, for which consideration she was thankful.

"Will their Majesties see me to-night at so late an hour?" she queried, eagerly.

"That I cannot answer; but be assured I will use my utmost power to gratify your desire at the earliest convenient moment."

A company of the royal guard at this moment crossed the quadrangle, their bright steel breastplates and basinetts glistening in the light of half a dozen torches borne by as many common soldiers who preceded the guard, and their heavy armour clanged loudly as they marched across the stone pavement.

Cochrane waited for the guard to pass, and as they did so the officer recognized and saluted him, casting a curious glance backward at the shrinking lady who stood by his side.

"This way, madam," said Sir Robert, and he preceded her to a large doorway in the west wing of the palace.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KING'S FAVOURITES.

"Within 'twas brilliant all and light,
A thronging scene of figures bright;
It glowed on Ellen's dazzled sight
As when the setting sun has given
Ten thousand hues to summer even;
And from their tissue fancy frames
Aerial knights and fairy dames."

Lady of the Lake.

THEY were admitted by a porter, who paid obsequious attention to Cochrane. All the attendants whom they encountered on their passage along several corridors and up three staircases to the apartments of Sir Robert, saluted the King's favourite with profound respect. He had the power to make or mar the gentlemen lacqueys, and so they paid court to him on every available occasion, receiving in return, as now, a slight bend of the head or a patronizing glance, according to the rank each personage held in the

royal household, and in the esteem of the great man. Some he passed without the slightest acknowledgment of their presence; but they were only a few whom he suspected of entertaining kindly wishes towards his rivals.

In passing them his visage assumed the cold, inscrutable expression habitual to it; but they were very few who were thus treated, for Sir Robert, in the midst of all his ambitious thoughts, never lost an opportunity to ingratiate himself with the humblest who approached him, prudently calculating that it was impossible to guess from what quarter he might need assistance at important junctures of his career.

Katherine was not used to court; she had indeed rarely mixed with other society than that afforded by the families of her father's kinsfolk; and it was natural that she should experience some sense of awe in finding herself for the first time under the same roof with royalty. This feeling was heightened by the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, especially by the fact that she was conducted hither by one whom she had so much reason to fear and to dislike.

It was also natural, under the circumstances, that she should be impressed by the evident respect paid to Cochrane; and he, as if desirous of making that impression as deep as possible, seemed to lead her through the most frequented corridors, whilst her cheeks were tingling with shame at being compelled to follow him.

The height of the building was five storeys, and the apartments of Sir Robert Cochrane were on the third floor—a place of honour as well as of some state. They were within convenient reach of the King's own retiring chambers; and they had been occupied at one time by the brother of his Majesty, the Earl of Mar. The possession of this dignified habitation was only one of the many favours which Cochrane had obtained from his royal master, to the great scandal and chagrin of the nobles whose rights and privileges had been, as they believed, contumaciously set aside for the advancement of a nameless upstart.

But Cochrane was a man who, whilst he would not court danger, was prepared to brave it to any extent in the accomplishment of his ambitious designs. He saw the frowns with which he was regarded, and the jealousies

entertained towards him by all except those who could stoop to buy his services or to play the sycophant with him. He was indifferent; those who frowned he watched with unwavering eyes, and those who fawned he treated with patronage or submission according to their degree, whilst he lost no opportunity of availing himself of everybody's service to his own gain.

Those who stood in his way, whether of high or low degree, he swept from his path by force of some of the cunning stratagems in which his brain was fertile. He had even been bold enough to assail the position of the royal brothers, Albany and Mar, with what fatal result will presently appear.

Having conducted Katherine into his apartments, he bade her, in his coldly respectful manner, to consider them as her own in the meanwhile; but he did not acquaint her that they were recognized as his during the residence of the King at the palace.

The chambers consisted of a reception or sitting-room—large, and elegantly furnished, with heavy French tapestry covering the walls, and three windows commanded a view of the principal court; next, a small robing-room and a handsomely fitted retiring-room.

The three apartments, and especially the first, were furnished even more luxuriously than when they had been occupied by the King's brother; for one of the prominent peculiarities of Cochrane's character—one made up of so much daring and cunning—was an almost womanish delight in all the refinements of apparel, and of the appurtenances of his residence. In this, too, he displayed considerable taste, for his residence in Italy and France, combined with much natural aptitude, had enabled him to catch the trick of adornment, which depends not so much on the lavish expenditure of money, as upon the artistic propriety of arrangement.

The King's own apartments were not more elegant in appearance than these, although they were crowded with articles of fifty times the value. This delicacy of taste was one of Cochrane's chief recommendations in the eyes of the monarch.

In obedience to a signal from Sir Robert, an attendant had followed him, and was now standing at the door await-

ing instructions. He was directed to supply the lady with refreshments, and to find some handmaiden who could attend upon her.

The man—a tall, dark-featured fellow, named Ross, who had been raised to his present post by Cochrane, and who was consequently devoted to his service—bowed silently and retired.

Katherine, fatigued by her long journey, and somewhat bewildered by her position and by all that was transpiring around her, remained mutely seated, looking wonderingly at the man before whom everybody seemed to bow in submission.

“Whatever you desire, madam,” he said, addressing her, “you have only to demand. There is no wish you can express which will not be instantly gratified, except one.”

“Doubtless,” she answered, wearily, “that one is the only wish which I would care to have gratified.”

“Possibly so; for it is the desire to leave these apartments before my return, which cannot be complied with.”

“As I thought,” she said, drily; “but if I am permitted to see the Queen, I shall be satisfied, and you will have kept faith for once.”

“You shall see their Majesties as soon as my poor influence can prevail upon them to grant us an audience. Meanwhile I would commend you to rest, that you may appear to more advantage, when you present your suit.”

“You are most considerate, sir,” she said, inclining with satirical courtesy.

“I am your servant, madam, for the hour,” he answered, bowing with an excess of politeness, and withdrew noiselessly as a cat, although he still wore his heavy riding-boots and spurs.

Late as the hour was, Cochrane proceeded immediately to seek an audience with his royal master. He did not delay even to make any change in his dress—a matter in which he knew the King to be somewhat punctilious, and about which he was himself usually most particular.

Booted and spurred and travel-stained as he was, he made his way through the guards and the attendants to the door of the ante-room of the presence-chamber.

The gentleman-usher whom he addressed regarded his

appearance with some amazement, when he desired to be instantly conducted to his Majesty.

"His Majesty has given orders that he is not to be disturbed to-night," said the usher, with a degree of uneasiness in thus opposing the entrance of the prime favourite.

"Say that it is I, Robert Cochrane, that would speak with him," was the haughty answer.

"But in that garb?" hesitated the usher.

"My business will excuse my garb. Do not waste time, sir, for the matter is of pressing import to his Majesty."

The usher bowed and quitted the ante-room, whilst Cochrane, waiting his return, endured the curious scrutiny of the gentlemen attendants without the slightest appearance of discomposure.

The outer one of the two doors which admitted to the King's chamber presently reopened, and the usher beckoned Cochrane to follow him.

Sir Robert, with a subdued smile of satisfaction, immediately obeyed.

The doorway displayed the thickness of the wall, and the two doors were covered with red velvet, so as to deaden all sounds from within. The recess between these doors was large enough to have permitted six men to stand in it close together.

The usher thrust open the inner door, drew aside the heavy velvet hangings, and admitted Sir Robert to the presence of his Majesty.

The door closed, the hangings dropped into their place, and the usher returned to the ante-room, where he was surrounded by his companions, who were curious to learn what his suspicions might be as to the motives of this sudden appearance of the favourite, and his hasty demand for audience. But the usher, a gentleman of years and discretion, was unable to give them any clue to what seemed so singular.

The apartment into which Sir Robert had been admitted was large and square, and was situated in the north-west tower. It was the one usually occupied by his Majesty for the despatch of ordinary business, and for taking his pleasure in the evenings.

On various stands and side-tables were placed numerous articles of vertu, suggesting at once the propensities of the royal occupant. Chief amongst these were the four mazers, large drinking-cups, or goblets, called after their original possessor, King Robert the Bruce, each deep enough to have made a couple of stout men more than happy if they drank fairly. One of the goblets had a cover finely chased.

The next in degree of curiosity was a great cock made of silver; and besides this, there were many pieces of filagree work from Italy, notably three salt-cells, upon which anciently much labour was bestowed, as they played so important a part in indicating the rank of the persons who sat at table, and as the salt itself was a symbol of amity to those who tasted it.

There were many plates of silver exquisitely designed, and which were carefully preserved by his Majesty, who rarely took them from the strong black chest in which he secured them with other treasures, except when he designed to be quite private, admitting only his most trusted favourites to his presence.

Such had been his Majesty's intention this evening, and the four persons who were with him when Cochrane entered were those whose companionship was supposed to have the worst effect upon his character.

They were the four comrades of Cochrane, and one of them at least was almost his rival in the royal favour. That one was William Rogers, sometimes called Sir William, an Englishman, and a musician, whose talents had won for him a place in the household of his Majesty, which was only second, if not altogether equal, to that of Cochrane.

Rogers was a man of considerable parts in music, although he has left nothing by which we can judge how far his real qualities were worthy of a king's friendship. He was contemptuously spoken of by the barons as "the fiddler," just as Sir Robert was designated "the mason." He was a man of quiet bearing and shapely form, and when out of his Majesty's sight, a somewhat unscrupulous gallant, as was reported.

First of the other three men was Leonard, a tall, powerful fellow, with swart, moody visage, and frizzled black hair

and beard. He was the King's armourer, and was called "the smith." The next was Torphichen, a fencing and dancing master, who was short in stature, but who had grown so broad and fat that his terpsichorean efforts had become of the most grotesque kind, while his florid, good-natured countenance inspired little fear for his skill at fence. But despite his obesity he could still handle a rapier with any man about the court, and could keep his ground, too, against the most agile if he had only a wall to support his back.

The last of the favourites was Hommel, a tailor by profession, who acted as a sort of general chamberlain to his Majesty. Upon him were cast innumerable epithets of scorn by the dissatisfied nobility; but he was a tall stout fellow, very unlike a tailor, and although he endured from the Lords what he knew it would be useless to resent, he soon taught their servants to respect him by the joint means of his cudgel and his purse.

These were the men on whose account King James III. had sacrificed the society of his peers, roused their rage and enmity; put himself on the unhappiest terms with his brothers, and for whose sake he risked the good will of his people, thereby hazarding even his hold on the throne.

Rogers had been singing a merry roundelay, when Cochrane had been announced. The song had been abruptly stopped; now, when the knight appeared in a costume so little fitted to the private chamber of the King, and so little in keeping with his usual care in these matters, all eyes were turned upon him in puzzled wonder. They were satisfied that he had some weighty reasons for this apparent breach of respect. And they were right.

CHAPTER XIX.

HIS MAJESTY JAMES III.

“See what burning spears portended,
 Couch'd by fire eyed spectres glare,
 Circling round you both, suspended
 On the trembling threads of air !

* * * * *

“But o'er thy devoted valleys
 Blacker spreads the angry sky ;
 Through the gloom pale lightning sallies,
 Distant thunders groan and die.”

Prophecy of Queen Emma.

COCHRANE made one pace into the room, then, uncovering, dropped upon his knee, bending his head low, and waiting for permission to speak.

The King was seated on a chair big enough to have accommodated two persons comfortably, and the cushions of which were covered with embroidery, wrought by the delicate fingers of Queen Margaret. He was half reclining on the chair, with his legs crossed, whilst his fingers were playing with the massive gold chain which hung round his neck. He had turned his eyes on Cochrane with an expression of amusement and some curiosity.

His Majesty was a little above the average height, and his form was shapely but slim. So far from there being anything massive or commanding in his appearance, he was rather effeminate in frame and look at this period, when he had scarcely attained his thirtieth year.

He had long, black, and rather curly hair ; large dark eyes, and long curving nose. His brow was smooth, flat, and very slightly receding to the roots of the hair. His mouth and chin were small and delicate as a woman's, which, combined with a sort of weak smile that generally played upon his countenance, were indicative of the indecision of his character. It was rather a handsome face, and a kindly one, but sadly deficient in all those qualities which mark a man fitted to hold authority. Clear decisive thought and inflexibility of will were the faculties most

needed in one who was entrusted with the reins of a Government in which there were so many elements of disturbance as that of Scotland, and these were the faculties of which his appearance and manner displayed least.

He was dressed in a pink velvet doublet, puffed and slashed with white satin between the shoulder and the elbow, and tightening to the wrists. The latter were encircled with white ruffles which displayed to the best advantage his small woman's hands, with their long tapering fingers. His trunks were of the same colour as his doublet, and descended to his knees, covering the tops of his grey silk hose. His shoes were of a light-brown colour, with gold buckles of star shape and diamond centre. His waist was girt with a gold-threaded belt, fastened by a gold buckle.

"Advance, man, advance," said the King, in an easy tone of familiarity, "and let us know where you have been loitering this week gone, and why you come to us now in as little order as if you had been riding with a witch a broomstick-race to the moon, and had not had time to dust your cloudy cobwebs off."

"So please your Majesty," answered Cochrane, approaching slowly, "I have been riding far and fast——"

"By my faith, you look like it, for your appearance is that of one who has outridden his courtesy."

At this Leonard, the smith, and Torphichen, the fat master of fence, despite the presence, or possibly on account of it, grinned at the jocular rebuké, and with apparent difficulty suppressed their laughter.

Rogers smiled quietly; Hommel, the tailor, opened his mouth wide and suddenly shut it, as if he had been about to give vent to a loud guffaw and had checked himself in time.

The subject of these demonstrations was not at all pleased by them, but he affected not to observe anything unusual.

The King, however, was rather gratified by the success of his wit.

"I have been riding far," continued Cochrane; "and no eyes were ever blessed with the sight of a fairer witch than my companion."

"Save the mark!" exclaimed his Majesty, starting, and

involuntarily making the sign of the cross; "do you mean to tell us that you have come here after being in such unholy society? Stand back, man; there's a smell of sulphur about you."

"The witch, sire, of whom I speak is only the lady who has become my wife."

"That makes it worse and worse, for if you have wived with a witch you'll be half a warlock by this time."

"She is no witch in the sense your Majesty means, but a simple lady, and the daughter of Janfarie of Johnstone——"

"Yes, yes; I mind, you left us for the purpose of getting wed. Why did you not say that before?"

"I had forgotten to remind you, sire," was the wily answer, "because my thoughts were bent on graver matters."

"Graver matters!—certes there are few graver matters than that of taking a wife. Let us know what you think of more gravity; it must be somewhat curious, or you are a sorry lover."

"Has not your Majesty received a despatch from me?"

"Despatch?—no!"

Sir Robert looked slightly disturbed.

"Has nothing been brought to your Majesty by the hand of one Nicol Janfarie?"

"Nothing that we have seen."

"I bade him ride post-haste, and some ill must have happened him or he would have been here by cock-crow this morning."

The King cast a helplessly inquiring look at his attendants.

"Your Majesty will remember," said Rogers, in a low, smooth voice, "there was a youth arrived at this place this morning, and delivered a packet to you whilst you were walking in the court."

His Majesty's face brightened.

"Thank you, Rogers; you are right, and the packet was placed in your hands that we might study its contents at leisure. Where is it now?"

"In the cabinet, sire."

"Bring it forth."

Cochrane furtively bit his nether lip, for this indiffer-

ence of his Majesty to a despatch upon which he had placed so much dependence chagrined him.

Rogers proceeded to an exquisitely inlaid cabinet which stood at the farther end of the apartment, and opening it, drew forth the packet Nicol Janfarie had delivered according to his instructions. The seal was still unbroken.

As Rogers advanced to deliver the packet to the King he was intercepted by Cochrane, who coldly took it from him.

"With your leave, sire," he said, "I will myself break the seal."

He tore it open, and unfolding the paper presented it.

His Majesty lazily took the document, and as if the perusal were a matter of effort, he settled himself back upon his chair, slowly smoothed out the folds of the paper, and then with a sort of sigh began to read.

But he had only glanced at the first two or three lines when his air of lassitude suddenly gave place to one of nervous attention. He started from his lounging posture; his long fingers clutched the paper tightly, and his eyes kindled with excitement.

"What is this riddle?" he exclaimed, in a tone of petulant impatience when he had read to the end of the missive; "by my faith it was well our wisdom left the thing till you were here to expound it; for, although there is much to rouse our wrath, there is nothing to explain on whom it should be vented. Expound, then, Cochrane, expound, and briefly."

"These are the matters, sire, which have caused me to outride my courtesy," said Cochrane, bending his head and speaking in a low tone; "but my explanation of them must be heard by no other ears than your Majesty's in the first place."

"Do you hear, loons? Stand aside, and let our faithful servant have private speech with us."

"The matter is one which concerns you all, gentlemen," said Cochrane, suavely apologizing for his apparent distrust of his comrades, "and you will be made acquainted with it speedily; but circumstances require that his Majesty should have the power of commanding its suppression altogether if it seems fit to him to do so."

Rogers and the others, making a low obeisance to their

master, retired to an embrasure at the farther side of the room, and waited patiently until they should be summoned to share in the confidence which Cochrane was imparting to his Majesty. Whatever might be their secret sentiments, they displayed neither envy nor dissatisfaction to each other.

"Now," said the King, impatiently, "read me your riddle."

"It is a dark one, sire."

"Let us have light upon it, then."

"It will vex your Majesty's kind heart sorely; and before I commit myself to the words which I know will sting you to the quick and perhaps rouse your wrath even against me, who am only true to my duty and to the deep gratitude I owe you in revealing the discovery I have made;—before I commit myself to this I must crave your pardon for whatever may offend you in my disclosures."

"Say on, man. You have my pardon for anything save for keeping me in suspense."

Cochrane bowed, and proceeded with a manner and tone of earnest solicitude—

"I have formerly made your Majesty aware of certain secret councils held by various ingrate and disaffected barons and their satellites, tending to the disturbance of your most gracious reign."

"Ay, ay, we are sensible of that. But they are fools who rush upon their own destruction. Our people are faithful, and we can trust to them."

"The greater part of them are so, sire, and they could not be aught else under so considerate a monarch. But the people may be misled; they may be deceived by false reports, and they would be only too ready to follow any leader whose position might seem to give warrant for his truth."

"That's true," muttered the King, changing his position uneasily; "but who is there of position high enough to give such warrant to become their leader?"

"I dread to remind your Majesty of the matters which have been already brought to your knowledge, involving two persons whose positions place them only second to yourself in rank and in the esteem of the country."

At this allusion to his brothers the King's face

darkened, but it seemed to be a mingled feeling of sorrow and fear which disturbed him rather than one of anger. It was evident that in spite of the confidence which he assumed, and tried to impress upon his favourite, he was troubled by grave doubts of what might ensue upon the outbreak into definite language of the disaffected mutterings which were daily swelling around him.

"But they would not dare the penalty of such treason," he exclaimed, anxiously.

"Pardon, sire, but who can tell what desperate deeds, what mad enterprises, and what wild efforts may be undertaken by men whose ambition and jealousy blind them to their own perils, their own duty, and to the worth of their truest friend?"

As these dark suggestions were whispered in his ear, with so much apparent earnestness that the fidelity of the speaker could not be doubted or his object questioned, the King leaned back, pallid in his distress, and helpless as a child against the terror which were conjured up before him.

A very little decision and firmness at this moment might have spared him many of the sad hours which were rapidly approaching. But whilst he listened his thoughts only became confused, and rendered his mind incapable of grasping clearly the circumstances which appalled him; he had to depend upon the direction and advice of those who had been the chief instruments in raising the threatening storm, and whose self-interest prompted their counsels. They had to protect themselves, no matter what the result might be to the master who had sacrificed so much for them.

He fell into a moody reverie, from which he roused himself abruptly.

"Yes, they are mad to dream of this treachery," he cried, clenching his hand as if in a spasm of pain; and then feebly trying to shut out the dismal prospect presented to him; "but they have done nothing yet—that is, nothing positive, nothing of which we have proof that would enable us to act with the sternness necessary to such ingratitude and disloyalty."

"That they have held secret councils, you have proof, sire; and that the conspiracy is ripening to rebellion I bring you further proof."

“In what—in what?”

“Your Majesty’s person and authority have been contemned and defied, and arms have been drawn against certain of your servants who claimed protection in your name.”

The King, still with his hands clenched and now with his lips quivering, rose excitedly to his feet.

“Denounce the traitors—by our Sacred Mother they shall know the authority they have braved—ay, if they were our dearest kin.”

“I knew that this would vex your Majesty, but I implore you do not let the goodness of your nature which tempts you into passion prevent you considering these things calmly, else your enemies will have the advantage of you.”

The King sank on his chair apparently exhausted by his ebullition of temper.

“Proceed,” he said, with an impatient gesture of his hand. “Let me know how this came about.”

He shaded his eyes with his hand as if to conceal the effects of the emotion he had just undergone. Like all weak men, he was subject to sudden bursts of passion, which as suddenly collapsed, leaving him in a manner prostrated by the exhaustion of his fury.

“You will pardon me, sire, for mingling my own affairs with yours, since it is through them that this first blow has been struck at your authority.”

“Go on.”

“I obey. The Abbot Panther has returned to Scotland, and he has brought with him Gordon of Lamington. They are the bearers of a secret treaty between France and—I shall say—the conspirators.”

“Well?—you have arrested them—you have them safe under guard, and you have got the treaty—where is it?”

“It was only yesterday that I learned what were their treasonable purposes. I would not arrest them until I was sure of laying my hands upon the despatch at the same time. As I could not be sure of that I left them free.”

“Free,” cried the King, “free with such dangerous weapons in their hands—free to execute their fell mission,

and mayhap to disturb the peace of the whole realm! You are mad, Cochrane, and you have lost the opportunity to do a service that would have rendered us your debtor for life."

"I trust when you have heard me, sire, that you will acknowledge I have served you best in acting as I have done."

"It will be strange if I do," muttered his Majesty, bitterly.

"You will judge when I tell you that both men are under the close watch of faithful servants of your Majesty; and I have contrived to make both men as eager to stand in your presence as I am to lay hold of them on your Majesty's behalf."

"You have brought them here, then?"

"No; but they are riding hither as fast as horses will carry them."

"For what reason, in the saints' name, are they so ready to thrust their heads into the lion's jaws?" asked James, looking up with an expression of profound astonishment which seemed to have overwhelmed his anger and alarm.

"It happens in this way, sire. The conspirators have been for some time seeking any straw which might show in what direction the current of popular rumour was flowing; and they have at last found it with the help of this youth, Gordon. There had been some love passages between Mistress Katherine Janfarie and he before he went abroad. He returned in time to cause my name to be maligned in the hearing of my betrothed wife. She was deceived by direct falsehoods, and before we had been an hour away from the altar on which she had sworn wifely fidelity to me, she fled with Lamington."

"Eh, what! carried your bride off? My faith, that was a bold stroke of gallantry; but I scarcely see how it bears upon the conspiracy."

And his Majesty, who had a natural esteem for those rash deeds which ballad-makers delight to sing, although he lacked the courage to execute any of them, was almost disposed to view the escapade as an excellent jest, notwithstanding the present agitation of his mind.

But Cochrane went on to narrate the various circum-

stances which had occurred, cunningly interweaving his account of them with the threads of the conspiracy. He traced the source of all that had happened not to the real cause—the thwarted affection of the lovers—but to the desire to injure him as one of his Majesty's most faithful servants. He laid much stress upon the riot in Dumfries, and upon the refusal of the burgesses to lay down their arms or to retire peacefully when commanded to do so in the King's name; and attributed the whole action to the desire to sound the sentiments of the people in such an outbreak as had taken place.

The Abbot, too, was denounced as acting in opposition to the royal authority, and the proposal to submit the decision of the whole question to their Majesties was represented as having been forced upon the malcontents by the narrator's success in prevailing on the lady to accompany him to Linlithgow.

He cleverly threw a gloss of design over the unexpected events which had favoured his stratagem, and affirmed that his chief object had been to compel the Abbot and Lamington to appear at the palace without any suspicion that their share in the treasonable conspiracy of the Duke of Albany and the Earl of Mar had been detected.

When the narration was concluded James looked pale and weary. He had listened with increasing agitation as Cochrane proceeded; the amusement he had been at first disposed to take in Katherine's flight had disappeared, and in every word, in every action, treason seemed to be made apparent.

A man of resolute mind might have readily penetrated the false guise in which the favourite arrayed the simplest matters, but James failed to do so. His temperament being naturally nervous and imaginative, he was only too ready to magnify shadows into huge substances, even without the promptings of such a man as Cochrane. But with such men to hum suspicion in his ear, rumours became truths, and the unsupported charges made by his favourites against all who might threaten to endanger their position, became facts.

"But what are we to do?" he asked, helplessly, at last.

"Act promptly and firmly, sire, as becomes an offended monarch whose generosity and confidence have been most

abused by those who should have been most faithful to him."

"Yes, yes, we will arrest this meddling Abbot, and the young fool Gordon, the instant they show themselves. You shall prepare the warrants forthwith."

"Pardon, sire," said Cochrane, dropping on his knee; "but you are striking only at the branches and leaving the root of the danger untouched."

"What would you have?" was the somewhat petulant ejaculation.

"I risk my head in speaking what all others fear to speak; but I risk it freely since it is for your Grace's weal."

"Speak," said James, watching him with a startled expression.

"Call your servants and friends together, tell them all that you know, and take my life if they do not answer you that, to insure your own safety from open rebellion or from the secret assassin, Albany and Mar must be arrested before the least sign is made that their guilt is known."

The King sank back on his couch, covering his face with his hands.

Cochrane felt that not only his fortune but his life depended upon the result of the struggle which was passing in the mind of his master; and he hastened to supplement what he had already said, by a reference which he knew would influence the superstitious nature of the monarch.

"Remember, sire, the warning of the wise man who cast your nativity only a few days gone—remember, sire, that the astrologer warned you that in Scotland a lion would be worried to death by his own whelps."

"It was so, it was so—the good man said it," said James, starting up excitedly; "and forewarned, forearmed. We shall take prompt measures. Call our friends together."

A council of the five favourites was held upon the instant.

One hour later Cochrane quitted the royal apartments, having received the promise of the King to compel Mistress Katherine's obedience to her lord, and having in his possession two warrants of arrest.

The warrants were for the king's brothers—Albany and Mar.

With these powerful opponents removed, Cochrane felt that he could defy all the efforts of Lamington to obtain justice.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

“Now, nought was heard beneath the skies,
 (The sounds of busy life were still)
 Save an unhappy lady's sighs
 That issued from that lonely pile.

* * * *

“Thus sore and sad the lady grieved
 In Cumnor Hall, so lone and drear;
 And many a heartfelt sigh she heaved,
 And let fall many a bitter tear.”

Cumnor Hall.

THE man Ross provided a repast for Katherine, and introduced a simple-looking girl, whom he called Mysie, to wait upon her.

Katherine was glad to have one of her own sex near her. Humble as the girl might be, her presence seemed to the lady a species of protection in the midst of the utter loneliness which oppressed her, notwithstanding the neighbourhood of a crowd of people. The apartments were singularly quiet, and their heavy draperies cast dark shadows on the floor. At intervals she could hear the tramp of a sentinel, and the clang of his arms in the court below, or the songing of the wind down the wide chimneys; but these were the only sounds she heard. The thickly padded doors prevented her hearing any stir in the corridors, and made the interior of the palace appear grimly silent.

With the assistance of Mysie she arranged her dress, and having ate a little, she was refreshed.

Mysie was modest and attentive; she had clear, honest eyes; and Katherine was inspired with the hope that she would learn from her what opportunities there might be of obtaining an audience with the Queen.

The girl wheeled a large chair in front of the fireplace, and the lady seated herself. She had been eyeing the apartment curiously for some time; and now she turned to Mysie, who was standing patiently behind her, waiting to render any service that might be needed.

"Come nearer, Mysie—that is your name?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Have you been long in the palace?"

"Only a few months, your ladyship. My uncle Ross, who brought me to you, procured my admission by the favour of Sir Robert Cochrane."

Katherine experienced a slight shock at that announcement, which disclosed that she was under the care of those who were bound to her persecutor by the strongest of all ties—that of self-interest. She contrived to hide her feeling of distrust, and went on.

"Will it be very difficult, do you think, for me to see her Majesty the Queen?"

"Oh no," answered Mysie, with simple enthusiasm; "the Queen is a good, kind lady, and is always ready to see even the poorest of her people who may have a suit to plead. Have you never seen her, my lady?"

"No; but I desire very much to make an appeal to her Majesty at the earliest moment that I can obtain an audience."

"You will only have to make known your wish, for Sir Robert Cochrane can do anything."

"But I am not Cochrane."

"But you are his lady."

"His lady!" exclaimed Katherine, with difficulty retaining her seat. With forced calmness she asked, "Why do you think that?"

Mysie looked amazed.

"Because my uncle told me so, and because I supposed that nobody except Lady Cochrane would occupy these chambers when he was in the palace."

Katherine gazed slowly round the room, and then fixing her eyes upon the astonished maid—

"Are these his apartments?" she queried, whisperingly.

"Yes, my lady." (More and more amazed by the question.)

Katherine turned her face quickly to the fire, looking earnestly at the blazing and crackling logs. She saw now some of the reasons why he had so readily complied with her request to be conveyed to the palace. Having got her there, he had cunningly contrived to place her in a position which would compromise her for ever—not only in the eyes of their Majesties to whom she was to make her appeal, but also in those of Lamington.

She drew a long breath, and her lips closed tightly as the spirit of resolution rose within her. She was determined to baulk his design at any risk, at any sacrifice to herself.

But she felt that she must not display this determination to the girl beside her. So she spoke quietly.

“Where does the chapel stand, Mysie?”

“You can see it from the window there to your right.”

“And is there no way of reaching it except by the way we came here? I would like to attend matins, but I do not care to pass along the general corridors.”

“There is a private passage, my lady, which will lead you down to the hall of the Queen’s confessional; from there you can pass to the chapel without anybody seeing you, because only the private attendants of their Majesties are permitted to go that way. But you would require to get permission.”

“Thank you, Mysie. Does the private passage you spoke of communicate with these apartments?”

“Yes, my lady, by a door behind the tapestry there.”

Katherine observed the direction in which the girl pointed without showing any unusual interest. She remained silent for a little while, busy calculating on the chances of her being able to open the door.

At length she bade the girl retire, telling her that she required no further attendance until the morning. Mysie asked if she might not assist to disrobe her, and the aid being declined, she withdrew.

Katherine started to her feet and hastened to the door which had just closed upon the girl. There was a massive lock on the door, but the key was absent, and as there was no bolt, she had no means of securing herself against intrusion except by raising a barricade of furniture.

There was no time for that, and so she hastened to the

place indicated by Mysie as the entrance to the secret passage. She had no definite idea as to what her course was to be; the only thing clear to her was that she must escape from these apartments. What she was to do after, there would be time enough to consider when she had overcome the first and chief difficulty of obtaining egress.

She drew aside the tapestry and readily discovered the small dark-coloured door of the secret passage.

Just as she made the discovery, the attendant Ross entered the apartment.

She, however, dropped the tapestry in time to prevent him detecting the nature of her occupation.

The man explained that he had knocked, and had fancied that permission to enter had been given to him. He only desired to know if her ladyship required anything more that night.

“Nothing, thank you; I only desire to be undisturbed.”

The man bowed respectfully and departed.

She breathed freely again; and instantly resumed her task. She pressed against the door with all her strength; but it was fast, and she could not move it. There was no handle on the door; but there was a keyhole, which rather dismayed her, for it suggested that it was locked in the ordinary way; and without the key it would be impossible for her to open it.

She had expected that, as was usual with doors of this kind, it would be fastened by a spring, the trick of which she had thought might be discovered by careful scrutiny, and the persevering test of every object in which the secret might be hidden.

She peered through the keyhole, and saw nothing save utter darkness. Then she determined to search, thinking that the appearance of the lock might be only intended to deceive any one who tried to penetrate the mystery of the door.

She searched. Half an hour passed, during which her eyes and fingers worked unceasingly; not a nail or seam, not a spot of the door and its framework as large as a finger-point was left untouched.

She won success at last. Pressing her hands against the lintel, she found that the whole side of it moved slightly inward. Another effort, and the cunningly contrived secret

yielded to her perseverance. The lintel moved stiffly, there was a sharp click as of a bolt moving in the lock, and the door opened.

She discovered the first few steps of a narrow, spiral staircase, which looked like the mouth of a dark pit.

Without a moment's hesitation she went back to the table, on which stood several wax tapers, and extinguished them all except one. Carrying the lighted taper in her hand, she began the descent of the staircase, having closed the door behind her. She did not mean to return to Cochrane's apartments, whether she found her way out of the secret passage or not.

The light flickered in the damp, close atmosphere; and she was obliged to pick her way carefully, for the steps were steep, winding round and round a stone pillar with such rapid gyrations that one unaccustomed to the stairs would have grown giddy, and probably fallen in an attempt to proceed at a quick pace.

Several times a chill draught of wind threatened to extinguish her light. She thought that the bottom of the staircase would never be reached, the descent seemed so long and weary; but the satisfaction of having escaped from the wretched dilemma in which Cochrane had contrived to place her was more than sufficient to give her strength to pursue the advantage she had obtained.

At length she reached a narrow landing-place from which two passages diverged. She was slightly giddy, and without the least consciousness of direction.

She chose the passage to the left, but before she had proceeded more than a dozen paces the light was suddenly extinguished.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE ORATORY.

“Then out it spak’ her, bonnie Jane,
The youngest o’ the three :
‘O lady, why look ye so sad?
Come, tell your grief to me.’

“‘O wherefore should I tell my grief,
Since lax I cannot find ?
I’m far frae a’ my kin and friends,
And my love I left behind.’”

Bonnie Baby Livingstone.

THE darkness was intense, and for a few moments she stood bewildered, and uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

An instant’s reflection, however, was sufficient to decide her course. She placed the now useless taper on the ground and advanced, groping her way cautiously.

The progress was slow, and in her excited state it was painfully so. The distance seemed to be considerable, and Katherine fancied that she was traversing the whole length of the building.

At last she reached what seemed to be the end of the passage. But the wall was stone, and all her efforts failed to discover an outlet. She turned back, feeling along the wall, and about six yards from the extremity of the passage she found a door.

At the same moment her ears were suddenly greeted by the dull, muffled sound of voices speaking within. She restrained her breath, and listened with senses quickened to painful acuteness. Gradually the sounds became more distinct; they formed into words, and, with a shudder of alarm, she became aware that Cochrane was one of the speakers.

It was a private door of the King’s apartment that she was standing at, and it was the conference of his Majesty and his favourites regarding the ripening conspiracies, in which she was thus accidentally made a participator.

Although the sentences were incomplete on account of the occasional indistinctness of the sounds, she heard

enough to make her aware of the grave danger that threatened Lamington and the Abbot, and to enable her to understand that their friends, Albany and Mar, on whose protection they had been calculating, were to be themselves made prisoners.

She was as much frightened by the manner in which the discovery of the secret had been made, as by the nature of the secret itself. She was as much appalled by her present position as by the observations affecting herself.

"She is a silly wench," Cochrane said, "and these knaves have deceived her regarding me so that she has learned almost to despise me."

"Have no fear," answered the King; "she will think better of it when she has learned our decision on the subject."

"Then I will take my leave, sire, and see that your commands are promptly executed."

At these words Katherine was roused from the sickening stupor which was overcoming her. The reflection that Sir Robert would proceed to his apartments and discover her absence reminded her that the danger she sought to escape was as near as ever.

She retraced her way along the passage; but now she proceeded with steps quickened by terror. At the foot of the staircase she descried a gleam of light from above, and heard the footsteps of a man.

With no thought save that she was putting distance between her and the pursuer, she darted onward by the passage to the right of the stair.

She had proceeded about thirty paces when, glancing back without halting, she tripped on her dress, stumbled, and fell. In falling, her hands touched some woodwork, which seemed to yield to them. Springing up, she tried it, and found it was a door, which, having been left unfastened, yielded to her touch.

She drew it open, and, hearing the footsteps behind her, darted out into a broad, dimly lighted corridor.

She did not know which way to turn; but observing a door slightly ajar, she rushed towards it and very unceremoniously entered an apartment which presented a spectacle that caused her to halt, panting, timid, and ashamed of the violence of her entry.

The apartment was small, but with a high oaken panelled roof, on which were painted various armorial bearings of the royal house, with their numerous quarterings. There was a pale, sad light in the place, and at one end stood a small altar, on which a dozen waxen tapers were burning before a crucifix. This at once indicated the character of the chamber: it was the Royal Oratory, or confessional.

When Katherine entered there were two ladies standing near the door, who regarded her with looks of astonishment. At the altar stood a venerable man in sacerdotal robes, and before him, kneeling on a black velvet cushion with gold tassels, was a lady, so intent in her devotions, that she did not observe the entrance of the intruder.

In front of the lady was a stool covered with red velvet, and bearing the royal arms on its sides. On the stool was placed a cushion similar to that on which she knelt, and upon it lay an open missal. Her hands—white and small almost as those of a child—were clasped, and her eyes were fixed devoutly on the book.

She was of rather diminutive stature, but the bearing of the delicate form was full of dignity and grace. Her features were clearly defined, and of decisive expression, although cast in no massive mould. Her hair was black, and her brow high, square, and marked with certain very faint lines, suggestive of anxious thought. Her eyebrows were high and black; her eyes were of a deep-brown hue, bright, and penetrating; they were eyes capable of expressing the tenderest affection and the sternest wrath, as occasion might arise. Her nose was straight and rather long; her mouth small, and, with the square-cut chin, expressive of much firmness.

Her dress consisted of a brown bodice, ornamented with embroidery of the most intricate design. Beneath this was a dark-blue velvet gown, trimmed with ermine. On her head she wore a coronal of jewels; and round her neck was a string of pearls, supporting a cross.

Katherine was not permitted time to observe all these details. The two ladies who stood near recovered from their surprise and advanced simultaneously, as if with the purpose of bidding her retire.

But before they had spoken a word the door was flung

open again, and Sir Robert Cochrane, with visage flushed and wrathful, appeared.

The priest, who from his position at the altar could survey all that transpired, hastily bent down and whispered something in the ear of the kneeling lady. Then he drew his hood over his face.

Katherine, with a half-stifled cry of alarm, flung herself at the feet of the lady who had now risen.

Cochrane, apparently blind with vexation, did not seem to observe the presence of any one save Katherine, and followed close after her.

"Help me, help me," cried Katherine. "Oh, madam, save me from that man!"

Cochrane was bending to grasp her arm and drag her from the place, when he was arrested by the voice of the lady whose devotions had been so rudely disturbed. Her tone was clear and authoritative.

"Hold, sir! and bethink you in what place you stand, and in whose presence."

Cochrane, with a smothered ejaculation, drew back, hastily uncovering.

"Pardon, your Majesty, pardon," he said, huskily, and with evident anxiety; "I would have spared your Grace this unseemly interruption had not this lady, ignorant of the respect due to your privacy, broken from me, and so caused this disturbance. I beseech your Majesty to attribute my present confusion to its proper cause—the shame and annoyance I feel in seeing my wife thus unbecomingly present herself to you."

"The Queen!" exclaimed Katherine, with a glow of surprise and joy, while she clutched the hem of her Majesty's robes, and looked up into her face imploringly. "Oh, grace—grace, your Majesty. I came hither to seek your protection from the misery which this man has caused me, and from the malice with which he pursues me. Pity—pity and save me; in the name of the Sacred Mother, at whose shrine you have been worshipping, I crave your protection."

And she bowed her head, trying to stifle the sobs of anguish which were wrung from her by the contending emotions of terror, hope, and doubt.

"Your Grace will not heed this raving," said Cochrane,

hastily, but resuming somewhat of that courteous demeanour which, in the first moments of his excitement, he had partly forgotten; "Lady Cochrane has been sorely tried of late by the ruthless assassination of her father under the hand of one for whom she had formerly entertained some liking. Other afflicting circumstances have strained her strength to its limit, and I fear her wits have become affected, for she shrinks most from those who hold her nearest—her mother, brothers, and myself."

"Oh, Heaven bear witness how false he speaks even whilst he stands at its altar," cried Katherine, vehemently, and raising her head; for her alarm lest the Queen should yield to his sophistries and resign her to his charge, imparted a courage and a quickness of speech which she could not have displayed in the royal presence but for her cruel necessity: "do not trust him; for our dear Lady's sake give me your protection—only for to-night, and if to-morrow I fail to prove myself worthy of it, spurn me from you, and let him work his spite upon me."

When her Majesty had risen, she had regarded the intruders with a degree of wonderment, then she had scrutinized the upturned face of the pleading woman, and scanned the disturbed visage of Cochrane whilst he eagerly endeavoured to explain or contradict the statements of Katherine. Now, with calm dignity, she interrupted him as he was about to make some new averment to counteract whatever impression Katherine's last words might have produced.

"Peace, sir," said Queen Margaret; "and remember that this is neither the place nor time for the explanation of your affairs. This lady pleads for my protection in the name of the Most Holy, and I grant her prayer till we have time to investigate her cause."

"Heaven will bless your Majesty for this mercy," exclaimed Katherine, fervently.

"But your Grace misunderstands—she is my wife," said Cochrane, darkly; "and not even Majesty itself has the right to step between those whom the Church has joined."

"To-morrow, sir, we will decide that."

"But the King has given me his authority to enforce her obedience to the vows which she would forswear in the present perverted state of her mind."

"I will be responsible to his Majesty for her safe keeping till the morning," was the calm response.

"Your Majesty cannot mean that you will listen to the idle tale of a weak-minded woman when you know that she is acting in opposition to her kindred, to her husband, and to the King's command."

"Enough, sir; all that we will hear at the proper occasion. You can retire."

"I obey your Majesty, but this is contrary to law and reason——"

He was interrupted by the stern gaze which Margaret fixed upon him. Even Cochrane, spoiled as he was by the influence he possessed over the King and by the consciousness of the power it gave him, dared not brave her displeasure too far; for Margaret possessed that strength of character which her husband lacked, and had her counsels not been rendered effectless by the plastic nature of the King in the hands of his favourites, the history of his reign might have been very different.

"How, sir," she said, her eyes brightening with scorn, "have you neither respect for my command nor for this place that you still parley when I bid you go?"

Cochrane dropped on his knee and almost touched the floor with his brow to show his humility.

"Pardon, your Grace; and if my tongue has moved in opposition to your will, it is because a distracted man believes in the goodness of your heart and in the wisdom of your judgment."

She turned from him, motioning him away.

"A boon, your Majesty, a boon!" he cried, humbly, without rising.

"Name it."

"One instant's private speech with Lady Cochrane."

"No, no, most gracious madam, do not grant him what he asks," was the imploring cry of Katherine.

"Let him speak; he cannot harm you, and I would not give him cause to complain that he had been unfairly dealt with."

Her Majesty moved a few paces aside to where the priest was standing, keenly observant of all, but carefully keeping his features screened.

Cochrane grasped Katherine's arm, and drawing her towards him, whispered hotly in her ear—

"Beware of what you say. If your tongue wag too fast, or your frenzy betray you in your charges against me, your own life and *his* may be the forfeit. Do not be deceived by what seems to you a triumph, for a few days will show you that my will is potent even here."

She shuddered as she listened to the words, which seemed to penetrate her ear with the sharp sting of a serpent's tongue.

He released her, and bowing low to the Queen, withdrew slowly, his bowed head concealing the dark passion which overspread his countenance.

As soon as she recovered from the shock his words had given her, Katherine crept to the feet of the Queen, and with tears of gratitude, kissed the hem of her garment.

"Rise, my poor lady," said Margaret, with womanly sympathy in her tone; "I have been made acquainted with your sad story, and trust me, whatever may be done to aid you will be done."

She assisted her to rise, and Katherine was comforted by the kindness of her touch. She was puzzled by the intelligence that her Majesty was already aware of the events which had brought her to Linlithgow. That, however, was soon explained, for the priest throwing aside his hood, she recognized the Abbot Panther.

"Have no fear, my child," said his lordship, taking her hand. "I arrived here only an hour gone, but happily in time to acquaint our gracious Queen with the violence which has been used towards you."

"I owe you much already; I am still more your debtor now," she said; and then, bending her head to hide the blush which suffused her face, "but Gordon—is he not with you?"

"You will see him to-morrow, doubtless," answered Panther, and hastily addressed the Queen, in order to avoid further interrogation on that subject. "Your Grace is satisfied now, I trust, of the necessity there was for the concealment of my arrival at the palace. While yonder man has the power to poison the King's mind against us, the lives of none of those who love his Majesty best are safe."

"I fear it is too true," said Margaret, with a troubled expression. "Heaven help and guide his Majesty safely

through the evils which are springing around us so fast and thick."

"Amen to that, with all my soul," said the Abbot, earnestly; "but if the dangers are averted it will be by your hand."

"It is a weak one for so great a task," she said sadly, her eyes fixed meditatively on the floor.

"It is a strong one, since its cause is just; and there are thousands of true hearts to rise at its beck. Your Grace will conquer, for truth is always strongest."

"May it be as you predict. Meanwhile, act as you may deem best, and be sure I shall not doubt your fidelity."

"I will count upon your Majesty holding that faith unswervingly, no matter what strange things you may hear of me. Do not hesitate, madam, to credit me that in whatever guise I may appear, I am working for your weal and our King's."

"You have my promise."

"And that will give me strength for any difficulties I may have to encounter. Before you leave me, madam, let me commend to your gracious favour one whom you will find devoted to you and yours as faithfully as myself."

"Let me know him."

"It is Gordon of Lamington, for whose sake this lady has risked so much."

"A true gentleman, your Majesty," said Katherine, crimsoning at the boldness of her advocacy; "and a faithful subject, although one who has been sorely wronged."

"I need friends," said Margaret, looking kindly in her face; "and for your sake I will believe Lamington all that you represent him to be."

"You will find him worthy of your trust."

"I can believe it, since you will be my hostage for his loyalty. For the present I will be your guardian, and when the knight arrives we will crave his Majesty's attention to your affairs."

"I have no power to thank your Grace as I would wish, for so much kindness."

"The wish will satisfy me. Good night, my lord, and do not fail to give me early tidings of any movement that may concern us."

"I shall not fail."

The Queen, followed by Katherine and the two ladies in waiting, proceeded by a private corridor to her apartments.

The Abbot betook himself immediately to the chambers of the reverend father whose place he had been filling in the oratory, and having changed his garments, he went in quest of certain nobles with whom he was leagued in the attempt to overthrow the too powerful favourites of the King.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONSPIRACY.

“He’s called upon his merry men a’,
 To follow him to the glen:
 And he’s vowed he’d neither eat nor sleep
 Till he got his love again.”

Baby Livingstone.

It was midnight when Lamington entered Linlithgow. He was accompanied by Muckle Will, who had been enabled to overtake him without difficulty, in consequence of the delay caused by the combat with Richard Janfarie. Trotting along by the side of Will’s horse was Stark.

Gordon had procured a change of clothes—a rough, countryman’s suit, which effectually disguised his real character. Along the road he had obtained tidings at various places of the party he pursued, and at Lanark he saw the Borderers, who had been left to rest there until the morning.

But he had failed to intercept Cochrane, and now, with horse dead beat, and himself fatigued and dejected, he entered the silent town.

When they reached the ancient well which marked the town cross—an object of much respect on account of its sculptural decorations—he was glad to perceive a few rays of light which gleamed through the chinks of the shutter of one of the upper rooms of the inn. Some of the gentlemen of the Court or their followers were doubtless keeping a late revel, although there were no sounds of mirth or clink of glasses issuing from the place to confirm the surmise.

On the contrary, the house was as quiet as if its inhabitants were locked in the deepest slumber. But whatever might be the meaning of these contradictory signs, the traveller concluded that some one must be stirring within, and bade his servant knock.

That duty Will performed with a heartiness which roused the echoes of the town; and as if wishing to add to the din, Stark bayed loudly.

In an instant the rays of light which had attracted Lamington's attention disappeared, and no answer was given to the summons.

After waiting for some time without any heed being paid to them, Will was directed to knock again. He obeyed with greater demonstration than before, and succeeded this time in bringing the host to the window above the door. He demanded the meaning of the untimely disturbance.

"Are ye a' dead or fou?" answered Will, indignant that the taverner should have kept his master waiting so long when it was clear that he had not been to bed.

"Wha are ye?" was the cautious inquiry.

"A gentleman and his servant frae Galloway."

"Is there only twa?"

"Na, there's three and twa horses."

"Where is the other?"

"Speak up, Stark, and let the dour creature ken where ye are."

Stark leaped up at the door, baying sonorously.

At this point some one drew the innkeeper from the window, and spoke to him in a whisper. The result of whatever was said was the closing of the window and the opening of the door immediately after.

The landlord conducted Lamington into the public room, where he placed a light for him, and offered to provide refreshment as soon as he had shown the gentleman's follower the way to the stable.

Gordon seated himself on a stiff-backed wooden chair beside the remains of a fire which was smouldering on the broad hearth of the wide chimney-place.

He had no pleasant thoughts to occupy him. The dimly lighted tavern-room, with its sanded floor, its bare wooden benches, low roof, and smouldering fire, were to his depressed fancy suggestive of the poverty of hope and

fortune to which he had sunk. The last red glow of the fire was fading under the white film which gathered over it; and that seemed like his own hopes. The white clouds of disappointment and defeat were enshrouding them, and they were slowly darkening into despair; just as the white film of the wood ashes was blackening in the coldness of extinction.

It seemed so strange that a few days should have made such a dismal alteration in the prospect of his affairs. He had returned to his native land with buoyant anticipation of a bright future, which Katherine was to have shared with him. He had rendered good service in the army of the French monarch, at whose court a path had been opened for him that would have led to the highest honours. But he had turned away from it, yearning for the home of his youth—for the lady whose love had been pledged to him, and yearning to perform the noble task of cleansing his father's name from the stain which rested on it, and to regain the lands which had been unjustly confiscated.

The Duke of Albany had pledged his words that he would intercede for him with King James; the Abbot Panther had promised his assistance too, and with these powerful friends to support his cause, he had counted upon a speedy victory, which he desired as much for Katherine's sake as for his own. Perhaps he desired it more for her sake; certainly had there been no consideration for her, or for his father's memory, he would have been well content to have remained in France, where his merits and fidelity had been most honourably recognized.

But with the promises of Albany and Panther he hastened homeward, and the first tidings he received on touching Scottish land were those of Katherine's bridal.

From that point his hopes seemed doomed to disappointment; he had rescued her and lost her; he had learned that the aid upon which he had calculated could only be rendered him when grave difficulties had been removed; and he had discovered that the royal brothers had been placed in such a position by the machinations of Cochrane, that their power was of no more avail than his own.

He did not yet know to what terrible extremity the chief favourite of the King had carried his power, pricked on by an insatiable ambition, but he knew enough to

understand that before the King would do him justice, the real character of Cochrane must be revealed to him so clearly that there could be no shade of doubt in the proof.

So weary did he feel that he began to speculate whether or not it would be well for him to bid a final adieu to Scotland, and to carry Katherine with him to France, where he might make a home and name for her.

But the cowardice of the thought made his blood tingle with shame: the action of a brave man was to assert his right in the teeth of all danger and all injustice. He would not fail in that respect: let the consequences be what they might, he would be faithful to his father's cause.

Through all these musings there was one fear haunting him: how would Katherine receive him after she had been made aware of the combat in the Druid's Circle? And how could he ever hope to claim her hand, if Janfarie should die? He had done all that a man could do to avoid the strife; he had inflicted no wound that could have been spared; and the only serious hurt her brother had received had been caused by his fall into the pit from which he had rescued him.

To explain all that so as to satisfy her that she committed no sin in uniting herself to the man who was charged with complicity in her father's death, and who had been directly instrumental in her brother's fate, would be almost impossible.

He was roused from these dismal reflections by the touch of a hand on his arm, and looking up hastily he recognized the jovial visage of the Abbot, who was attired in the sober garb of a staid private gentleman.

"You here, too!" exclaimed Lamington; "then Cochrane has beaten us all, and Katherine is at his mercy."

"Not quite," responded his lordship, with one of his genial smiles. "The lady is safe under the charge of the Queen—benisons upon her for a noble lady, and a true woman—and our friend is baffled so far."

He briefly explained what had occurred, and Gordon was relieved.

"But why are you here?" he queried, somewhat puzzled that the prelate should have quitted the palace to seek the hospitality of an inn; "and why are you in that disguise?"

"I wear this habit that I may pass to and fro with as little observation as may be. It is a humour of mine to enjoy the immunities of a private person whenever I can. I am here to meet some friends," the Abbot modulated his voice, and bent close to his interrogator: "Douglas, Earl of Angus, Lord Gray, and others."

"You have held a council, then?"

The Abbot nodded.

"And your decision?"

"Banishment or death to the whole brood of knaves who are undermining the King's safety."

"But Cochrane must be left to me."

"Surely, if you think him worthy of any better punishment than a few yards of hemp may provide."

"And when will you take action? for I am eager to begin the work."

"As soon as Albany and Mar arrive at the palace. Tomorrow a trusty messenger will be despatched to bring them hither. When they appear, those of the guards who may be depended upon will seize all who are known to be favourable to Cochrane and his companions; and, to render treachery impossible, Douglas will have five hundred men within call, and ready to overturn the whole garrison if necessary."

Panther spoke in a quiet tone, in which there was a note of intense satisfaction. Lamington listened with growing excitement as the bold scheme was unfolded to him; but with his feeling of gratification at the prospect of the decisive blow which was to strike his enemy helpless to the earth, there was mingled a doubt as to how far the safety of his Majesty might be involved in the conspiracy.

"You have already explained to me," he said, hesitatingly, "that this movement concerns only the false parasites of the throne, and that there is no breath of harm to fall upon the person of the King."

Panther's brows contracted slightly.

"I have. Do you doubt it?" he said coldly.

"To be honest with you, my lord, I have feared that our present action might lead to something more. I am with you thus far, but no farther. I hate his minions, but I am his Majesty's faithful servant."

"So are we all. Enough, man; you will not doubt

again when you know that the Queen herself prays for our success."

"I am content."

"Amen; may you be so always. And now let me know what has delayed your journey hither?"

When Lamington had recounted the events of his meeting with Janfarie and of the loss of the tablet, Panther gave little heed to the possible consequences of the fray in his anxiety about the latter misfortune. He, however, expended no words in upbraiding his friend for permitting the mishap despite the caution he had received.

"Our friends must have timely warning of any danger that may threaten them should the roll fall into unfriendly hands. Luckily it was so written that it can prove nothing against them, save that some unknown hand has joined their names together."

"If that is all, we need give ourselves little trouble about it."

"Ay, if that is all; but Cochrane might make much more of it. Since there is no help, we must prepare for the hazard, and our action against him must be the more prompt and decisive."

"Command me when you will, and as you will."

"Enough; should any one address you with signs of authority, ask what tower is falling."

"And then?"

"And then you will know him to be a friend, if he answer—*the curse of Scotland.*"

"I will remember. Good night."

"Good night, and benedicite."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STORM-CLOUD BURSTS.

“ Ye Highlands and ye Lowlands,
 O quhair hae ye been ?
 They hae slain the Earl of Murray,
 And hae lain him on the green.

“ Now wae be to thee, Huntly,
 And quhairfore did you sae ?
 I bade you bring him wi’ you,
 But forbade you him to slay.”

The Bonnie Earl of Murray

FOR fourteen days Lamington remained at the Black Hound Inn of Linlithgow, undisturbed by any unfriendly event; but fretting more and more as the days advanced under his enforced idleness.

He had not yet been permitted to see Katherine; and the Abbot had not yet fulfilled his promise of presenting him to Queen Margaret. But he could not complain of the delay, knowing how sincerely Panther desired to further his interests, and that he would avail himself of the first opportunity of serving him.

He was the more readily content to bide his time, being assured that Cochrane had quitted the palace on the day after his arrival with Katherine, and that whatever might be the nature of his mission he had not yet returned.

Panther visited him almost every evening, always in his private garb, and always anxious to avoid observation. Gordon was aware that there were mysterious meetings held in the hostelry long after the curfew had been rung, and the honest burgesses had extinguished their lamps and retired to the slumbers of the industrious, with heads little troubled by politics beyond the bitterness with which they resented the attempt to force the base Cochrane placks upon their acceptance, and their dissatisfaction at certain new imposts with which the royal favourite proposed to fill his master’s treasury and his own.

The meetings of the disaffected barons were held at the hostelry in preference to the private residence of any one

of them, because the gatherings in a place of public resort were less liable to suspicion, even if they were discovered.

Gordon was not at first admitted to the conclave of the conspirators; but after he had been presented to Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus—a man of gigantic stature, and possessed of all the fierce courage of the race from which he sprang—and to Lord Gray—a man of policy and discrimination—he was invited to join them.

He hesitated: for, however willing he might be to serve the cause they had in view, he still doubted the propriety of leaguering himself for good or ill with men whose power and ambition might, when the first step was gained, induce them to proceed still farther. On one point he was resolved, that nothing should tempt him to raise his hand against the King; and despite Panther's assurance, he feared that the Duke of Albany, whose martial character and dauntless spirit fitted him so much better for the throne than his more delicate-natured brother, might in the glow of one triumph seek another and much bolder one—namely, the abdication of James in his favour.

His suspicion was not altogether without foundation, and afforded reason enough for his hesitation. But there suddenly rang a cry throughout the land which scattered his doubts to the wind and made him one of the most resolute of the conspirators, although it did not alter his purpose of serving the King whilst he assisted to overthrow the myrmidons whose deeds were covering the country and the throne with ignominy.

The cry which stirred to the depths the passions of the people, high and low alike, and united them by a common bond of enmity to the government, was that Albany and Mar had been arrested.

The Duke was imprisoned in the castle of Edinburgh, and the Earl at Craigmillar.

Sir Robert Cochrane was recognized as the chief instrument of this arrest, and the warrant on which they had been seized bore his Majesty's sign-manual. Only too well-founded fears were entertained for the lives of the royal brothers when it became known that the crime they were charged with was that of having conspired against the person and authority of the monarch; and these fears seemed to obtain confirmation when it was discovered that

Mar had been secretly removed to a house in the Canon-gate, and placed under the care of Cochrane and his minions.

A general state of confusion followed; the dire cloud of civil war was lowering over the land; the very atmosphere seemed loaded with discontent and the premonitions of a bloody strife. The confusion was nowhere more apparent than at the Court itself. The guards were doubled in and about the palace; a regiment of trusty soldiers was summoned from Stirling and quartered in the town to be ready for any emergency to co-operate with the royal guards; the King did not stir abroad, but took his exercise in the quadrangle, and that only when the troops were under arms.

The Queen passed through the town several times, with no more than her ordinary attendants, as if to show her confidence in the people; but it was noticed that the good lady was unusually pale, and that despite her effort to seem content, an expression of sorrow was on her countenance. It was pitiable to see the anxiety with which she watched her son, Prince James, then only aged about eight years, and who, in happy ignorance of the brooding turmoil around him, was blithe and mischievous as a child should be.

Several nobles fled from the court at the first tidings of the catastrophe, and fearing that they might be implicated in it, either took immediate refuge in France, or in their own strongholds, gathered their retainers about them, and prepared for war.

Others of the barons remained doggedly in attendance—amongst them Angus—but there was gloom upon their brows; they wore stout hauberks of steel under their coats, they had various weapons secreted about their persons, so that whilst they appeared to wear only their swords—to which they were restricted in the presence of the King in time of peace—they were in reality armed to the teeth; and they kept their followers ready to spring to their rescue at the first bugle-note of alarm.

This state of matters continued for several days, during which nothing decisive occurred. Albany and Mar were still prisoners, and couriers were constantly passing to and fro between Linlithgow and Edinburgh.

At length there came a day on which the elements of

nature seemed to give voice to the terrors and wrath which were repressed in the bosoms of the people. All day the sun was obscured by big black clouds, and lamps had to be lit for the discharge of the most ordinary duties indoors. The rain poured steadily down without pause; fierce shafts of lightning broke through the dense clouds, and darted in fiery lines toward the earth; thunder rolled unceasingly, shaking the tenements of the town—shaking the palace itself—to the foundations.

The storm maintained its fury far into the night; and in the midst of it a horseman, whose steed was reeking through the rain which dripped from its hide, and its mouth foaming, galloped from the direction of the capital up to the palace.

The rider, with his cloak and coat soaked and clinging close to his body, the plume of his hat draggled and broken, looked somewhat disreputable; and the excitement which gleamed in his eyes would have suggested that the wine-cup had been the prompter of his mad ride through the storm, had his voice not been so steady and his words pronounced with such clear precision.

As if he had been expected, the gates flew open at his first summons; his horse was taken charge of by a groom who appeared to have been in waiting for that purpose, and he, without having spoken more than half a dozen words, strode to a small door which was placed near one of the buttresses, and so artfully contrived that it looked like a part of the wall. Its existence would not have been suspected by any save the initiated.

The man who approached it now was one who knew its secret; and whilst the dense darkness of the night concealed him from the chance gaze of any of the sentinels, he opened the door and entered the palace.

The passage in which he found himself was like all of its kind, narrow and dark. But the traveller was well acquainted with its intricacies, and he passed along with a rapid step, ascended a spiral staircase, and at last stopped at what seemed to be a door.

After pausing a moment, apparently to discover what might be passing within, he gave a peculiar knock with the pommel of his poniard.

Presently a light gleamed upon his ghastly visage, with

its thin blue lips quivering as if in terror; and as a panel slid back in its grooves, Torphichen, the little fat master of fence, stood staring at the mysterious visitor.

The latter faltered for an instant, as if doubtful whether to advance or retreat; then, clenching his teeth, he crossed the threshold, and hastily closed the panel.

Torphichen drew back a pace, with a look of fright.

"Swords and daggers, Cochrane!" he gasped, "what makes you look so haggard? Have the rebel dogs broke loose—are we surrounded?"

Cochrane, with a forced smile, and his lips still quivering, removed his hat, shook the raindrops from it, and thrust back his hair, evidently desiring to rectify something of the disorder of his appearance.

"Seem I so wild, then?" he said, and his voice was strangely husky, whilst his manner was nervous despite his affected calmness; "seem I so wild that nothing better than rapine and murder is suggested by my presence?"

"I said nothing of murder," was the fencing-master's retort; "but by the best Toledo that was ever tempered there is that in your air which made me fancy that Angus himself and all his howling tribe were at your heels, ready to wipe off with their blades the long score of grudge they owe us."

"Pshaw! am I the one to blanch or look strange if all the wolves of Scotland were griping at my throat?"

"In faith, at such a pass, I would not stake my finger on the complexion of the best of us. But what is the stir, then?"

"You will know in time enough. Is his Majesty alone?"

"No; Rogers is with him, and Innis, the armour-bearer, is fitting on a new shirt of mail that Leonard just finished before he went away with you and Hommel. Our Lady send that the mail be of good proof, for there will be need of its best service speedily, or I am out in my reckoning. There has been thunder on every face since the news came."

The words "the news" were pronounced with a significance which plainly showed their application to the arrest of the royal brothers.

"The thunder will burst to-morrow," muttered Coch-

rane, gloomily. "Fetch Rogers and the other fellow in here, and leave me with our master for a while."

The chamber in which this colloquy had taken place was a small, square cupboard of a place, only large enough to have permitted six persons to be seated at a table, and was used chiefly as a sort of waiting-room for his favourites whenever his Majesty desired to be alone.

Cochrane advanced brusquely into the royal tiring-room, where James stood at the moment, with Innis buckling on the new coat of mail, which was constructed of such finely wrought links that it did not interfere with the least or most violent exertion of the body.

"It fits as neat as though it were made of silk," the King was saying; "and so Burniewind (the smith, Leonard) said it would. If it will only stand hard dunts as well as it fits the body we'll owe him something."

"May your Majesty never require to put it to the proof," said Rogers, softly.

"I can say amen to that, man, with a clear conscience," answered James, somewhat sadly; "but I doubt that's a prayer we cannot hope to have answered. Eh, what the deevil's yon?"

"Your servant, Cochrane, my liege," answered that person, approaching and kneeling.

The King started back as if alarmed by his wild appearance.

"By my faith, sir, you come as if the hour had already struck when the strength of our mail and heart were to be put to the proof," exclaimed his Majesty, with an air of mingled anxiety and displeasure.

"My hope is of another kind, sire. I trust that your servant brings you tidings that will delay the proof of your armour, although it may trouble your heart. I crave private speech with your Majesty."

The countenance of James became agitated as he surveyed the disordered guise in which Sir Robert, the most fastidious of all his courtiers, had a second time entered his presence, and on this occasion there was a gleam of excitement in the man's eyes, and a haggard expression on his face, which, with the tone of his voice, suggested that something of very unusual import had occurred.

The knowledge of the threatening circumstances which

surrounded him, and into which he had been led as much by this man's counsel as by his own fears, or the occasion for them, combined with the observation of Cochrane's trembling lips, served to thrill the King with a foreboding of the calamity that had befallen his family.

He signified to his attendants that they were to retire. Innis offered to remove the hauberk, but the King impatiently bade him leave it alone, and to give him his mantle. A handsome purple cloak, lined with ermine, was thrown over his shoulders, and Torphichen, obedient to Cochrane's hint, led the way into the waiting-room.

Cochrane had not yet risen from his knee, and whether with real or simulated agitation, his form shivered.

"In the name of all the powers of heaven," exclaimed his Majesty, eager to hear and yet dreading what was to come of all this singular conduct, "explain, man, what is it that moves you so?"

"Oh, my liege—my liege," cried Cochrane, with vehement sorrow, "I, who would lay down my life to spare you the pettiest pang, am doomed to be your torture."

The monarch's countenance expressed astonishment and increasing alarm.

"Do your work, then, sir; since you are doomed to it you cannot escape it; but if your intent be kindly, spare me at least that portion of the torture which lies in suspense."

Cochrane seized the hem of his Majesty's cloak and bowed his head upon it with an air of abject and awed submission.

"I dare not look upon your Grace's countenance, lest its frown kill me," he said huskily; "for the tidings I bring will afflict you whilst they promise you increased safety."

"Let them be spoken, then."

"One of your enemies—one of the most dangerous of your Grace's foes, because one of those most highly placed—is dead."

The King's cheek became pallid.

"Dead!" he gasped; "who is dead?"

"My despatches acquainted you that he lay ill in the house in Canongate."

"Then it is John of Mar you speak of," cried James.

“The same, my liege, and he is dead.”

The monarch snatched his cloak from the man's grasp, and recoiled from him as if there had been poison in his touch.

“Villain!” he cried, with a violence of passion of which few would have believed him capable; “bloodthirsty hound—you have murdered him!”

“Sire, sire, hear before you condemn me,” exclaimed Cochrane, now seriously alarmed for his own safety, and speaking in sincere distress of mind; “for all that I have done I had your Majesty's warrant.”

A loud peal of thunder shook the foundations of the palace, and there was a pause, during which the King stood as one appalled.

“My warrant?” he said, rousing himself. “Dare you so far as claim me for your accomplice? I gave no warrant for murder. Heaven itself proclaims you liar. You have stained your hand with the same blood that flows in our veins, and God bear witness, but there is no torture man or fiend can invent that you shall not undergo. Ho, there, Rogers, Torphichen, summon the guard and carry this loathsome vampire to the blackest dungeon of our hold.”

Rogers and the others, astounded by the loud outcry of their master, appeared in haste, and stood still more astounded by the strange command they had received.

Cochrane rose slowly to his feet and stood with an air of dejection and of respectful submission, but also with the firmness of one who feels himself injured.

“Your Majesty can take my life,” he said, in a low voice, which reached only the King's ears; “it has been yours always, and I am as ready to yield it to you in this fashion as in any other. But I said nought of murder. The letter of my warrant I have obeyed, no more. What has been done, I have done in your service; and till now I have believed that he whom I served would never spurn from him, without hearing a word of justification, one who has been true to him when all others have been false. But I accept my fate; and, sire, believe that there is no torture your hangman can invent that will make me cease to pray, whilst I have breath, for your safety in the midst of the perils which are about to assail you.”

The King, during this address, stood at first irresolute, and when it was finished he motioned to his attendants to withdraw again. Then, as another peal of thunder shook the building, he sank on a chair, shuddering, and covered his face with his hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FATE OF MAR.

“Fell Lindsay puts his harness on,
His steed doth ready stand;
And up the staircase he is gone,
With poniard in his hand.

“The sweat did on his forehead break,
He shook wi’ guilty fear;
In air he heard a joyfu’ shriek—
Red Cumin’s ghaist was near.”

The Murder of Caerlaveroe.

THE silence which prevailed in the royal apartments for several minutes after the retreat of those whom the King had so hastily summoned with the intention of placing the bearer of the evil tidings under arrest, was rendered only the more observable by the wild din of the tempest which raged without. To the superstitious mind of James it seemed as if the evil spirits with which his imagination filled the air were rejoicing over the demoniac work that had been done, and were loudly claiming him for their victim.

Cochrane’s features were hard set and inscrutable, his bearing was that of one who had been unjustly accused, and whose offended dignity would not permit him to offer an explanation unsolicited.

The monarch abruptly removed his hands from his face as if angry at his own weakness. He fixed a look of scornful loathing upon his favourite; but the expression gradually became tinged with uneasiness as he observed the emotionless visage of the man who confronted him.

But his indignation was still strong, and sustained him in his resolution to wreak a terrible retribution for his brother’s fate.

“Are you dumbstricken, sir?” he said huskily. “If not, give me knowledge of the worst that you have done.”

“I waited your Majesty’s permission.”

“You have it.”

“Then the worst that I have done, my gracious liege, has been to obey your mandate faithfully——”

“By Heaven, this is too much,” interrupted James, choking with passion that was not unmixed with dread of what might be the consequences of such an accusation as he understood Cochrane to be making; “a second time you charge me as your accomplice.”

“If your Majesty will be pleased to hear me to the end you will understand that I dare not, and need not, even were I bold enough to dare, attach the mildest breath of calumny to your gracious person.”

“Your tidings and your manner have been much misunderstood, then.”

“So please your Grace, they have been cruelly misapprehended. My couriers have daily brought you tidings of the course of events. At the very hour when I staked my life and earned a villainous reputation in your Majesty’s service—at that hour arrangements had been all but completed to seize your royal person and to keep you under restraint, whilst Albany as Regent, with the aid of Mar, conducted the government until you should be compelled to abdicate or——”

He paused, gazing steadily in the King’s face.

“How say you? Be sure you have proof of this,” cried James, all his ire rapidly turning to another object, “the Sacred Mother have thanks, but this has been a rarely treacherous matter timely checked. But why have you stopped? Go on, man, and be sure that you do not speak aught for which you may not be prepared with warrant.”

“Unhappily, sire, there is too much truth in my averment. I halted in my speech because——”

“Well?—because what?”

“The words burn my tongue, but it is proper that you should hear them. Let me call to your mind again the dark legend of the man learned in the signs of the heavens. He told you, my liege, that a lion would be worried by its own whelps.”

"What of that now?" wrathfully exclaimed the monarch, but his complexion blanched.

"Only this—that the Regency was to continue until you abdicated or—*died*."

"Died? Am I so infirm, then, that my days may be numbered and my crown put up to barter?"

"Not so infirm, sire, but you may reign till your son's hairs are grey, which in my heart I pray will be your fortune, for our country's sake; but too generous, my liege, to deal with your enemies until they stand openly confessed before you. When they do that, your opportunity will be gone and they will have power to make terms."

The face of the King darkened as he listened.

"Ay, ay," he muttered, "I dally too much with the spark, and give it time to grow into a fire, spreading destruction around me and mine."

"It is because you, my liege, are too just, and those who are near you too envious."

"But your action has left the traitors leaderless—they will not dare advance now?"

"That cannot be answered safely; for since the chief offenders in this matter—although I credit them with too much of your own kind nature to think otherwise than that they have been inveigled into this dark course by older heads and baser minds—since they have been placed under control, night and day my steps have been dogged by men thirsting for my life. Even here, standing in your presence, I am not safe."

"Humph, we shall see to it," said James, casting a quick, uneasy glance round the apartment, and running his fingers nervously over his hauberk.

"But great as the danger is to me now, my liege, it will be magnified twentyfold when it becomes known that Mar is dead."

"Ay, we are back to that foul work," he muttered, gloomily.

"The same unworthy suspicion which has made your face so wroth with your servant will be taken up by the thousands who hate me because of my fidelity to you. They will hold to it that I have done this deed; no proof of innocence will satisfy them, and if you desert me I must perish."

"Before we promise you protection you must satisfy us that you are blameless," said the King, returning to his sterner mood.

"That shall be done speedily, my liege. You are aware that, immediately after the arrest, his lordship of Mar became afflicted with sudden swoonds. We sought no chirurgeon's aid because we feared treachery might be used to remove him from your Majesty's guardianship."

"Dolts that you were, had you not means at your command to render treachery impossible?"

"Our responsibility made cowards of us all. But what skill or cunning we could bring to bear upon his malady we used. He still grew weak, and I, noting this, determined that to-morrow we should seek proper aid. Saints pardon my delay! To-night his lordship entered his bath. He spoke of much feebleness, but of no pain, as Hommel, who acted as his chamberlain, closed the door of the bathroom. We had no thought of the dread danger in which his malady placed him, and we tarried for his summons for Hommel to attend him."

"What followed?"

"The summons never came. We did not count the lapse of time at first, for we were busy discussing what chirurgeon of skill might be with most security called to his lordship's assistance. By-and-by we began to marvel that he spent so long a space in his bath. Still we waited his pleasure to call; but when another half-hour had turned on the dial, we knocked at the door. No voice answered us; and becoming alarmed lest some calamity had happened, we forced the door."

"And found?"

"And found his lordship dead. He had been taken with one of his swoonds whilst in the bath, his head had sunk below the water, and he was suffocated where the least sound, the least cry for help, would have brought friends to rescue him."

The monarch shuddered slightly, and he remained an instant steadily scrutinizing Cochrane's visage for the least sign that might betoken falsehood.

"Did you leave him there? Did you make no effort to restore him?"

"We were at first horror-stricken and frightened for

the consequences of the misfortune to ourselves. But a moment after I tried with all my strength and skill to win him back to life, whilst Leonard sought a chirurgeon. The man came, and his cunning availed no more than mine. Finding that my Lord Mar was beyond hope of recovery, I resolved at all hazards to myself to ride hither and inform you of his fate. That is all, my liege, and it is the simple verity."

"You swear that it is so?" said James, huskily.

"I swear it."

The king pressed his hand on his brow, closing his eyes as if the spectacle his imagination conjured up were too horrible for his endurance. It seemed as if he wished to believe the bearer of these sad tidings blameless of any part in forwarding this event, and yet his instinct persuaded him that the facts had been narrated in a garbled fashion, concealing the real cause of the swoond which had resulted in the death of Mar. But even at that moment, so effectually had his imagination been played upon, and his dread of the growing influence of his brothers had been so fostered and magnified, that he could not avoid the miserable thought that Mar's death removed at least one powerful foe from his path.

He was grieved by the event, horrified by its nature, and yet he could not shut his eyes to the advantage, poor as that might be, which he reaped from it.

Whilst he stood faltering, whether to accept the statement he had received as a faithful one, or to deliver Cochrane over to the guard, the door of the room was abruptly thrust open, and he was startled by the distant sound of a tumult of voices more than by the apparition of a woman, who thus, without leave, interrupted his privacy.

It was Katherine who presented herself in this strange manner, with an expression of terror and anxiety on her countenance.

She hesitated at sight of Cochrane, and he regarded her with a look of amazed curiosity. Then she advanced boldly to the King, and displayed Queen Margaret's signet.

"This has been my pass to your Majesty's presence," she said eagerly; "and she who gave it me implores you to save yourself, for your life is beset. Angus and his followers have forced an entrance to the palace, bent upon avenging the murder of my lord of Mar."

The ominous announcement which was made in this abrupt fashion, whilst his Majesty's mind was still in great perturbation about the very subject that had roused his fiery courtiers to action against him, had the effect of stupefying him for a moment. He stood staring at the fair messenger of the Queen in blank bewilderment.

Cochrane, however, after the first bound of alarm and surprise that the vengeance he dreaded should have been sprung so speedily, rushed out of the ante-room to inquire the meaning of the disturbance, which was rapidly becoming louder as it approached the royal apartments.

The sound struck upon the King's ears like a dismal note of warning, and was heard above the wild tumult of the storm that was still raging. All the weakness and indecision of his character beset him at this moment. His vanity, and his keen sense of what was due to his authority, his consciousness of the degrading cowardice which his flight would display, prompted him to hold his ground as became one in his high place, and to awe his rebellious barons into submission by the calm firmness and resolution of Majesty.

He knew that he should stand before them as one raised above the petty fear of personal safety; but he also knew that his resolution would fail him when the troop of wrathful nobles stood in his presence demanding instant vengeance for the crime they believed had been committed by his favourite, and ready to take it if it were refused. The thought of his own helplessness to control the fiery spirits which he was aware would be opposed to him, and the thought of the shame which any display of weakness must bring upon him, counselled flight as the readiest means of escaping the dilemma in which he was placed.

The desire to maintain the dignity of the crown was as strong as his anxiety to avoid the exposure of its wearer's weakness, and between the two sentiments he remained pitifully inactive and irresolute.

Katherine could not guess the conflict of thought and emotion which was afflicting him, and she was distressed by the fancy that he discredited her tidings, or that she had failed to make him comprehend his danger.

"Your Majesty has not understood me," she said, with respectful anxiety—indeed, she seemed as anxious about

his safety as the most devoted adherent could have been—"or you doubt my tidings; but here is the Queen's signet. Your own ears will satisfy you of the approach of the conspirators; and I, unhappily, have too sure a knowledge of their intent. In the name of my generous protectress and mistress, I implore your Grace to seek safety in some place of hiding."

"Yes, yes, I understand," muttered the King, bewilderedly; "but who are the men—the traitors? By our royal hand they shall pay the penalty."

"For your life do not dally with the few minutes which are still left to your Grace. What matter who or what the men are? All that you can learn when the present peril is over."

"We shall call the guard."

"It is too late. Those who are faithful to their trust have been overpowered by this time. Oh, my liege, my liege, why stay here when you are but one man against so many?"

"Because I am their King."

He pronounced the words with a dignity and calmness inspired by the sense of his high office. Had he been gifted with the strength of character to sustain that bearing it is probable that even Angus and his followers would have been as much impressed by it as Katherine was.

She was silenced, although still apprehensive of the consequences of what appeared to her the very rashness of kingly valour.

Cochrane rushed back to the chamber, closing and barring the door behind him.

"It is too true, my liege," he cried, breathlessly; "you are trepanned—the knaves have overcome the guard and are close upon us. Fly, your Grace, fly, and I will linger behind to give you what time the sacrifice of my life may win for you; or to gather what assistance may be found to rescue us all from the bloodhounds who assail us."

All the dignity which had been displayed by the King a moment before was changed into a manner of nervous agitation. He dropped his mantle from his shoulders, exposing his shirt of mail, but he seemed incapable of moving without direction. He eagerly sought for some weapon of defence, and not having a sword, he clutched the hilt of his poniard spasmodically.

At this moment Rogers and the others, who had been disturbed by the various unusual sounds they had heard, ventured forth from their place of retirement.

"Away you, Rogers and Torphichen," cried Cochrane, as soon as he observed them; "there may yet be time for you to quit the palace; hasten to the town, rouse the soldiers who are quartered there, and bring them to the help of our master. Away! Be silent and be speedy on your lives."

Rogers and the master of fence had heard enough to comprehend something of the position of affairs, and without a word they wheeled about to seek egress by the same passage which had admitted Cochrane to the royal apartments.

"Hark you, Innis," continued Sir Robert, rapidly, addressing the armour-bearer; "remain you here, there is no danger to you, for those who are coming hither seek higher game. If they find entrance, detain them while you can, and when they force you to speak bid them search yonder chamber."

The latter words were spoken under his breath, so that only Innis heard them distinctly. The apartment he indicated was the sleeping-room of his Majesty.

The armour-bearer, with a bend of the head, signified his readiness to obey.

Cochrane picked up the King's mantle and proceeded to the room to which he had just referred.

"This way, sir, this way. We shall baffle them yet, despite their cunning."

James followed him with hesitating steps, bitterly sensitive to the humiliation of his position, and yet too feeble of will to remain when the eager voice of Cochrane was calling upon him to fly.

Katherine, desirous of seeing that her mission was completed, hastened after them. As soon as she had crossed the threshold the door was closed by Cochrane and secured.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ATTACK ON THE KING.

“And they cast keivils them amang ;
 And keivils them between ;
 And they cast keivils them amang
 Wha suld gae kill the king.

“O, some said yea, and some said nay,
 Their words did not agree ;
 Till up and got him, Fause Foodrage,
 And swore it suld be he.”

Fause Foodrage.

FOR several minutes before the prime cause of all this disturbance had succeeded in leading his Majesty away, there had been loud knocking heard at the outer door of the suite of apartments. So loud and furious waxed the demand for admission that little more strength seemed to be requisite to beat the door down.

From that act of violence, however, they were restrained by the venerable Lord Gray, who was most anxious that the heat of the moment should not betray his companions into any excess of violence against the King.

“Remember, my lords and friends,” he said, “we come to demand justice from his Majesty, and not to insult his authority or alarm his mind, by rushing at him like a herd of wild Highland bulls, ready to gore him to death before he has had time to hear us or to grant our demand.”

“I tell you we must force our demand,” said Angus, hotly. “James is too woman-hearted to yield up to his favourites, even when he knows their guilt. They will lie to him, and they will persuade him to cheat us if he can. But by the blood of the Douglas there shall be little rest for him until the murder that has been done is requited, and Albany stands free amongst us.”

“You waste time, gentlemen,” said the Abbot Panther, approaching from the corridor as Angus concluded; “these doors are fast, and unless you mean to force them you may stand there till doomsday.”

“Force them, then,” ejaculated Angus.

“Nay, that would be an offence unpardonable against the King’s person. Follow me, and I will find an entry for you that will save time and trouble.”

The first to move after the prelate was Lamington, who had remained amidst the group of nobles silent, but watchful for the moment which might bring him into contact with Cochrane.

Angus and Lord Gray, with all the others, save half a dozen who were left to guard the door, followed. They were speedily conducted by the private passage—the same by which Rogers and Torphichen had just escaped—into the royal chambers.

There they found only Innis, the armour-bearer, who was immediately seized and roughly interrogated as to the whereabouts of his master. For some time, under the presence of alarm, and the effects of the shaking he had received, he avoided answering.

But at length, when he was threatened with the point of a sword, he directed the conspirators to the door of the bedroom, according to his instructions.

The door was instantly assailed, and, on finding it fast like the others, several minutes were occupied in excitedly discussing whether or not they should break it down. In the mean time, the communication with the ante-room had been opened by one of the party, Captain Douglas, and those who had been left on guard crowded into the apartment in which the chief members of the company were now assembled.

“It is for his Majesty’s sake as much as for aught else,” said Angus, darkly; “he is in the power of his minions, and Heaven knows how they may deal with him in the terror that he may deliver them into our hands. Break down the door. I say it in the King’s name.”

“In the King’s name it is opened to you,” said a woman’s voice, as the door was suddenly flung back.

“Katherine!” exclaimed Gordon under his breath, and drawing back a pace, astounded by her unexpected apparition at such a moment and in such a place.

There was a brief pause of amazement, and then some of the younger gallants laughed, whilst the elders frowned.

Katherine, however, was too intensely absorbed in her desire to gain time for the King’s retreat to observe the

laugh or frown, or to have comprehended the miserable suspicion they indicated, even if she had noted them.

But Lamington heard and saw, and his blood pringled with the shame of it, so that for the instant he was deprived of speech.

"Who is the wench?" said one.

"A fair one, i' faith," answered his neighbour, "whoever she be."

"By my soul, his Majesty's taste is perfect in the works of art," muttered another.

"The door is open, gentlemen," said Katherine with dignity; "you have found the only key which could undo the lock—your sovereign's name. Enter if it be your pleasure, for I will not believe that it is a regicide who demands admission with such a password."

"Where is the King, wench?" said Angus, sternly. "We were acquainted that he entered this room."

"He was here," she responded evasively, wishing to detain them as long as might be by an appearance of frankness which should disclose nothing.

"Answer straight, minion," thundered the irate earl, "else we may take means to compel your tongue to utter truth for once."

Katherine's cheeks became scarlet as the fact of the equivocal position in which she stood was thus rudely manifested to her. Before she had time to answer, Gordon sprang to her side. She had not had time to observe him in the crowd, but now, with an exclamation of joyful relief, she clung to his arm.

"You are mistaken, my lord, in the person you address," he said, haughtily; "how she comes to be here I cannot answer, but Katherine Janfarie is a lady of unstained honour, and he who gainsays me does so at the peril of his life."

Angus scowled; Lord Gray looked grave, and the others grinned.

"To that and more, in this lady's favour, I will pledge myself," said the Abbot, forcing his way to the side of his friends; "and I must pray you all to treat her with the respect due to one whom ill-fortune has placed in perilous ways."

"Your friends discover themselves under droll guises,

my Lord Abbot," retorted Angus, suspicious that there was some treachery hidden behind this singular interruption to their course; "but if they be worthy of the warrant you have given for them, the lady will not hesitate to acquaint us where we may find the King."

"If she has knowledge of it she will not hesitate, I stake my word," rejoined Panther, suavely, "when she learns that no harm is intended towards his Grace—whom Heaven keep in safety—and that it is the knave Cochrane whom we seek. Answer his lordship's question, Mistress Katherine, if you can."

She hesitated, and then spoke with proud coldness.

"I accept your pledge, my Lord Abbot, that this goodly company who have broken upon his Majesty's privacy mean him no harm."

"Our honour is pledged to that—is it not, gentlemen?"

"Most faithfully," said Lord Gray, and several echoed his words.

But Angus remained silent, too haughty to give a pledge which he deemed none should have required from him, notwithstanding the threatened attitude he occupied at the moment.

"You seek Cochrane?" she exclaimed, remembering with what eagerness he had hurried the King away; "he has given his Majesty reason to believe that you were about to attack his royal person."

"And so has obtained protection for himself whilst he makes us seem blackest villains, by hurrying the King away from us," added Lamington.

"As I guessed," muttered Angus; "the more need to find his Majesty at once. Speak, mistress; whither fled he?"

"He went hence by a private passage, and Cochrane with him," she answered; "but I have no knowledge of their hiding-place."

"Follow me, some of you," cried the earl, "to the chambers of the Queen—spread the rest of you throughout the palace, and leave no corner that would hide a toad unsearched for the assassin Cochrane."

The command was acted upon, the instant it was uttered. Half a dozen accompanied Angus, and amongst them Panther, that he might be near his royal mistress in the emer-

gency, and that he might exercise what restraint he could upon the heated passions of his companions. The others seized the various lights which illuminated the King's apartments, and directed themselves to the search for the general foe.

Cochrane had need of all his courage and cunning this night, for those who were on his track had smarted under the slights his ambition and vanity had inflicted; many of them were kin to nobles and esquires who had been banished the court by his influence. They were men, too, of resolution, and conscious that their failure in this open outbreak against the favourites of James would result in their own compulsory retirement for a while, if in nothing worse.

Lamington alone remained with Katherine. A solitary taper shed a feeble light athwart the chambers of royalty which had been so recently ablaze and resonant with voices. Now they were deserted and filled with a ghostly silence, all the more remarkable from the bustle which had prevailed a little while previously.

Katherine watched the last of the conspirators disappear, and then she turned eagerly to Gordon.

"Lamington—Lamington," she cried, "do *you* credit them—are *you* satisfied that they mean the King no harm—and why are you leagued with these men?"

"Because I love you, and because I hate Cochrane. That is why I have leagued myself with those whom he has wronged, and who thirst like me for his destruction."

"But do they seek it wisely in thus breaking through all law and exposing themselves—exposing you, Lamington, to the suspicion of the foulest treason?"

"There is no time for explanation, Katherine," he said, with a strange tone of sadness in his voice, arising from the many conflicting emotions which her presence inspired, and which their singular meeting this night had served to heighten; "I am with them for reasons which have satisfied me that theirs is the only course whereby justice may be wrought."

"And if they fail?"

"If they fail I perish utterly, for death will be the smallest penalty that our victors will requite us with. Angus and the rest have staked much upon this venture,

but I stake more than all of them, for my hopes of winning you rest on the hazard."

"Then pause now; it is not too late."

"I dare not pause without being counted doubly false; for I can only prove the worth of the motive that has tempted me so far by pushing straight forward to the end."

"You will destroy all—the good Queen Margaret is our friend. She has given me her protection; she has made me one of her own closest attendants, and she has pledged herself to set you right in the estimation of the King—she has pledged herself that all you most desire shall be granted in spite of twenty Cochranes, if we will only have patience for a little while. She has given her gracious promise for all this, and the Queen has never failed her word."

"I do not doubt it, and from my soul I am grateful to her; but it is too late to turn."

"Can nothing stay you—not even me?"

"Nothing can stay me, when to stay is to lose you. Cease your persuasions, Katherine, and help me to the end we both desire. We have already wasted time, and I am a laggard when I should be most active. As you are the cause of my sloth, be you likewise the means of proving my industry."

"In what can I aid you?"

"Show me which way has Cochrane fled. That is how you can aid me, and remember upon my finding him to-night depends our future."

She did not answer.

"You hesitate, and with me, when you have learned how much depends upon the issue of this night's work!" he ejaculated, drawing back from her in wonder.

"If I have hesitated, Lamington, it has been for your sake—the soldiers have been summoned from the town; the guard will be released, and your escape will be impossible."

"Ha!—the soldiers already called in from the town—the more need for haste. Show me the way, if you are as wishful for our speedy union as I would fain believe you to be."

"If I am? Oh, Lamington!" she exclaimed, reproachfully.

"Prove it, then, and let Cochrane be swept for ever from our path."

"As you will, and the Sacred Mother help us both."

She took the remaining taper from its stand, and approached an ebony cabinet which stood near the bedstead. She drew open one of the panels, and displayed a recess filled with various articles of curiosity. These she thrust aside.

"I do not think his Majesty would have moved from his place had it not been for Cochrane," she explained, as she proceeded; "he drew his Grace away and would not permit him to encounter the nobles, as he wished to do, even when I delivered to him the Queen's message begging him to fly—for she had been cruelly alarmed by what little she was enabled to learn from one of her attendants."

"Ay, Cochrane no doubt feared to let him act as his Majesty's own good sense dictated, and as a monarch should have acted."

"He almost dragged his Grace away, for he seemed to become too much confused to know what he was doing," Katherine continued; "it seemed as if Cochrane were the master rather than the servant, and in my anxiety at the moment I obeyed him as though I did not recognize in him my bitterest foe. He bade me replace these things as you see them now, and whilst he was moving them, as we are doing, I watched him closely, and so discovered the trick of this passage."

As she spoke, a portion of the back of the cabinet yielded to her touch, and sliding to one side, disclosed the stone wall of the chamber. Again, obedient to a cunningly contrived spring, a part of the masonry revolved noiselessly on a hinge, revealing an opening only large enough to permit one person to pass at a time. Gordon went first, and Katherine reclosed the various traps which concealed the outlet.

Then she took the lead, holding the taper high to show the path.

He wished to go first, but she was obstinate. She did not explain her dread, lest from some unknown recess he might be stricken down without the possibility of raising his hand in self-defence.

Whilst she preceded him, holding the light, and with

its aid scanning every dark, suspicious nook, there was at least the probability that she would be able to give him warning before he could be assaulted. So she was resolute, and no entreaty of his could move her from the determination to be his guide.

She suddenly slackened her pace, and listened eagerly for any sound that might indicate the neighbourhood of others than themselves.

"Do you hear aught or see aught, that you linger?" he said, lowering his voice instinctively.

"No," she rejoined, in the same whispering tone; "but the last words I heard Cochrane utter were that the vaults would be the safest place. I fear that we may pass the entrance to the stair that leads to them."

"Think you his Majesty would go with him?"

"I think he would proceed at once to the Queen's apartments, where he would be most safely concealed. Ah! here is the stair."

They descended a steep staircase and reached a lower passage, the walls of which were so damp, and the atmosphere so close, that no doubt was left that this was the region of the vaults.

They had only advanced a few paces cautiously when Lamington suddenly wheeled about at the light sound of a footstep behind them, coming from the direction on which they had turned their backs.

A man darted up the staircase, and instantly disappeared in the darkness.

Gordon would have followed, but his guide restrained him.

"It was his Majesty; I saw his mantle," she said.

"Then Cochrane is left behind. Now, St. Andrew, give strength to my arm, for no holier cause was ever served than that of destroying so foul a knave. Give me the light."

As he snatched it from her hand she had no option but to follow him with what speed she could. He rushed towards the place from which the man who had just ascended the staircase appeared to have come.

A voice called hoarsely, "Are they there?"

Guided by the sound, Lamington burst into a low, damp, noisome-smelling vault. He heard an exclamation of terror, but at first could see nothing.

Presently his eyes became accustomed to the place, and he descried a man crouching in the furthest corner.

"Draw, villain, and save yourself, if you may," shouted Lamington, raising his sword, "or die defenceless, as the noble Earl of Mar fell under your murderous hands."

The sword was drawn back to thrust, when, with a wild scream of horror, Katherine arrested his arm.

"IT IS THE KING!" she cried.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHICH IS THE TRAITOR?

"May I find grace, my sovereign liege,
Grace for my loyal men and me?
For my name it is Johnnie Armstrong,
And subject of yours, my liege,' said he.

"Away, away, thou traitor strang!
Out o' my sight soon may'st thou be;
I grantit never a traitor's life,
And now I'll not begin with thee."

Johnnie Armstrong.

GORDON'S arm was paralyzed. His heart seemed to bound in his throat, choking him; his eyes became dazed, and a thousand lights appeared to be glancing before them, whilst he could see nothing. He remained transfixed in his position—his sword raised, ready to thrust, and the taper held above his head.

When the King had asked the question which had disclosed his hiding-place, he had been under the impression that the footsteps he heard were those of Cochrane, who had just left him, returning with the news that the conspirators had discovered his retreat, and he had spoken in his eagerness to learn the worst.

It had been his wish to take refuge in the Queen's apartments, but Cochrane, aware of the small esteem in which her Majesty held him, feared that to pacify Angus and his companions, and to insure the safety of the King, she would not hesitate to deliver him into the hands of his enemies as soon as she was informed that he was the cause

and object of the outbreak. So he had persuaded his master to fly to the vaults, and had left him there whilst at no little risk he proceeded to seek assistance.

There was small generosity in his apparent devotion, however. He had simply chosen the least of two dangers. Safe as he might have been in this place of hiding, he knew that the safety would only continue for a time, and that probably in a very brief space his foes would fall upon him. Therefore he preferred to brave the more immediate hazard for the chance of finding help, and by another bold stroke defeating his pursuers. Then he might put what interpretation he pleased on the conduct of the barons, and his own position would be more secure than ever. To fall a prisoner into their hands in this hole, like a fox run to earth, would be irremediable ruin, even if his life were not taken on the spot.

The King discovered the blunder he had made the instant Lamington had answered his inquiry by appearing with the light; and fancying that a troop of regicides were behind him, he had crouched back in the farthest corner of the cell.

Everything seemed to confirm his suspicion of the man's purpose, and the short instant which intervened between the discovery and Katherine's recognition, was to the unfortunate monarch a long period of acutest agony.

Now, observing that the impending blow was arrested, and that his assailant made no movement to effect the threat he had just uttered, James rose slowly from his undignified posture, but he was obliged to lean heavily against the wall for support. He was sick with terror, and with the sudden revulsion of emotion which he experienced in his confused sense that by some miraculous means he had been saved from the wretched fate which a second ago had been imminent.

Katherine could not utter anything more than that exclamation which rung in her lover's ears with a sound of inexpressible horror; but the horror was mingled with thankfulness as he slowly began to realize the position, and to perceive from what a crime he had been opportunely rescued.

Katherine was the first to recover from the stupor which affected them all. She threw herself on her knees

before the monarch, thus placing herself between him and Gordon.

"Your Majesty will pardon the blind haste of one who mistook you for him who is your Grace's worst foe. Oh, Heaven is kind, my liege, and has spared you whilst it has saved one who loves you from a deed that would have made him accursed in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world for ever. Speak, speak, your Majesty. You will pardon his haste, which the saints above know was intended for your service."

James motioned to her feebly with his hand; but whether in token that he granted her prayer, or merely that he desired her to be silent, it was impossible to tell.

Lamington was roused by the sound of her voice, and he dropped on his knee.

The instant he moved the King started, and watched him nervously.

Lamington bared his head, seized his sword by the blade, and extended the hilt towards James, who shrank from it, whilst at the same time he seemed to remember the humiliating character in which such a movement presented him, and he made an effort to recover himself.

"Your Majesty can yourself judge how miserably blind I have been," said Gordon, huskily. "I am your true servant, and will prove it with my life."

"Yes, yes—and you were like to prove it with mine enow," muttered the King, struggling to speak with some degree of dignity and calmness, but glancing anxiously toward the entrance in the hope of seeing Cochrane arrive with the guard to assure him of safety.

"The circumstances are not altered, sire, since I entered this place. Your gracious person is as much at my mercy now as then. You cannot, sire, doubt my fidelity, when I offer you my sword; and, if it please you, I am ready to pay the penalty of my blunder and place myself at your mercy."

"He is innocent, sire—innocent of any thought of treachery to you," cried Katherine; "and your Grace is too good, too generous, to blame him for the accident which has made him appear in such threatening fashion before you. The guilt is mine, sir, if any guilt there be in this, for it was I who led him hither; it was I who made him

believe that he would find the enemy he sought. Grace, grace, my liege, for both, or let me alone bear your wrath."

James snatched the sword from Gordon's hand, but he showed no intention of using it for the purpose for which it had been presented to him. Resting the point on the ground, he leaned on the hilt whilst he spoke hoarsely—

"Who and what are you? Why are you here?"

"Bertrand Gordon, of Lamington, so please your Grace. I came here to seek Robert Cochrane, who has defamed me in your esteem, who has endeavoured to force from me this lady whose troth has been long plighted to me. I thought to find here him who has this night foully murdered your royal brother, the Earl of Mar."

"Have you proof of that? Give it to me if you have, and his head shall answer for it."

"I have no other proof than the averment of a faithful servant of his lordship, who, on discovering what had been done, rode poste haste to Linlithgow, and made known his dread tidings to the Earl of Angus and Lord Gray."

"They are the avowed foes of Sir Robert Cochrane, and you yourself proclaim an enmity bitter as theirs."

"I have had bitter cause to do so, my liege."

"Why has not the messenger come to us? We are the proper head of the State, and the nearest kin of him who has been slain—as you say."

"The man feared that Cochrane would be with your Majesty before him, and that you would give credit to whatever cunning lie he might devise, so that the courier would have suffered for his rashness in opposing his own unaided testimony to that of one so powerful."

"The knave must have given us little credit for judgment, else he would have known that in a matter so nearly affecting our own person we would have given it grave consideration, in despite of the little belief we might have given so wild a story."

"He erred in that, my liege; but the man deemed it more respectful to you that the charge should be made known by the tongues of those who were privileged to speak frankly in your presence."

"And therefore sought the help of gentlemen whose feud with the accused would at once cast discredit on their

accusation. But the matter shall be looked to. Where is the fellow, and what is his tale?"

"He asserts that when his master entered his bath, he was not permitted to attend him. Two hours later he was summoned to the room, and there beheld Mar dead. He had been smothered—by accident, Cochrane and the others stated—but he was assured in his own mind that it was not so. When he sought to uncover the throat of his master he was prevented by Cochrane; and when he craved permission to leave the house it was denied him. He made his escape by stealth, and rode hither to tell what had been done."*

"And on the word of a mere scullion you charge Sir Robert Cochrane with murder! It is like an enemy to transform an accident into a crime."

"He was no scullion, sire, but the faithful follower and close friend of your royal brother, a gentleman by birth and training."

"Cochrane has been my attached follower, and one whose genius lifts him to a level with the proudest of those whose ignorance despises him."

"I see that it is useless to debate this further with your Majesty."

"It is no matter for debate, sir," said the King, irritably, and now oblivious to the fears which a little while ago had rendered him so distraught; "it is a matter for proof, and the proof you shall produce, or by our royal hand you shall pay the forfeit of this most villainous charge. What sound is that?"

Katherine hastened to the entrance, and peered forth.

"Armed men, your Grace, descending the stairs with torches," she answered, in a quick undertone.

"Bar them out; do not let one of them enter," cried James, again beset by his alarm.

"There is no danger, sire," said Gordon, rising to his feet; "but if you will give me back my sword, none shall approach you save over my body, unless it be your pleasure."

The monarch, scarcely knowing what he did—forgetful of the distrust with which he had regarded Lamington, in

* Historians are not agreed as to whether the Earl of Mar was smothered in his bath or bled to death.

his dread of those who approached now—flung the weapon to him.

Gordon sprang to the entrance sword in hand, just in time to encounter Cochrane, whose eyes were glistening with triumph, and at whose back was a detachment of the royal guard.

“Hold there, all of you,” cried Lamington. “Advance a step further, and it is at your peril.”

“Stand aside, villain,” retorted Cochrane, drawing. “Upon him, gentlemen, in the King’s name.”

“Cochrane,” ejaculated Gordon, “on guard, sir, on guard.”

“I strike for the King, and thank Heaven we have arrived in time to rescue him from your murderous hands.”

“That trick shall not serve you, sir,” rejoined Lamington with ineffable scorn, for he detected at once the ground which his opponent purposed taking in charging him with an attempt upon the King’s life.

Their swords crossed, and the gentlemen of the guard, partly because their leader blocked the entrance, and partly because they had not much inclination to make a general attack upon one man, did not move to prevent the affray.

But his Majesty, as soon as he perceived the real state of affairs, advanced, addressing the combatants authoritatively.

“Put down your weapons, sirs, I command you. What, are private brawls to have vent in our presence? Down with your swords, and be thankful if the present confusion prove excuse enough for the disrespect you show us.”

Cochrane, with a submissive bow, instantly obeyed, but Gordon hesitated. He was too hot to recognize the folly and impolicy of giving vent to the wrath which stirred within him at the sight of his foe, when the King laid his express command upon him to desist. The wrong which this man had done to him and to others seemed too monstrous to be laid aside for a moment: it was like temporizing with the blackest guilt.

So he stood irresolute, his sword still raised, and glancing at the monarch questioningly, as if seeking his permission to renew the assault.

Katherine, with a woman’s quickness, perceived the false impression which his conduct was likely to convey to

all, and especially to James. She was by his side, and whispered eagerly—

“Obey—obey, for my sake, if not your own. Your hesitation will do more to hurt our cause than all the infamy that Cochrane may charge you with.”

Still he hesitated, and the King, who at first observed his insubordination with surprise, now regarded him scowlingly, and with a return of all his worst suspicions concerning him.

The guard had by this time penetrated the chamber, and their torches lit up the dark slimy walls of the vault. They surrounded their master, who, feeling himself secure from danger, and possessed of the power to give his authority effect, forgot the helpless condition in which Lamington had found him. Like all weak natures when suddenly released from trouble, his Majesty thought more of the indignities he had suffered than of those who had relieved him. He remembered in what questionable shape Gordon had appeared, and, overlooking the devotion he had displayed, was ready to vent upon him some of those pangs with which he had been afflicted in his humiliation—the memory of which was still painful to him.

The pause was a brief one.

“How, sir?” ejaculated the King, irritably. “Has our misfortune so lowered us in your estimation that you set our plain command at naught? By my faith, there is need for amendment here. You shall learn, sir, that if you have found us in a somewhat awkward dilemma, we have lost none of our power or the humour to punish treason. Something in your manner made us doubt that you could be the traitor you have been represented, albeit your actions gave full warrant for the charge. Our doubts are being cleared, thanks to your own stubbornness. Deliver up your sword, sir, and your affairs shall be dealt with as they merit.”

“A prisoner!” exclaimed Lamington, unable to believe that his Majesty could mean to place him so completely at the mercy of his enemy.

The King made a haughty gesture in reply.

Cochrane, with a smile of satisfaction, furtively watched the effect of this new sign of his triumph on the man he hated and, in some respects, feared.

The captain of the guard advanced a pace to receive the prisoner's sword. Lamington started back, his eyes glistening with indignation.

"Stay your hands, gentlemen, for by St. Andrew this is no fair duty that is put upon you, although it is the King who orders it." Then, turning towards his Majesty, "I came hither, sire, to-night, hoping to render you loyal service; that I did not come with any treacherous thought toward your Grace, your own conscience will bear witness. The high degree of the service I was but now about to give you, you will not be ready to own; but you should know that I would have saved you from the scorn which to-morrow all Scotland will cast upon its King when it learns that he has screened the murderer of his brother from the just retribution which Heaven and law call for."

The boldness of this speech astounded James, whilst the earnestness with which it was uttered impressed him sufficiently to recall the suspicions with which he had first received Cochrane's tidings of Mar's death. But the scornful reference to the blame which would attach to himself demanded a sharp retort.

"Peace, braggart! Are we not fitting judge of our own honour? Still brandishing your weapon in our face? Yield it up at once, or by my soul we shall attain you with an attempt upon our royal person."

"Oh, sire, your own heart will tell you that there is no drop of treacherous blood in my veins. To your Grace I surrender my sword," he said, dropping it at the King's feet, "but to none other. Preserve it, sire, in memory of this night; and when the end comes, which all men who love you foresee and dread, remember it is the sword that might have saved a throne."

Again the monarch was impressed by the passionate earnestness of his manner, which imparted to the words a tone of prophecy. He peered uneasily at the speaker's face, which was pale, and marked with an expression of regret! But the regret was for his Majesty, not for himself.

"Umph! He looks honest," muttered James to himself; and then glancing quickly at Cochrane, who was surveying the scene with placid content, "and, by my soul,

the other looks less honest than he has ever seemed in my eyes before. But we will scrutinize this matter—we will prove it to the quick, and justice shall be done.”

He nodded to the captain of the guard, who understood that movement as a sign that he was to lead his prisoner away. Having picked up the sword, he turned to him.

During these passages Katherine had remained silent; but she had listened to everything, and she had heard everything with agonized suspense. Once or twice she had attempted to interrupt Gordon, in order to prevent his excitement betraying him into speech that could only have the worst consequence.

But when she observed with what content Cochrane was regarding her, she drew herself up and stood proud and calm awaiting the issue, whatever it might be, without any outward symptom of the dismay with which her heart was fluttering.

She felt that Lamington was speaking as became a loyal gentleman, and one who had been cruelly misapprehended and wronged. She would not disgrace the love he bore her by any exhibition of a woman's weakness which could only distress him the more, without offering the slightest probability of helping him.

So she stood by his side, her hand resting on his arm; silent, but with a dignity in her bearing and a contempt in her regard of the King's favourite which expressed her testimony to the truth of all her lover said.

There were several amongst the gentlemen of the guard who envied Lamington the position he occupied, notwithstanding its peril, and who would have readily changed places with him, if she would have taken the same place by their side with the same devotion.

When he had done speaking those dangerous words of truth to the King, she pressed his arm tightly, and looked in his face with a proud, sad smile that gave him comfort and strength.

“Thanks, Katherine, thanks,” he whispered, huskily, whilst he took her hands, clasping them fondly with his own; “you at least understand me—but you will suffer with me. Ay, there is the cruel barb with which yonder wretch can reach my heart. But courage, Kate, courage; it is better for me that I should die an honourable man,

striving to do loyal service to my King, than to live dishonoured and an exile, even with you to share my fate."

"I will share it, Bertrand, even if it be death; and I am prouder of your love now, when you seem to have sacrificed it and yourself by the rash words you have spoken to his Majesty, than I ever could have been had no cloud darkened our path."

"Brave heart, it is worth enduring their worst spite to know how much you love me, and how worthy you are to be loved."

"Ah, Bertrand, it is in bitter moments such as these that hearts are tried, and mine tells me that you have acted nobly, although it trembles at the fury of to-morrow. But all is not lost yet, perhaps; the Queen is generous, and the King is just when he is permitted to follow the dictates of his own nature."

"Expect nothing from him—you have seen how his trust in Cochrane is undisturbed even by the murder of his brother."

"Then, if we find no release, no justice, you will fall, knowing that your country honours you, and that the King will sorely rue his own blindness and the wrong he has done you."

"That gives me little comfort whilst I know that you are left behind defenceless against that knave's snares."

"Not defenceless, whilst I can raise my arm with more than strength enough to carry a poniard home; and not defenceless whilst my brothers live."

That reference sent a thrill of sickness through Lamington, so that he was almost glad when the captain respectfully touched his arm.

This brief colloquy had taken place during the few moments his Majesty had spent in musing between the dictates of his better nature—which prompted him to release the prisoner and to accept his parole to be in attendance whenever he might be required—and the evil suggestions of his favourite, which counselled no mercy and no confidence.

His Majesty roused himself from his reverie with an impatient "Tush!" and, addressing Cochrane sharply—

"Is the palace clear? May the monarch of Scotland

crawl out of this rat's hole into which you thrust him and show himself again in his proper chambers?"

"The way is clear, so please your Majesty. Thanks to the prompt measures we adopted, your enemies are routed without a struggle."

"My enemies!" echoed the King, drily. "Ay, man, Rob, yonder chiel would have had me believe that they were yours, and not mine at all."

"Long may they be so, my liege, for so long will you reign in peace and content."

"Exactly," said James, slowly, eyeing his favourite with a searching glance, which that personage bore unmoved. "Come, we will quit this den; it smells too much of the charnel-house to be pleasant, when we have time to note such trifling affairs—that is, trifling by the estimate of our blustering barons, who have no finer sense than to know when a sword is well tempered or a bowshaft straight."

Saying this in a manner which was a droll mixture of sarcastic contempt and humour, he began to move from the place.

"Your matters will be looked to in the morning, sir," he said, as he passed Lamington; and at the same time to Katherine, "Follow us, madam, that we may see you properly bestowed. We owe you so much for the labour you have undergone on our behalf."

He disappeared from the chamber, attended by Cochrane and twelve guardsmen.

Katherine, dreading lest Cochrane should be sent back to seek her, hastily bade Gordon farewell, and followed. He, divining her reason, did not attempt to stay her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE QUEEN'S VICTORY.

“Then east and west the word has gane,
 And soon to Branxholm Hall it flew,
 That Elliott of Lairistan, he was slain,
 And how or why no living knew.”

The Laird of Lairistan.

THE triumph which Cochrane had obtained was due to the happy accident of the purpose of the conspirators being mistaken for an outbreak against the King in favour of the imprisoned Albany—an event which the wily favourite had caused his master to believe might take place at any moment.

The Queen knew how much reason his Majesty had given the nobles for displeasure in retaining as his prime confidant and adviser one so generally detested as Cochrane. She was conscious at the same time of something of her royal consort's weakness, whilst she could not be blind to the warlike merits of Albany, which had obtained for him the respect of the people, who were incapable of appreciating the finer qualities of their monarch. Aware of all this, she dreaded the approaching crisis; and, despite the assurances of Panther, at the first murmur of the advent of the angry barons she became alarmed for the King's safety.

A frightened attendant brought to her an exaggerated and distorted account of the appearance of the barons, and of the overpowering of the guard. Thereupon she had despatched Katherine to the King, whilst she herself hastened to the sleeping-chamber of the prince, that she might be prepared to protect him from any danger that might threaten his innocent head.

The apartment adjoined her own, and she entered it softly, in order not to waken the little sleeper. The ladies-in-waiting were careful to observe the same caution as their mistress; and as they only crossed the threshold, closing the door noiselessly behind them, the prince slept on undisturbed.

The Queen advanced to the couch, and, seating herself beside it, watched the calm face of her child—a fair, frank face, on which the passions of life had not yet imprinted any baleful line; but the shadow of the stormy future through which he was to pass to his chivalrous fall at Flodden seemed to be already lowering upon it. The affectionate eyes of the mother rested on the child with the greedy devotion of one gazing upon a treasure that is in peril of being stolen.

The arrival of Angus and his companions was announced by a loud summons at the outer door, and then by the heavy tread of armed men in the apartments which the ladies had just quitted. The summons was presently repeated at the door of the prince's room.

It had been bolted by the ladies-in-waiting, who now looked anxiously to their mistress for instructions.

"Undo the bar and let them enter," said Margaret, calmly, although she was very pale, and instinctively cast her arm round her son to give him all the protection of which she was capable.

Angus entered first, frowning, and his huge form drawn to its full height in the wrath which swelled his breast. He was followed by Lord Gray, quiet and respectful, and immediately after entered the Abbot, who had remained behind an instant to persuade the others to remain outside.

Their entrance wakened the prince, who started up with an exclamation of half wonder and half fear. But as soon as he recognized the persons who occupied the chamber, he rose to his knees smiling, and resting a hand on his mother's shoulder, he cried—

"Is it morning, cousin Angus? and are we bound a-hawking?"

"The hawks are on the wing already, so please your highness, but the quarry is out of sight, and I fear our humour would not make the sport pleasing to you," answered the earl, gruffly.

The boy was astonished by the manner of this reply, and looked with an expression of childish puzzlement from the speaker to the Queen.

"Do they fly hawks in the palace now?" he inquired, simply.

"The hawk flies whither its prey leads," said Angus.

"I trust, my Lord Angus, the prey has not led you here," said Margaret, with quiet dignity.

"It is even so, madam, for we seek the King."

"Has he frightened you, mother? I felt you start," said the prince; and then, turning to the earl, his fair face flushed with childish indignation. "Angus, you are saucy because you are so big; but I will be big too, some day."

"Heaven grant it so," replied the earl, with rough sincerity, "and wherefore, as your highness would bid me beware how I carry myself now, I accept the reminder."

"I would remind you, too, Angus, that nobody stands covered in my mother's presence except the King."

The boy was standing up on his couch now, and was pronouncing his admonitions with a gravity that would have been laughable at any other time.

Angus, instead of being annoyed by the singular address of the young prince, was so far pleased that his frown faded under an expression of admiration.

"That check also I accept from your highness with proper submission," he responded, whilst he removed the plumed hat from his head, "and say again, Heaven grant you long life, and may your present spirit lose no whit of its bravery as years advance."

"So say we and all Scotland," added the Abbot, with solemnity.

"Your Majesty will pardon the neglect I have shown without meaning offence," continued Angus; "the evil humour which the sorry events of this night have roused in me must plead my excuse. Your Grace knows that I have as little of the courtier's fine ways as of his baseness; but rough as my bearing may be, you have no more devoted servant than Archibald Douglas."

"We believe it, Angus," said the Queen, with confidence, "and in that belief your offence is already pardoned. Now tell us the meaning of this untimely visit with armour on, and angry brows. My lords, you look, all of you, more like a band of dangerous rebels than of liege men who seek redress or justice at the hands of their sovereign."

"So please your Grace," said the Abbot, "these gentlemen have been much disturbed to-night by a tale which is too horrible for your Majesty's ears, and they seek the King, that prompt retribution may be taken. Not finding

his Grace, and fearing that he has been ill-advised—as has happened more than once before—to shun the audience which we all demand in the great name of justice, we have come hither to pray our gracious Queen to use what influence she can command to obtain for us the immediate audience we desire.”

“What is the tale you deem too horrible for me to hear?” Margaret inquired. “If wrong has been done, it is well that we should know it, since you desire our aid in its requital. Speak, and be assured that our anxiety for the public weal is more than strong enough to overcome all private weakness.”

“The Earl of Mar is murdered,” said Angus, bluntly.

“Uncle Mar killed!” cried the prince, his eyes starting in astonishment; “and will I never see him again?”

“Not in this world, your highness.”

“Oh, who has done that? He is a traitor, and we cut off traitors’ heads.”

“Robert Cochrane has done it; and we call upon the King to do justice to himself, to his dead brother, and to the people,” responded the earl, warmly.

“Give him to Angus, mother,” exclaimed the prince, excitedly; “give him to Angus, and let him deal with the cruel man.”

The Queen had been startled and distressed by the ominous tidings, for she saw at once how much danger there was of the King being suspected of complicity in the crime, if he were not already suspected, as the words of Angus seemed to imply. She experienced much alarm, too, in the thought that his Majesty would be, more than likely, deceived by the plausible explanation which his favourite would be sure to have ready for him; and thus draw upon himself a still greater share of popular disfavour, and discontent with his government.

As soon as she had recovered from the first shock of dismay and surprise, she bade the prince be silent, and directed two of her ladies-in-waiting to attend him, whilst she led the way into her own audience-chamber.

His highness was not pleased to be deprived of the interesting conversation in which he had taken so active a part; and as Angus was slowly following the Queen he called to him to come back.

"What will you do with Cochrane?" he queried, resting his hand on the earl's wrist and looking up inquisitively at his stern face.

"What would your highness wish to be done with him?"

The prince reflected, whilst his finger mechanically traced the links of the earl's corslet.

"Give me your sword," he said presently.

Angus humoured the boy, and unsheathed his weapon.

Grasping the hilt with both hands, the prince exerted all his strength to raise the heavy sword, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm the while.

"If I could only hold this up," he said, slowly, "I would strike the bad man down, and I would help the good man to keep his ground."

"And I would stand by your highness whilst my hand could gripe a weapon. Good night, and pleasant dreams."

Angus hastened to rejoin his companions. He found them all standing before her Majesty, who was seated on a large chair of state, and apparently waiting only for his appearance.

"My lord of Angus," she said, deliberately, "the business which you have thrust upon us to-night is not one to be disposed of with the rude haste which you and our other friends seem to desire. The matter concerns our nearest interests, and must be dealt with resolutely, but not with the unbecoming haste which partakes more of the character of vengeance than of justice."

"The penalty of a deed such as this, madam," said Angus, "should be enforced without pause of any kind."

"Ay, if you are sure that you have found the guilty one."

"And we are sure of that."

"Who has seen Mar, and can attest that he has perished as you say?"

"We have certain tidings of his fate, madam, and we know too much of Cochrane to doubt his guilt or his object."

"My lords, I fear the little favour which you bear the man has caused you to judge him with more haste than your calmer humours would hold wise."

"So please your Grace," broke in Lord Gray, "we have

known the man too long not to have had more than time enough to judge of him with all due discretion. I am not one hasty to decide upon a violent action; but I pledge myself and those who are with me that the peace of the country will be endangered if Robert Cochrane is permitted to remain another day at Court—ay, if he is even permitted to live after this night's work."

"Your verdict, my Lord Gray, carries weight with it, and without doubt it is given upon due consideration. But we must act in this affair in open court, and to-morrow that shall be done by his Majesty and yourselves in council."

"To-morrow? Why not to-night?" ejaculated Angus.

"Because to-night we have no clear proof that this foul crime has been committed by one who is your avowed enemy; and to-morrow we will know the best and worst. Retire, then, gentlemen, for to-night; and we pledge our royal word that there shall be no let or hindrance to the deliberation and decision of the council to-morrow."

There was a general expression of disappointment on the countenances of the noblemen, who glanced from one to another, dissatisfied, but hesitating what reply should be given to her Majesty's proposal. All felt that by the morning Cochrane would have so wrought upon the King that it would be impossible to obtain his concession to the verdict which they would unanimously pronounce. Nothing but the sincere respect they entertained for the Queen could have prevented them at once repudiating even the short delay for which she asked.

Observing their hesitation she rose to her feet, as if preparatory to dismissing them.

"My lords, I call upon you as leal friends and subjects to yield to my request," she said, quietly.

"Madam, you could not have put our fealty to a severer test," responded Gray; "but I for one will prove it at the risk of whatever may hap to-morrow, and I submit to your Grace's will."

The others, although aware of the probability that when the council met they might find themselves stand in the position of the accused instead of the accusers, immediately followed the example Gray had set. All proclaimed their devotion to her Majesty, and their submission to her will, and they slowly retired.

Angus alone remained dourly silent, leaning on the hilt of his long sword. He was the last to move from his position. Starting from what appeared to be a gloomy reverie, he made a stiff salutation, and was about to withdraw, but he stopped, and approached the Queen.

"We yield to your Majesty," he said, somewhat huskily, and with a degree of agitation; "but to-morrow you will regret that you have driven us to it, and to-morrow we shall regret that we obeyed."

Margaret was not insensible to the probability that the grim prophecy would be fulfilled, but she only said—

"We will pray that the event may prove otherwise, my lord."

The earl bowed stiffly, and without another word withdrew.

That was the end of the outbreak which had threatened to become so serious. Angus and his companions retired with their followers to their respective lodgings in the town, and they appointed vigilant watches during the night to give them timely warning of any attempted reprisal from the palace. Not one of them felt sure of liberty or life so long as the King remained under the control of his favourites.

But Cochrane was too well pleased to avail himself of the advantage which their unexpected retreat gave him to think of taking offensive steps immediately. He could not guess the reason of their sudden change of policy; and he did not trouble himself much to inquire. It was enough for him that their present conduct would to all appearance confirm the representations he had made to the sovereign. It would be difficult for them to eradicate the first impressions made on the King, and by-and-by there would be opportunity found to retaliate.

He knew that it would be a hopeless venture to deal with the barons collectively; for then even all the power of his Majesty would only stand a chance of victory, and he could not count upon support to the last extremity. But he was satisfied that he could deal with his foes individually, mighty as they were; and he was content to bide his time. He was pursuing the cautious policy by which James II. had triumphed over the rebellious nobles of his reign.

Meanwhile every circumstance seemed to combine to further his more immediate interests. He already looked forward to the crowning object of his ambition—the title of the murdered Mar—as almost within his grasp. Next to that object in importance to him, if not equal to it, was the subjugation of Katherine, and that, too, he did not doubt of achieving.

Although apparently enjoying perfect freedom in her position as an attendant on Queen Margaret, she was under the constant surveillance of his spies. Lamington was now a prisoner, and he would take care that the charge against him was so coloured that his escape from the block or the scaffold would be impossible.

And so with all these favouring winds filling his sails he saw a clear course to harbour; for even Katherine must succumb to the wiles with which he was gradually surrounding her.

It was, therefore, with much secret self-congratulation that he followed James back to his proper apartments, and when Katherine craved permission to return immediately to the Queen with the tidings that his Majesty was safe, Cochrane made no attempt to interrupt her, or to attend her, as she had feared he would.

The relief she experienced from this event would have been considerably decreased if she could have divined that he allowed her to seem free only because he felt so sure of his power over her. She hastened to her generous guardian to make known the plight of Lamington and to crave her assistance in defending and rescuing him.

Cochrane informed his Majesty that his manœuvre in summoning the soldiers from the town had been successful in driving the rebel barons to flight.

The King was morose and silent; he listened to the explanation without expressing any opinion, and then informed his favourite that he might retire.

Cochrane was slightly perplexed by this humour, but affected not to perceive it, although his dismissal for the night had come sooner than he had expected. There were several matters upon which he desired to be informed before withdrawing.

“Has your Grace any commands for the morning?” he asked.

"None."

"No instructions regarding the arraignment and execution of the ruffian, Gordon of Lamington?"

"Arraignment and execution! By my faith, Cochrane, you seem to have judged and condemned the youth without troubling us about a trial."

"He drew his sword against your gracious person," exclaimed the courtier, with an air of loyal horror; "he was at the head of those unruly spirits who forced their way into the palace, and he is the son of an attainted traitor. To those who love your Majesty there can be little hesitation as to the judgment to be pronounced against him."

"Those who love my Majesty will wait till they know our decision on the subject," was the dry response; "the youth had no intent against us, and we have no mind at present to give him either to the block or to the hangman."

"If your Grace is satisfied of his innocence, I must be silent," said Cochrane, humbly; "but there are considerations which should not be overlooked."

"Nothing shall be overlooked."

"Then your present decision will be altered, sire; for the kindness of your heart must yield to the clearness of your judgment, and that will satisfy you of the necessity to punish this open treason against your government, promptly and unrelentingly."

"That may be," said the King, with a movement of his hand, peremptorily closing the interview.

"That shall be," mentally ejaculated Cochrane, as he made a low obeisance and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DUNGEON OF THE PALACE.

“Come in, pretty Captain Ogilvie,
And drink of the beer and the wine;
And thou shalt have gold and silver
To count till the clock strikes nine.”

“I’ll have none of your gold and silver,
Nor none of your white money;
But I’ll have bonnie Jeanie Gordon,
And she shall go now with me.”

Old Ballad.

LAMINGTON was conducted by Captain Murray, and four gentlemen of the guard, to a cell which possessed the appropriate attributes of strength and gloom. The heavy door, which groaned with its own weight in opening; the bare, dark walls, and the narrow slit, high up near the roof, which was the only aperture for the admission of light and air, combined to impress the prisoner with a due sense of his own helplessness.

“I wish we might have offered you better quarters, sir,” said Murray, respectfully; “but a private command, whispered to me by Sir Robert Cochrane, leaves me no option save to treat you with the utmost rigour, as if you had been already condemned.”

“He is my enemy,” answered Gordon, indifferently; “and for the present he holds me at advantage. Like enough, he may carry his purpose so far as to afford you an hour’s amusement at my execution. If he succeed, so much the happier for himself—if he fail, my turn will come. But to you, captain, I am as much indebted for the wish to use me better, as if you had been permitted to treat me like a royal guest.”

The captain smiled gruefully.

“By St. Andrew! I might construe your thanks otherwise than you mean them, sir; for royal guests, nowadays, fare worst of any, as you ken.”

Gordon shrugged his shoulders.

“Your jest reminds me that I may bid good-bye to the

world, since even the nearest kin of the throne is at the mercy——”

“Hold, hold,” interrupted the captain, hastily; “I understand you, and we need have no names. I spoke enow in bitter sorrow, not in jest. But the nearer the wolf comes to the hearth the closer he is to the guidman’s axe.”

“Ay; but if the wolf have the axe firm under his claws, the chance is that the guidman himself will be the victim.”

“Saints guard us from that mischance!” exclaimed the captain. “Can we send you anything to relieve the tedium of your lodgings?”

“If you can leave me a light, that is all I care for. Thanks again.”

“You shall have it.”

Captain Murray not only provided him with a lantern, but caused a couch to be carried from his own room into the cell for the accommodation of the prisoner, who, without this unusual kindness, would have had to content himself with a stone bench when he might desire to sit or to repose. The generosity of his keeper, however, did not extend farther than the effort to make the cell a degree more endurable. The captain, although he understood the real object of the conspiracy, and sympathized with it, was still attentive to his duty, and saw that the door of the prison was properly secured and guarded.

Despite the gloom of the dungeon, Gordon experienced at first a sense of indifference which puzzled himself. There was no shrinking dread of the morrow, no sharp pangs of doubt, although his fortunes were now brought to a more critical pass than they had ever been before. His life depended on the feather’s weight which might turn the King’s verdict for or against him; and there could be, he fancied, small question that the influence of the royal minion, Cochrane, would be more than enough to doom him, even if the proofs of his apparently treasonable intents had been more difficult to find than they were.

It was the very desperation of the circumstances which rendered him almost callous to his seemingly inevitable fate. Two thoughts, however, materially aided to produce the extraordinary calmness of which he was conscious.

The first was, that Katherine would be safe under the protection of the Queen, whatever befell him. The second was, that at his trial he would have the opportunity of denouncing Cochrane in open court as a false knave, and the assassin of the Earl of Mar.

"I will dare him to the proof in the lists," exclaimed the prisoner, pacing his dungeon, eyes kindling and countenance flushed with the excitement of the prospect. "If he refuse to make good his truth at hazard of his life, then his guilt will stand confessed before the court and the world. The King must be satisfied then of the character of the wretch he has trusted."

The passion with which the bare prospect filled him made the gloomy walls of his dungeon light as those of the most luxuriously appointed chamber; and rendered the bolts and bars which confined him of as little account as if the least motion of his finger could have undone them.

He was sharply recalled to the consciousness of his immediate surroundings by the harsh grating of the key in the massive lock, and then by the creaking of the door as it swung slowly open.

He fancied that it was the captain of the guard returning with some new sign of friendliness, and he turned to meet him frankly.

His eyes opened wide with curiosity as he perceived that his visitor was a man whose build differed greatly from that of his good-natured custodian, and that he was closely muffled in a large black cloak which almost touched his heels. A tall man, whose person was effectually concealed by the cloak. His brow and eyes were almost hidden by his plain, black hat, which he had drawn down for that purpose, until it touched his nose.

The door had closed behind this personage, and he stood near it, quietly examining the prisoner, but making no attempt to speak.

After the first second of simple astonishment Gordon began to be suspicious of his visitor's object. He had heard of such things as of men being found dead in the dungeons to which they had been consigned to await trial, whenever that trial threatened in any way to harm a powerful opponent. He was convinced that Cochrane was capable of adopting a measure of that kind without com-

punction, if it promised to relieve him of the smallest trouble.

So Gordon was presently speculating upon the probability that the person before him was intended to act as his executioner. The silence of the man and his curious gaze seemed to confirm the suspicion.

If that had been his purpose the fellow was in no hurry to begin the work, for he was motionless as well as silent for several minutes.

"I bear a message to your knightship," said the stranger at length, in a low and, as the hearer fancied, a feigned voice.

"From whom?—there are few friends of mine who could obtain admission for you to this place."

"The message is from his gracious Majesty, King James."

"His Grace has a passion for droll servants," said Lamington, who detected something in the voice which jarred upon his ear, and heightened the suspicion he had already entertained concerning the man; "but give me the despatch."

"It is not written."

"Then repeat it to me."

"His Majesty sent me to throw open the door of your dungeon and to give you safe conduct from the palace."

"How, he has sent you to release me?" exclaimed Lamington, astounded by this remarkable contradiction to all his conjectures.

"Such is his gracious pleasure," said the man, coldly.

"Heaven shield his Majesty," cried the relieved prisoner; "his own kind heart has been for once permitted to obey the dictates of justice and generosity. To-morrow I will thank him in person, and will be ready to answer to the council for anything I may be charged with. Meanwhile, I am grateful to you, sir, as the bearer of the King's message, and crave your forgiveness for the hard thoughts with which I have been regarding you."

The man bowed courteously, but made no movement to open the door, whilst he said—

"You cannot understand my conduct, and therefore you are blameless for the misjudgment of your thought."

"I do not understand your answer, sir, further than

that you accept my excuse. On another occasion we may have leisure to exchange explanations. Meanwhile, I will pass out with you at once; for short as my acquaintance with this den has been, I know enough of it to long for more airy quarters. Pass on, sir, if it please you."

"Your knightship is somewhat hasty."

"What now?"

"You have not heard all that I am instructed to repeat."

"Then, in the saints' name, say it, man, and have done."

"When you quit the palace there will be a horse waiting for you, and a sum sufficient for your immediate requirements, if you are not already provided in that respect," continued the messenger.

"His Majesty is most considerate," commented Gordon, his former suspicions beginning to revive. "Proceed. I am provided with a steed and money. What further benefit would his Grace confer?"

"He would save you from the certain doom which awaits you here, and which will reach you as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow, if in any obstinate humour you renounce the mercy that is extended to you."

"What does his Grace command?"

"That you take the horse, ride to the most convenient port from which you may sail in secrecy to France or Germany, and swear by your knightly honour, by your faith in Heaven, that you will not now, or at any time after, seek to communicate with any man or woman in Scotland."

"What, is it the command of his Grace that I should fly like a dastard, and remain for ever an outlaw to friends as well as to foes?"

"It is so; his Majesty is most mercifully disposed toward you, and offers you this means of escape. Go, and there are the prospects of an honourable future open to you; or remain, and be hung like any common malefactor."

Lamington grew pale and red by turns: the indignity which the mere proposal of this wretched course cast upon him was harder to bear than the probability of being consigned to the scaffold. He had difficulty in restraining his

passion ; but with what calmness he could master, he said—

“There is a lady in the palace whose estimation is of some little importance in my eyes—nay, I will confess to you that I would wish her to be the companion of my flight.”

“You must not even attempt to inform her that you have fled,” said the man, with a flash of vehemence for which there was nothing apparent to account.

Gordon smiled with his teeth clenched, and bent his head to hide his grim expression. He had discovered one probable meaning of this peculiar offer of his Majesty.

He appeared to reflect for an instant. Then looking up quickly—

“You will not refuse me a slight service, sir ? ”

“If it does not interfere with my duty.”

“It will not, you may trust me. See, here is a ring—a lady’s gift. I would ask you to restore it to the giver, if I am to part from friends and country as you say the King commands. Will you examine it ? ”

The man unguardedly approached.

Lamington, with a quick sweep of his hand, removed his visitor’s hat, and drew the cloak down from the face, revealing Sir Robert Cochrane, who started back in some confusion.

Gordon laughed contemptuously at the discomfiture of his rival. The moment he had been told that the condition of his release was that he should take immediate and secret flight, he concluded that the proposal could only come from Cochrane. He next became satisfied that the messenger was the man himself. To make sure of it he feigned to be yielding to the measure ; and, as he had rightly calculated, Sir Robert’s eagerness betrayed him.

The laugh and the look of scorn with which the prisoner regarded the chief favourite of a monarch, chagrined that personage more than the mere exposure of his subterfuge could have done. His sallow visage darkened, his thin lips quivered, and his hand involuntarily sought the hilt of the poniard, which hung at his girdle.

“Nay, never heed your weapon, man,” said Gordon ; “you will not need its help against me at present. I hate you too much to give you the chance of saving yourself, by

my removal or your own fall, from the ignominy that lies before you. My retribution must be made in the broad light of day, that the people may see the destruction your own treachery has brought upon you."

"You are confident of results."

"I am confident that justice will not miscarry this time. I will denounce you before the council, and you dare not refuse my challenge to the proof of combat. You have foreseen my course, foreseen your danger, and that is why you are here to attempt by a silly trick to make me baffle my own project."

"I offered you liberty."

"Ay, but without all that renders liberty worth having—you offered me liberty without honour and without Katherine. But I shall have it with both."

Cochrane bowed his head, and stood for several moments in gloomy reflection. Gordon had correctly surmised his motive in acting the strange part he had done.

"You have quite decided," said Cochrane at length, in a tone of perfect self-possession; "you refuse the offer I have made to you, and you mean to stand the hazard of whatever may follow?"

"That is my intent," was the response, with a mocking bow.

"I am sorry for that," continued the favourite, coldly; "for you will drive me to extremities that I desired to avoid."

"Do what you will, I can meet your worst spite."

"And fall as others have done who had the power and friends to support them that you have not."

"I do not reckon my chances by the fate of others. I count only that there is a false knave to be punished, and that fate has made my own fortune dependent on his destruction. My hands have been directed to the task, and for its accomplishment I am prepared to sacrifice life, if need be—I am prepared to risk the loss of Katherine, who is more to me than life."

Cochrane was not moved in the slightest by this outburst; he only paused a second before replying.

"Your defiance is bravely spoken, sir, and I can respect courage even when it is opposed to myself. You will answer me one question: is it only for the sake of winning her that you seek my ruin?"

"I seek your ruin, Cochrane, not only for her sake, but for the King's and my country's."

"Then you would not consent to leave Scotland even if I resigned her to you?"

"No—not now."

"You are sure of that?" (Slowly and reflectively.)

"So sure that if Katherine herself came here, and all the doors of the palace were thrown open to me, and she prayed me to fly, I would not budge till I was assured that you were delivered to the hangman."

Cochrane drew a long breath, and there was a venomous glitter in his eyes, although he spoke calmly.

"Since your resolve is so fixed, I will make no further effort to move it. But before we part now you shall understand me better than you do at present."

"I will be amazed if you can make me see your black purposes clearer than I do."

"I only wish you to know why it is that I concern myself so much in your affairs. By your own determination there is feud between us to the death. I will tell you why I take the trouble to accept the challenge. I sought the hand of Katherine Janfarié because her father and his kinsmen could command the service of a goodly troop of Border riders. But had you shown yourself before the contrast was sealed between us I would have withdrawn my claim rather than have thwarted the lady's humour."

"Why did you deny her appeal to your forbearance?"

"Because I thought her like most other women, disturbed only by a silly fancy, which would soon change when she understood the position to which I destined her; and because she made her appeal too late. Perhaps the passion she inspired in me had something to do with it, and perhaps the whim which at times influences me to seize that which seems most difficult of attainment, prevented me yielding to her appeal. No matter now; she proved her obstinacy, and you proved your power over her when matters had advanced so far that for me to have retreated would have been to show myself the veriest poltroon."

"Why repeat all this to me? I am not your confessor."

"Bide a little. You and I are not likely to hold another gossip so calmly," he said, with a grim smile. "A

few words more and I am done. It has been my fortune to climb high, and it has been necessary in my course to encounter many obstacles. They only served to give my resolution ardour, and those impediments which I could not stride over I crushed under my foot without hesitation and without remorse."

"Of all that I have been long aware."

"You know it from my own lips now. Know also that you of yourself would have been too petty to have ruffled my humour for an hour. But Katherine's love has made you one of those impediments in my path which must be ground to earth without mercy. I would have spared your life, for that seemed the readiest method of removing you. But the conditions do not please you; so I must accept your defiance and act upon it. I have never failed yet to exterminate the wretched creature who opposed my will; you have defied it."

"And will do so to the last."

"So be it. Good night."

Cochrane resumed his hat and cloak, and with a courteous obeisance, retired.

The heavy door was locked and barred when he quitted the dungeon, and Gordon was left to meditate upon the possible and probable results of the defiance he had given to the powerful favourite, whose word could open every door of the palace, and whose beck would be obeyed by ready assassins.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN JEOPARDY.

“ Sternly he spoke—‘Tis sweet to hear
 In good greenwood the bugle blown,
 But sweeter to Revenge’s ear
 To drink a tyrant’s dying groan.

“ Your slaughtered quarry proudly trod,
 At dawning morn o’er dale and down,
 But prouder baseborn Murray rode
 Thro’ old Linlithgow’s crowded town.’”

Cadyow Castle.

THE fatigues he had undergone had the happy effect of soothing the prisoner to slumber, in spite of the excited state of his mind caused by anticipations of the trial in the morning. The sunlight which penetrated the narrow slit in the wall of the dungeon did not relieve the gloom of the place, but rather served to heighten it by suggesting the brilliance of the day without.

That was Gordon’s first fancy when he wakened from his sleep. He could not help contrasting the dismal aspect of his lodging with the glory of light and freedom which was denied to him, although the poorest scullion of the palace might enjoy it.

But his repose had refreshed him, and with the buoyancy of health and courage, he resisted the despondent humour which his position was calculated to inspire. He was eager for the hour of trial, confident that the King would acquit him of any treacherous design against his royal person; and confident that in any case he would have the opportunity of publicly denouncing Cochrane and challenging him to the test of combat.

He requested the attendant who brought him food to inform Captain Murray that he desired to speak with him. The man promised obedience.

Occasionally the prisoner could hear the tramp of armed men and the clatter of horses’ hoofs in the palace square. At intervals the sharp tone of some officer’s command would sound faintly in his cell, or the distant baying of a

hound would strike his ear. But everything heard from that place had a dull tone which grated upon his ears, and would have saddened him, had he not been too busy inventing possible reasons for the delay in bringing him before the court.

Hours passed, and still no one came for him. The buoyancy with which he had encountered the first despondent thoughts of the morning deserted him, and his vague speculations wrought his mind to a pitch of anxiety that verged on frenzy.

When the daylight had gradually faded from the dungeon, leaving weird shadows on the walls in the short, dull gloaming which linked the intervening moments of light and darkness, he sat down.

He was forced at length to the conviction that for some reason his trial had been postponed.

Gloomy as the conviction was, it relieved him, for it was a satisfaction to know anything definitely. The perturbation of expectancy is always harder to bear than the knowledge of a disagreeable certainty.

The gloaming faded, and he was left in deep darkness. He was exhausted by the monotonous promenade of his prison, and much more by the mental exercise which he had been making all day, so that he fell into a species of listless reverie which rendered him for the time insensible to his circumstances.

He was roused by the opening of his door and the rays of a lantern flashing upon his eyes, dazing them for a moment.

It was Captain Murray who entered. His countenance was disturbed and somewhat pale.

"I never saw friend more welcome," cried Gordon, starting up and recognizing the captain.

The latter bowed in a constrained fashion, and it was evident that he experienced no pleasure in yielding to the prisoner's request to see him.

"You desired to see me," he said, in an abrupt manner. "We have been in constant waiting upon his Majesty all day, else I would have been here earlier. I am even now under command to be ready at any instant to attend his Grace; therefore you will understand my time is brief."

Lamington regarded him curiously: the whole bearing of the man was so much changed that he was puzzled to account for it.

"I note, sir, that something has occurred to alter your disposition towards me——"

"Nothing can occur to alter my disposition towards you, but I am under commands which render it difficult for me to speak frankly with you. I trust you will not question me further on that score."

Lamington felt a chill of dismay pass over him; but he inclined his head with the courtesy due to the soldier whose heart was clearly so much opposed to the command which his duty compelled him to obey.

"Do not answer me, Captain Murray, if I unwittingly make any inquiry which you should not reply to. My first question is, Has the council met to-day?"

"It has."

"And the result is that Cochrane has been delivered into your hands, a prisoner?"

"The result is," said the captain, with signs of agitation in his voice, "that Angus, Lord Gray, and a dozen nobles beside, have, with all their followers, withdrawn from the court, and to-morrow attainders will be declared against many of the best gentlemen in Scotland."

"Merciful powers! Then the assassin of Mar still rules the King?"

"Sir Robert Cochrane has been closeted with his Majesty since the council broke up in haste and anger; and through him have issued all the commands which we must obey."

Gordon clasped his hands tightly, and his teeth became clenched in despair.

"That is why I have not been summoned to answer the charges he has to make against me. It may be that I am already condemned, without trial, and without the barest opportunity to defend myself."

"I cannot answer you."

There was a pause. Then Gordon, with quivering lips—

"And your silence assures me of the truth of my conjecture. But it cannot be. Scotland will not allow this mockery of all law and justice to be done, even when

it passes under the warrant of the King, for he is blinded and deceived. No, by Heaven, this shall not be——”

“Pardon me, sir. I cannot hear more of this wild outcry.”

With a huge effort Gordon checked the outburst of indignation to which he had been on the point of giving vent. Even at that moment, when he seemed to have been thrown entirely into the hands of his remorseless enemy, he could respect the position of Captain Murray, who, although fully sympathizing with all that he might say, would have accounted himself a traitor if he had listened to it whilst he held the command of the royal guard.

“The words I have spoken,” he said, huskily, “are too sadly true to be recalled; but for having uttered them in your presence, sir, I crave your indulgence.”

“I have already forgotten.”

“I am your debtor. But I will not transgress further on your kindness. I can wait now to meet the worst whenever it may come.”

The captain, with an awkward salute, drew back toward the door, then halted, and spoke with an uneasiness which he endeavoured to conceal by an assumption of gruffness.

“There is one waiting without who bears the King’s signet, and who may be able to give you the satisfaction I dare not—and, in sooth, care not to give.”

Not waiting for any reply he withdrew, leaving the light he had brought for the convenience of the prisoner.

Lamington was satisfied by what little the captain had said, and by his manner, that Cochrane had again succeeded in exercising his baleful influence over the King to the serious peril of his government. If Angus and the others had quitted the court in anger and contempt, then rebellion would be the probable consequences as soon as the forces of the barons could be collected; and in the mean while Cochrane’s will would be the only law observed.

The prisoner saw his own fate—a secret and ignominious death, without even the poorest chance of unmasking the knave whose mysterious power over the monarch was being exercised to the distraction of the kingdom.

He clasped his hands upon his head, and threw himself on the couch, utterly hopeless and helpless now. The

prospect which rendered his imprisonment endurable had been suddenly swept away from him; and there was nothing left to do but to prepare to meet, with the calmness which became a man of honour, the vengeance which Cochrane would speedily take.

“Bertrand!”

The voice was sad and sweet. It roused him like the spell of an enchanter, and, turning, he saw Katherine, dressed from head to foot in black.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FATAL LOVE.

“‘A boon, a boon, my noble liege,
A boon I beg o’ thee!
And the first boon I come to crave
Is to grant me the life of young Logie.’”

“‘O na, O na, my Margaret,
Forsooth, and so it manna be,
For a’ the gowd o’ fair Scotland
Shall not save the life o’ young Logie.’”

The Laird of Logie.

HER appearance at that moment of despair was like a glare of sunlight to one who has been long immured in darkness. He sprang toward her with a glad cry of welcome, and folded her in his arms.

His delight was too great to permit him to observe immediately the ashen hue of her features, and the strange coldness with which she submitted to his caress without acknowledging it by any word or movement. Some cruel sorrow had left its imprint on her face and dimmed the brightness of her eyes. She stared over his shoulder as if she were gazing at some sad spectacle afar off that stunned her senses to all that was transpiring near her.

“Heaven is merciful,” he said, huskily, “in giving me the joy of holding you once again in my arms before death parts us.”

She shuddered, and bowed her head.

“Look up, Kate, look up; for if there be no hope for me you will live to see the villain whose treachery has doomed us to this misery pay the penalty of his crimes.

His hour will come, and trust me, darling, it will come speedily, or I read the signs of his fate badly."

"That will not save you," she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

"No; but we will have at least this satisfaction of knowing that my fall will hasten his overthrow."

"You have heard, then, what has happened to-day?"

She spoke in an abstracted tone, and as if there were something preying on her mind, the nature of which she desired to conceal.

"I have heard enough to know that I am in Cochrane's power, and that means death to me—separation from you for ever in this world."

She raised her head, and gazed in his face with a curious yearning expression, as if she were seeking there the confirmation of some unhappy suspicion.

"Separation there must be, Bertrand," she said, sadly, "but not by death, I hope."

"How? What chance is there that Cochrane will permit me to escape him?"

"None."

"And has he not regained the King's favour, in spite of Mar's death under his hand?"

"He has regained it all, by what trickery I cannot tell. But he is more powerful than ever; and in requital of the foul slanders which you and others have uttered against him, his Majesty has agreed to give him the title of his dead brother and to create him Earl of Mar."

Gordon was astounded by this new proof of the deluded King's weakness.

"It is an act of madness that will cost him his throne," he exclaimed. "But you cannot be rightly informed; such monstrous contempt of nobles and people alike would be opposed by Cochrane himself as too perilous even for his ambition to profit by."

"His ambition knows no fear. His Grace's own lips gave me the intelligence of the new honour he had conferred on his favourite."

"The King told you! Wherefore should he tell you?"

Katherine quietly released herself from his arms, and proceeded to answer him in a cold, steady voice.

"Listen, Bertrand, and you shall learn in what danger

you stand, and how I came to have assurance of it. By the earnest entreaty of the Queen, his Majesty convened the barons to meet him in council this morning; but Cochrane had been with him at an early hour, and entered the council chamber with him."

"And was not the knave arraigned by any of the lords and charged with the crime of which all know him to be guilty?"

"Angus denounced him, and others bore testimony to the charge. His Majesty interrupted them, refused to examine their proofs, and declared he had been satisfied that morning that this charge was nothing more than the result of a conspiracy to ruin a worthy gentleman who had served him faithfully."

"What said their lordships?"

Angus answered the King that if such service as Cochrane had rendered him were accounted faithful, there was no need for his presence at the court, as he would never do the work his Majesty required of his followers. The King told him angrily to go, and never to appear before him again unless specially summoned. Then Angus marched out of the chamber, and he was followed by nearly all the barons assembled.

"Did not his Grace recall them?"

"No; he hastily dismissed the council, saying that what business he had to transact he would do without their lordships' aid."

"Was there not one near him bold enough to make an effort to stay the course of such wild folly?"

"There was one—the Queen. She implored him to recall their lordships, or at least to take time to consider what he was about to do. He replied that they were rebellious knaves, and that he was the monarch of Scotland, as he would make them understand."

"He has been goaded into this mad course by some subtle lie of the arch-traitor Cochrane."

"That is too certain. The Queen, finding all effort to soothe him or to alter his resolution vain, begged him to set you free, and——"

"He refused?"

"Ay, refused most resolutely. Her Majesty informed me of it all, and then enabled me to obtain audience of the King."

“For what purpose?”

“There could only be one—to implore mercy for you. I knelt at the feet of his Grace and besought his clemency. He sternly answered me that you had openly defied his authority at Dumfries, that you had been party to the death of a loyal knight, and that you had been leagued with certain persons whose names were written on a tablet which had been in your possession, to disturb the peace of the realm by a rebellious attempt to dethrone his Majesty.”

“It was the tablet Panther gave me. I lost it——” He checked himself, for he remembered Richard Janfarie, of whose fate he was still uncertain. He added hastily, “I lost it on my way to Linlithgow.”

Katherine’s head was again bowed.

“His Grace charged you with another crime, of which we need not speak at present,” she went on, with difficulty controlling the emotion which some unexpressed thought or memory caused her; “and he bade me rise, for no prayer of mine could obtain from him the boon I sought. Then he counselled me to forget you as speedily as possible, and to think well of Sir Robert Cochrane, who would soon be in a position to offer me the coronet of a countess, as his services had won for him the earldom of Mar.”

Gordon gasped for breath, and then, hoarsely—

“The King said this! What answer gave you?”

“That I could never respect the man, although he offered me the crown of a queen, and proved you base as I believe you noble.”

“That was bravely spoken, my own true heart.”

And again he clasped her passionately in his arms, but she seemed to shrink under the embrace, although she made no violent effort to disengage herself.

“It was Cochrane who led me from the chamber,” she continued, hurriedly, “and in the ante-room he offered to save your life if——”

“Well? Proceed.”

“If I would consent to acknowledge his claim as my husband. I told him that you would scorn me and spurn the offer of life on such terms. He did not try to persuade me. He said he was sorry that I had determined so, and left me.”

“You were right, Kate, and you were faithful to me

and to yourself. If I had fifty lives I would rather lose them all than live to know that you had paid such a price for one of them. But all hope may not be lost yet. Albany is still a prisoner at Edinburgh. Angus and the nobles who have been driven from the court will rise to protect him, and perhaps they will do it in time to save me also."

"Alas, no; for to-night you are to be removed from the palace by a strong guard of Cochrane's men, and that means that they are to conduct you to execution in some secret place."

"Gracious powers! his Majesty can never have sanctioned that?"

"His Majesty has consigned you to the care of Cochrane, to deal with as he may think best for the peace and welfare of the country."

"How do you know this?"

"My good, gracious mistress the Queen, who is sadly distressed by these events,—seeing more clearly than his Grace to what they will lead,—told me all."

"Saints guard her from the storm which will soon sweep over our poor country!"

"Amen with all my soul, for she has been our true friend. It is by her aid that I obtained the King's signet and permission to see you. We must use the opportunity this gives us."

"To what advantage?" he queried, gloomily.

"To enable you to quit this dungeon."

"Escape?"

"Ay, it is better you should fall in trying to save yourself than perish under Cochrane's hand. This signet will open the doors to you, and you must fly hence to some place of safe hiding until the man's villainy evokes the retribution he merits. Then you may show yourself freely again."

"You will go with me?"

"No; I remain under the protection of the Queen, and when that fails, I must seek shelter in some convent."

He regarded her searchingly, and for the first time became conscious of the singular coldness of her manner. A glimmering suspicion disturbed him that there was something behind all she had said.

"It cannot be," he muttered uneasily, "that you are

deceiving me in aught. It cannot be that you are trying to save my life whilst you hide from me that you have sacrificed yourself to Cochrane——”

She drew back from him with a disdainful glance.

“Forgive me,” he cried, before she could speak; “it was the doubt of a moment. It is gone, and will never ruffle my mind again. Be content, and pardon me. I will do what you wish; but you must follow me if you will not go with me.”

“It cannot be,” she said, stifling a sob and turning away her face. “It can never be now.”

He stood dumfounded, staring at her and discrediting his ears. But his eyes confirmed the words which seemed to be still ringing against the walls of the dungeon, and filling his soul with more despair than he had experienced even when the intimation was made to him that he had been condemned unheard and without any form of trial.

“Can never be now?” he echoed at length, pausing after each word as if trying to realize its full meaning. Then vehemently, “And why not? What act of mine relieves you from the vows that you have pledged to me? What crime have I committed that gives you the right to turn from me? Right! No, we shall not talk of right; for love is circumscribed by no law or condition. If you ever loved me, no misfortune of mine—no guilt even—could make you renounce me.”

Whilst he spoke she covered her face with her hands, and, swaying to and fro, she seemed distracted by the harrowing emotions his words conjured up.

“I loved you, Bertrand, and I love you—I can never change in that. The bitterness with which I recognize the need for our separation teaches me how much more dear to me you are than all the world. But I dare not place my hand in yours and fulfil the pledge that I have given, as I yearn to do. I dare not do it without bringing an eternal curse upon you and myself.”

He was, if possible, more astounded by this strange speech than by the first. He made an effort to compose himself so that he might not add to the pain which he saw she was enduring.

“In the saints’ name, Kate, read me your riddle,” he

said, perplexedly; "for I can make nothing of it save that some wild fantasy, and the sorrows which surround us, have disturbed your reason. If you still love me, what is there that can part us?"

He drew her hands down and attempted to take her in his arms. But she drew back from him with an exclamation that had in it something of horror.

"Must I tell you that?" she cried in passionate grief. "Oh, Bertrand, Bertrand, search your memory, and say to me then, if you can, that there is no act of yours which could render our union impious."

His lips trembled, and he was silent, for the unknown issue of the combat at the Druid's Circle haunted him.

"It was by our means that my father fell," she went on, wildly; "but that I tried to forget. I tried to deceive myself with the thought that we were blameless, and I would not let the mishap part us."

"Had he been more just to us, he would not have fallen so," said Gordon, hoarsely.

"Hush, and remember that I owed him a daughter's duty. I might have learned in time to believe that my rebellion would be pardoned; but now—the same messenger who brought the tablet containing the names of your fellow-conspirators brought also the black tidings that my brother had fallen under your hand."

"Heaven is witness that he forced the quarrel upon me with scornful menaces; and Heaven is witness that I no more than defended my life against his furious onslaught," answered Lamington in a low, dejected tone, for he began to see the dismal barrier that had sprung up between them in spite of all his efforts to prevent it.

"You own, then, that it was your hand that robbed him of life?" she cried, piteously, as if she had entertained some vague hope that he would deny it. "Speak, and if you can, swear that this is some new trick invented by our enemies to separate us."

He could not speak. He sat down on the couch, and pressed his hand against his brow.

"Speak," she said, touching his arm, and gazing at him with eager and yet despairing eyes; "say that Nicol, who brought me the tidings, has been deceived by Cochrane, or that he is himself trying to deceive us."

"Did he say that his brother was dead?"

"Yes; he said that Richard died two days after he had been carried from the place where you had encountered him."

"Then Heaven forgive me, for my love has been the cause of bloody work."

She drew back, shuddering, and staring at him like one fascinated, as he rose slowly to his feet, with an expression of utter hopelessness on his countenance.

"Be merciful to me, and say that no man may charge you with my brother's fate, as they have charged you with my father's," she cried in pitiful suspense.

A pause, and then he turned to her sadly, but calm as one who feels that fate is victor, and further struggle against it is useless.

"I cannot answer as you and I would wish, Katherine. I know how much is sacrificed by my confession, but even to win you and keep you I dare not dishonour myself by a falsehood."

"Then it is all true," she moaned, clasping her hands in distress.

"It is true that we fought, and accident gave me the victory—a fatal and accursed one. It is unavailing to explain to you by what means he forced me to draw against him, and by what strange mishap he received his death-wound. All that would not make me the less responsible for his doom."

"Had you no thought of me when you stood up armed against my brother?"

"Ay—every word spoken, every blow aimed at my heart, made me think of you and submit to contumely that no other man dared have cast upon me. I tried to save him by all means short of exposing my breast to his sword, and yet he fell. The dread of the tidings which you have brought me has haunted me for days. It is over now—the worst has come, and, since you wish it, we must part. But Heaven knows how hard I strove to avert this calamity. I give up the contest now: for fate has made our love a sign of doom to all."

"One word from you and I would have placed my hand in yours, ready to fly with you wherever you might lead me. We might have fled to some far-off land where our happi-

ness in being together would have enabled us to forget all the horrors we have been involved in here, and that one word you cannot speak."

She said this almost as if she were disappointed that he had not, rightly or wrongly, denied the truth of the accusation she herself had made against him.

"Because that one word would have been a falsehood."

"And I honour you the more, Bertrand, because you could not speak it," she replied, in faltering tones, but gazing at him proudly through her tears; "I honour you the more, although my heart will break in the separation to which your own confession condemns us."

His brave submission to the truth, when he knew how much it was to cost him—a truth which he might have dared to deny—and the sight of his despair, overcame the bitter reflections which had at first given her strength to control the turbulent emotions the thought of their parting aroused, and she sobbed piteously.

His head was bowed, and he could not look at her, for he felt as if he were the guilty cause of her misery, although he had been powerless to check the course of events which made him so; and every sigh she uttered smote him to the quick. For a little while there was no sound in the gloomy dungeon save that of her sobs and of his half-stifled respiration.

"Oh, it is a cursed fate," he cried at length, his whole nature vehemently rebelling against the course into which they were driven by circumstances they had been unable to control; "it is cruel that we who love, and who have risked so much for its sake, should be severed because our enemies were those who should have been our truest friends. It was no fault of mine—no fault of yours that raised this fatal barrier of your brother's blood; why should we let it stand between us? Why should we not trample it underfoot and forget it?"

He seized her hands, holding them tightly in his own, as if he would keep her there in spite of every power that sought to drag her from him.

"Oh, if we *could* forget!" she exclaimed fervently, but hopelessly.

"We shall, we shall," was his passionate cry.

"We cannot," was her piteous answer; "even now,

when my breast is racked by the strife of love against the instinct which my father's and my brother's spirits inspire—even now, when you seem more dear to me than ever, the touch of your hand reminds me that under it Richard fell."

Shudderingly she turned her face aside, and he dropped her hands.

"You are right, Katherine," he said, gloomily; "after the first glow of our passionate resolve to cleave to each other had faded, my every touch would make you think of him until you might learn to hate me. Better we should part in agony than live in hate. I, too, would feel the influence of the dead, and I could not look into your sad eyes without remembering Richard Janfarie. The sacrifice must be made for your sake as much as for aught else."

"It will kill me," she moaned, growing weak as he became strong in the resolve to do what seemed right.

"No, Katherine; you will live to know that, whether I am near or far away, my heart is always with you. Every thought of mine your dear image will share, and every act your sweet influence will guide. In memory, at least, you will be mine always, and that memory will be to me a beacon, directing and leading me wherever noble deeds may be done to expiate my crime."

"I came here, Bertrand, so filled with horror at the thought of the ruin our love had wrought upon my nearest kin that I was calm and cold. The parting which I came to announce seemed no more than a just punishment for the evil we had done, but now I feel that it is a sacrifice too great for me to bear."

He too felt that, but he would not show his weakness again. His heart ached cruelly, and he would have prolonged the parting indefinitely. But he wished to spare her some portion of the anguish she endured.

"I will help you, Katherine," he said, with forced calmness. "Show me how I may escape from this den and I will go at once. So long as you remain in safety, I will not cross your path again; but when danger threatens, I will be near you."

"Do not risk that—do not remain in the country; for whilst you are near me, you are within reach of Cochrane's treachery."

He bit his lip, and his brow darkened.

"Give me one promise before I go—that you will never give that man any claim over you."

"Do you need such a promise?"

"No," he answered, after an instant, in which he scrutinized her face curiously; "I do not need it, for I read your hate of him too clearly. You must seek no promise from me as to my movements, for although I part from you, I cannot part from the hope of vengeance, which is all that his villainy has left to me."

"As you will," she murmured, miserably.

"One kiss—the last; and then—farewell."

He kissed her; and then, with the sudden coldness of a man resolved to meet the worst, he asked her to show him how he was to escape from the dungeon.

She gave him a cloak, which he donned at once. She watched him with a species of wonder in the midst of her distress; for he had become strangely calm and firm. She did not at the moment understand that it was the very bitterness of his despair, and the parching thirst to begin the work of retaliation upon the man to whose machinations he traced all their misfortunes, that gave him the resolution and steadiness of fate itself.

"What next?" he said, with unshaken voice.

"This ring will enable us to pass the guard; after that you must make your way from the palace as opportunity may offer. If the private passage to the church is clear, you will pass forth without difficulty. Follow me, and let nothing tempt you to speak."

Having taken the lantern which the captain had left, she drew open the door of the dungeon and passed out, Gordon keeping close behind her. He closed the door, so that no chance observation of the sentinels might discover his flight too soon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SPY.

“But she has stown the King’s redding kaim,
Likewise the Queen her wedding knife,
And sent the tokens to Carmichael,
To cause young Logie get his life.

“She sent him a purse o’ the red gowd,
Another o’ the white monie;
She sent him a pistol for each hand,
And bade him shoot when he gat free.”

The Laird of Logie.

THE passage conducted straight into a ward-room where the sentinels were always to be found on duty, with several of their comrades who were off duty, and who were either waiting to take their turn on guard, and beguiling themselves with some game at hazard meanwhile, or who came there to spend an idle hour.

There was no other way of ingress to the dungeon or egress from them save by this ward-room, and therefore it was unnecessary for the sentinel to remain in the passage—for no prisoner could escape, even if he managed to open his dungeon door, unless he passed through the midst of the soldiers.

The escaping prisoner and his guide halted on the threshold of the ward-room.

Katherine drew breath, closing her lips firmly to hide their tremor, whilst she strove to nerve herself for the crisis which was at hand. She touched Gordon’s arm as if to convey a tender reassurance.

“Remember—be silent, no matter what is said or done,” she whispered.

He was as coldly unmoved as if he had been the least interested of all persons in the world in the present peril.

“I will remember,” he said.

On that she boldly led him into the ward-room.

The sentinel confronted her, and the butt of his halberd rang on the stone floor as he brought it down from his shoulder into the position of rest.

He was a grim-visaged fellow, with a scar dividing his nose, from the brows downward, and scars on his cheeks, showing that he had been in action of some sort.

Behind were half a dozen troopers; four of them at a table playing dice with much loud laughter and constant sallies of wit—or, at any rate, of what was wit to them, and is to all of us, the difference lying only in expression; for their theme was war and love-making. Two of these rough conviviais looked on at their comrade's play, joined in the mirth, and all made frequent application to the black-jack, which passed from hand to hand almost as rapidly as the dice-box.

Lounging against the wall, close to the wide door which opened upon the corridor, was Ross, the sly old servitor who was the faithful adherent of Cochrane, and the uncle of the girl Mysie, who, without knowing it, had rendered such kindly office to Katherine when she had been entrapped in the minion's apartments.

Ross was a shrewd fellow, who saw everything and said nothing. His master had directed him to keep a sharp eye on Lady Cochrane—as he persisted in designating Katherine.

Ross pocketed the two golden angels which had been placed in his hand as the order was spoken in his ear. He knew that the gold pieces were only an instalment of what he might hope to get by-and-by; and so as they clinked in his pouch he pledged himself as the spy of the man in power.

He kept his pledge, and Katherine—not wholly unaware of the constant watch upon her—was scarcely at any moment beyond this man's vision, save when she was in the chambers of the Queen.

When she had asked for Captain Murray, and when he had conducted her to Lamington's cell, Ross had followed as far as the ward-room. There he had stopped, for he feared to expose his purpose by advancing too far; and he knew with what contempt the men of swords and halberds would have regarded him had he been denounced as a spy. They were rough fellows, and they would have in all probability displayed their contempt in some fashion more forcible than looks or words.

He invented the excuse that he had come to have a

gossip with the troopers, and to replenish their black-jack when it was empty. On these terms he was made welcome.

So he waited and watched. He was puzzled when Captain Murray returned without the lady, and passed through the room giving no instructions of any kind.

He was still more puzzled when the lady reappeared with a cloaked figure behind her.

A burst of laughter, in the midst of which the sentinel called—

“Halt!”

Katherine, with a cool courage that surprised herself, looked in the man’s grim face, and smiled sweetly.

It is impossible for a warrior—or a man of any heart—to look in a pretty woman’s face, to see it smiling sweetly on him, and remain stern.

The soldier unbended visibly, grim as he was in feature.

“Why do you stay us, good sir?” she said softly.

“Duty, lady; I must have authority for permitting you to pass hence.”

“Why, you saw me enter!” she exclaimed, with very pretty surprise, and a coaxing glance of the bright eyes.

“Ay, but not your companion.”

“Has not the captain told you there were two of us to pass?”

“Not a word said he, lady, else I would not dare to bar your way, unless it might be to have a minute’s pleasure in looking at you.”

Ross bent down to the men at the table, who were too busily occupied to notice what was passing behind them.

“Yonder’s a rare lass,” he said, with a wicked grin; “and she is up to some mischief with our comrade. Look to it.”

“Did you ever see a pretty woman that wasn’t up to mischief?” retorted the man nearest the speaker; and then he laughed so loud and heartily at his own humour that the others could not help joining him.

But they all looked round at Katherine and stared at her in a fashion that would have been unendurably offensive to her if she had only time to observe it. Lamington observed and almost forgot his promise to be silent and quiet, in his desire to bring them to a proper sense of respect.

"What an eye she has!" said one.

"And what lips!" said another.

"Take care," said a third; "it is the new dame of her Majesty the Queen. I saw her in attendance this morning. So take care of your tongues, my masters, or you may chance to get them clipped."

The warning had its effect, and the gaze of free admiration promptly changed to one of respect. They were even about to resume their game and leave the lady as one whom they had no right to incommode by their observation, when Ross spoke again—

"There is mischief, masters, I tell you; so look to it, and do not let them pass till I return, or you will answer for it to my Lord Cochrane."

He departed hastily.

Meanwhile the conversation between Katherine and the sentinel proceeded.

"Well," she said, laughing good-naturedly, and quite captivating the poor fellow to the destruction of all caution, "you have had several minutes of the pleasure you seem to covet; so now you will let us go on our way."

"I dare not, lady, without some warrant."

"Will this satisfy you?"

And she held up her pretty hand to show him the King's signet.

The man took down a lantern from its iron hook; and taking her hand in his own horny fist examined the ring.

"Do you not know it?" she said, with just the least perceptible impatience.

"It bears his Majesty's crest," answered the sentinel, slowly.

"It is your King's signet," she said, with a tone of proud complacency.

The man shouldered his halberd, and made a respectful salute.

"I ask your pardon, lady, for staying you; but my commands are strict."

He stepped aside.

"You are blameless," she said, with a gracious smile, as she passed him.

She advanced to the door, which was now the only

obstacle between her and the comparative freedom of her companion. He walked by her side.

But they were brought to a sudden halt. The six troopers, who had been a moment before busy with their dice and ale, now stood on guard at the entrance with their halberds in rest.

The name of Cochrane was not a popular one even amongst these men, but it was one they feared; and the intimation that they would have to answer to him, if the two persons before them escaped, instantly cleared their brains of whatever dulness the fumes of the liquor they had been quaffing might have produced. They sprang to their feet, seized their weapons, and stood on guard.

"Pardon, my lady," said the soldier, who had recognized Katherine as one of the Queen's ladies, "but you cannot pass."

"How, fellow?" exclaimed Gordon, unable to restrain himself.

She grasped his arm and pressed it convulsively to remind him of his promise.

His indignation and her anxious movement were observed by the soldiers, and held as confirmation of the suspicion which Ross had awakened that there was some treachery afloat.

"By whose orders do you detain us?" she said, boldly, although her heart was quaking.

"We hope you will not blame us, lady, but you must remain here for a few minutes until we are relieved from this awkward duty that has been forced on us."

"What awkward duty, and by whom is it forced upon you?" she rejoined, still maintaining her haughty bearing.

The sentinel, who had been the first to stay them, approached at this juncture to aid them.

"There's a mistake, comrade; you must not stop her ladyship."

"It's not so much the lady as the gentleman who is with her that must be stopped," said the soldier. "Has she shown you a warrant to permit them to pass, comrade?"

"The lady has shown me the signet of his Majesty the King, and after that I had no business to ask who or what the gallant is who goes with her," answered the sentinel,

with the tone of one whose discretion has been unfairly questioned.

"Will you show it to me, my lady?" said the spokesman of the guard, who with his comrades began to feel somewhat uneasy at the announcement of the authority which had overcome the sentinel's opposition.

"It is there!"

She held it up to him, and the soldier saluted, hesitated, and said—

"We have been told that we will be answerable to Sir Robert Cochrane for the detention of your ladyship and this gentleman who keeps himself so closely hidden from us."

The pulse of the man and woman seemed to suspend their action at this information.

Katherine recovered quickly.

"Master soldier, you will be answerable to the King himself if you set the authority of his servant before his own."

The men were staggered. She seized the moment of hesitation and said authoritatively—

"Stand aside, sirs."

Her dignity and imperative tone made the desired impression. The men wavered, looked stupidly from one to another, and finally stepped back from the entrance.

The way was clear now. No, fortune was in one of her coquetting moods, and was alternately raising and dashing the hopes of Gordon and his brave champion.

"Here is the captain," cried one of the soldiers, with much satisfaction in the prospect of entire relief from all responsibility in this peculiar business, which seemed to threaten them with dire penalties whichever way they acted.

On the one side was the authority of the tyrant they feared, and on the other appeared the authority of the King, whom they were bound to honour and obey before all others. So the entrance of Captain Murray was a source of congratulation to the soldiers, although it was the source of another and more serious check than any previous one to those who were eager to escape from the place.

The woman's wit was sharpened by the necessities of the occasion. She acted as if by inspiration. Before the

soldiers had time to say a word, she advanced straight to the captain.

"This is the King's signet, Captain Murray," she said, showing it; "on the authority of it you gave me admission to this place; on the same authority I require you to permit me and my friend to pass freely hence. We are going to the presence chamber of her Majesty the Queen; and you may follow us thither if it so please you."

There was an eager flush upon her face, and yet a certain degree of impatient disdain, at the interferences which had arisen, and these combined to make her look more lovely than ever.

The captain was sensible of her beauty. He was, besides, as has already appeared, we hope, a gentleman in every respect, and one kindly disposed towards Lamington. But he was also an officer, stern in his regard for duty. He maintained the strictest discipline amongst those who were under his command, and he was careful to observe the same rectitude in his own conduct which he required from others.

He glanced from his fair challenger to the cloaked figure at her side; and despite the disguise, aided by his knowledge of circumstances, he recognized Gordon.

His eyes opened, and his lips closed tight and hard, whilst his brows contracted.

Katherine perceived the rapid change of countenance, and her heart sank within her. It seemed so hard to be so near the accomplishment of her object and then to fail.

"This is undoubtedly an authority, madam," he said, coldly, "which I would be the last to oppose, but——"

He was interrupted by the heavy tramp of feet on the corridor, and the entrance of a dozen armed men who wore the livery of Sir Robert Cochrane.

At sight of them, Lamington drew back a pace, and clutched desperately at his side where his sword should have been. Then he became suddenly calm, for he noticed the trooper who had been the unlucky cause of their delay, and the consequent failure of their project, holding his halbert carelessly on his shoulder. When the moment for action came he would seize that weapon, and woe to those who attempted to bar his way when armed, and conscious

that he fought against the myrmidons of his deadliest foe, and the man who sought to become his assassin.

At the sight of the men Katherine barely restrained a scream, and for an instant she felt that her enterprise was frustrated. She recovered, however, and in very desperation maintained a calm demeanour.

At sight of the men Captain Murray's countenance changed again. The stern expression which it had assumed in the moment when he had felt himself compelled to discharge an important and painful duty, became transformed into an expression of disgust.

Behind Cochrane's men, and keeping purposely in the background, was Ross the spy. At the head of them was Torphichen, the fat little master of fence and terpsichore. This personage advanced to Captain Murray and presented a sealed packet.

"I am directed to relieve you, sir, of the care of your prisoner, Gordon of Lamington, and this is my warrant," he said, with a salute which displayed all the stereotyped courtesy of the dancing-master.

The captain slowly, and with apparent reluctance, took the packet. But before he broke the seal he glanced at Katherine.

There was a deadly pallor on her face, and she answered his look with one so full of agonized appeal that he paused in the act which would have compelled him at once to deliver Lamington into the hands of his enemy.

She stretched out her hand imploringly.

"That is the King's signet, she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

There was the hesitation of a second in the captain's manner. Then he raised his hat, and bowed with respectful courtesy.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, kindly, and with a slight huskiness of tone. "Pardon me; I had forgotten that I must obey the sign of his Majesty's authority before attending to any other duty, even if it were not a lady who presented it. Most honourable Master Torphichen, permit this lady and her escort to pass."

Torphichen, not to be outdone in politeness, made a profound reverence to the dame, and bade his followers stand aside.

The captain respectfully took her hand and led her through the midst of the men, passing by Ross, who stood puzzled and silent, and out to the corridor, Lamington following.

"Heaven bless you, sir," she said, pressing his hand in earnest gratitude, as he was about to part from her.

"Saints forgive me," he muttered in a low tone, and retreated thoughtfully.

Her distress, and the appearance of the royal favourite's myrmidons with the warrant which was too surely the sign of doom for the unfortunate prisoner, had effected the triumph of the worthy captain's good nature over his scrupulous sense of duty. The beauty and sorrow of the lady, and the malice of her persecutor, had made him do that which no bribe or prospect of personal advantage could have tempted him to do. He was aware that he would probably have to answer for his offence to a severe taskmaster; but that did not disturb him so much as the thought that he had planted a bar sinister on the hitherto unstained shield of his fidelity to whatever trust was imposed on him.

"But it cannot be an unpardonable sin," he reflected uneasily, "to help the unfortunate against the persecution of a knave. Holy Mother, help me. I must take the consequences now."

Katherine and her companion hurried along the corridor in the direction of the Queen's apartments; but that was not their destination.

Ross, perplexed and curious, sneaked after them, keeping at a safe distance, however.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“ FOLLOW, FOLLOW ! ”

“ When Carmichael came before the King
 He fell low down upon his knee ;
 The very first word that the King spake,
 Was, ‘ Where’s the Laird of young Logie ? ’ ”

The Laird of Logie.

THE captain rejoined Torphichen. The latter received him with a leer.

“ Do you know the dame you have just been gallanting ? ” said he, looking very sly.

“ Well, slightly,” answered Murray, with assumed indifference and real discomfort ; “ she is one of the Queen’s damsels.”

“ Ay, ay, but she is more than that.”

“ Indeed ? ”

“ I believe she is the only creature on the earth our friend Cochrane ever cared for without calculating the precise value of the person to himself in the shape of coin or place.”

“ Faith, she is a fair-looking dame,” answered the captain, relieved ; “ but I doubt if her fancy tends his way.”

“ Therein is the jest. It is said that she is even wed to him by holy church, and still turns her back on him. Wherefore as the rule runs, her coldness makes him blaze the more, and he is as hot in the pursuit of her as he has ever been in the compassing of weightier affairs.”

“ It would be a pity if she yielded to him.”

“ How so ? She might do worse. He has chances that few men have.”

“ True, true ; she might do worse ; but her influence might interfere with his projects.”

“ Hum—perhaps. Who was it went with her but now ? ”

“ An escort, as I understand.” The captain again became uncomfortable. “ Some one of her Majesty’s followers, I suspect, sent hither to protect her from any

chance rudeness on the part of my lads, who are ever too quick, as you know, to forget their manners in their admiration of a bright eye. You know something of that humour—ch, comrade? Ha, ha! I have heard of many a poor lass who has lost appetite for your sake.”

“Well, a man of spirit must be gallant at times—it’s his nature,” answered the fat little fellow, with much complacency, for he cultivated the repute of being a cavalier in Cupid’s ranks; “and I confess that there may have been some passages in my life that have left broken hearts as well as broken heads behind them. But a man cannot marry every dame who chooses to set her heart upon him.”

“Had it been possible, I’ll be sworn you would have had a hundred wives, Master Torphichen,” commented Murray, laughing with apparent zest in admiration of his gossip, and all the while congratulating himself that this banter was giving the fugitive time to make good his escape.

Having once commenced anything, Captain Murray was not one to leave it half accomplished.

Torphichen, the obese, was flattered by this admiration, and laughed at the boast of his gallantry all the more loudly and gleefully because he had been really the least successful of wooers, and the lie gave him a species of revenge that gratified his vanity in blemishing the reputation of the sex with the same breath that extolled himself.

“Well, well,” he said, leering again, and remembering the object for which he had come hither, “we shall have a gossip, captain, anent these affairs when we have more leisure. You have not broken the seal of my warrant yet.”

“Ah, that was a neglect; but is there need for so much haste? I have some rare sack and Burgundy in my chamber that you should know the flavour of. What say you?”

“In faith I like your offer better than the service I am bound on. Yet there is no such need for haste, either. I can travel an hour later as well as an hour earlier, and in the better humour for your hospitality.”

“Come, then. A cup before you go will give you stomach for the keen night air.”

The master of fence was not proof against this warm invitation. He left his men to await him in the ward-

room, and accompanied the captain to his retreat, where the wine proved even more attractive than the entertainer had promised.

He would not have consented so readily to accept this hospitality had he suspected that Katherine's companion was the person whom his warrant authorized him to conduct as a prisoner from the dungeon of the palace to the keep of Cochrane's Tower. Ross had only directed his suspicion to the lady; and that, the King's signet and the conduct of Captain Murray had removed.

The wine was good; Torphichen forgot his mission, and the warrant still remained unopened. But the conviviality of the captain and his guest was abruptly checked by the appearance of Cochrane, to whom Ross had hastened as soon as he became satisfied that the purpose of Mistress Katherine was not to conduct her companion to the presence of the Queen, but to enable him to quit the palace unobserved. He was then certain that this was an affair for the immediate attention of his master, and so it proved.

Torphichen looked up at the scowling visage of his principal in happy unconsciousness of any dereliction, save in the matter of half an hour's delay, which was of no consequence.

Murray flushed slightly, and then assumed an expression that was almost dogged in its resolution to maintain silence.

"I required you to make speed, Torphichen," said Cochrane, darkly, "and this seems a droll fashion of obedience."

"Swords and daggers, man," cried the impetuous little master, his good humour changing on the instant to rage, "am I your cur that I must do your dirty work and be whipped for it by you? 'Sblood, sir, I but stayed to drain a cup of good fellowship with my comrade here in order to give me spirit for the knave's task you set me: and forsooth, because I tarry so long as a man may drink in comfort you turn upon me. There, take your warrant, and do the thing yourself."

This ebullition was the result of the wine that was in the man's stomach, rather than the judgment that was in his head; for although somewhat of a blusterer at all times, he was usually careful to avoid giving offence to Cochrane. But the pique with which he saw him elevated

to the first place in the King's favour found vent in this moment of tyrannical oppression, for such he considered the attack of Cochrane.

The latter picked up the warrant which was flung at him by his hot-headed compeer, and noting that the seal was unbroken, his scowl became darker. Without a word he turned to Murray.

"This is for you, sir. Has it not been presented before?"

"It was, and I am to blame, perhaps, for not examining it sooner. But the matter did not seem of pressing import, and I laid it on the table there whilst I helped my guest to prepare for his journey."

"You have helped him to drown what little wit he had. Read now."

Torphichen swaggered up to his compeer.

"Much or little wit, Cochrane, I stand slight from no man. You will see to this business yourself, and I thank the saints my hands are clear of it."

"Tush!" ejaculated Cochrane, with the gesture of impatience he might have used had a child stumbled in his way at a busy moment.

"This way, gentlemen," said Murray, quietly, after reading the warrant.

The fencing-master sullenly reseated himself at the table. Cochrane followed the captain.

They went to the dungeon in which Lamington had been confined, and found it unoccupied.

"You shall answer for this with your head, Captain Murray," cried Cochrane, in savage chagrin.

"I shall answer to my master, sir, in whatever he may require of me," answered the soldier, with dignity.

The royal favourite turned from him exasperated, but not foiled yet. He addressed his own retainers.

"Pass the word to the sentinels—a prisoner has escaped. Let every door and gate be closed, and let none pass without permission given under my hand or the King's. The rest of you call upon every man in the palace to begin the search, and leave no corner, however low or high or sacred, that you do not penetrate."

He wheeled round to Murray.

"You, sir, will call the gentlemen of the guard together

and inform them that you have permitted the villain who attempted the life of his Majesty to escape. Redeem your error—if it be no more than error—by prompt service now.”

Murray bowed, and departed to summon the guard.

Cochrane had examined the sentinel and the men who had been in the ward-room when the prisoner passed, and although astonished to find that the King's signet had been the token which enabled him to escape, he was satisfied that Murray had betrayed his trust, and Torphichen too.

The alarm passed from one quarter of the palace to another with the rapidity of lightning; and in ten minutes after the discovery of the escape every man and woman within the precincts of the royal dwelling was on the alert.

Cochrane himself led the search, fired by all the passions of disappointed malice, fear, and jealousy. He moved from place to place with the nimbleness of a panther—now issuing commands, now questioning those whom he encountered as to their success. He first made sure that no one had passed through the gates for two hours, and then he felt that the victim was still within reach.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WATCHWORD.

“ All night I'll watch you in the park,
With me till morning stay ;
For dark and dreary is the night,
And dangerous is the way.

“ Beneath the bush he laid him down,
And wrapped him in his plaid ;
While trembling for her lover's fate,
At distance stood the maid.”

Sir James the Rose.

PROCEEDING at a quick pace, but not so hastily as to excite suspicion in the minds of any of the persons they met in the corridors, Katherine and Lamington, without obstruction, reached the tower in which the Confessional was situated, and where she had first presented herself to the Queen.

There was a private corridor leading thence to the chapel; but it was guarded by a door, and when she tried it this door was fast.

She did not know how or where to procure the key; the door was too strong to be easily forced, and the poor lady turned with eyes of dismay to her lover.

He was calmer, and the emergency only made his resolution the more desperate.

"Since that way is closed," said he, quietly, "I must try the bolder course, and openly cross the square. The alarm has not been raised yet, and I may pass the guard by some lucky chance in time."

"It is madness. You would be challenged; you have not got the word, and you would be stayed at once."

"I must venture that," he answered; "for to remain here is only to be captured, without even the poor chance of escape I may find at the gates."

Ross had got near enough to catch the last words, and thereupon he departed to find his master.

Katherine remembered Mysie Ross, and fancied that she might know where to procure the key of this obstinate door which barred them from safety.

"No, there is another hope. Remain here."

She pointed to the embrasure of a window, which was dark enough to screen him from any casual observation. There he ensconced himself whilst she hurried away in quest of Mysie.

The delay was unfortunate, for the girl was unable to supply the required information. Katherine rejoined Gordon.

"You have failed," he said, reading the disappointment in her face.

"Yes; you must make the venture of crossing the square."

They retraced their steps to the head of the principal staircase. As they approached it the alarm was given, and the pursuit commenced.

Hurrying footsteps, the murmur of voices, and the clank of arms were the sounds which suddenly greeted them, and they drew back appalled.

"It is too late," he said; "and I have no weapon with which to secure for myself an honourable death."

"Too late for that course," she said, stifling her agitation and quickly devising a new scheme, "but not too late for another. Yonder stair leads to the ramparts. Ascend; they may not think of searching there, and if they do, you may still find means of hiding till they retreat."

"Good—farewell. You will hear of me whether I fall or live."

"First, give me your cloak and hat—quick, they are coming."

Without questioning her purpose, he obeyed. Then touching her hand with his lips, and with one look of love and gratitude for the devotion and courage she displayed on his account, he sprang up the stairs which she had pointed out.

Cochrane a moment afterwards stood on the spot where the lovers had parted. With him were half a dozen of his followers and Ross.

They saw a figure in cloak and hat moving rapidly along the corridor.

"Yonder's the man," cried Ross, pointing to the figure; "I could swear to the hat and cloak."

Cochrane, with an exclamation of satisfaction in the immediate prospect of triumph, pursued.

The figure glided onward swiftly and noiselessly. The pursuer was startled and brought to an abrupt stand, when the figure boldly entered the ante-room of the Queen's apartments.

After a moment's hesitation, Cochrane rudely thrust open the door and followed.

"Her Majesty's privacy must be protected from such intrusions as this," he muttered; "and our prisoner must be seized."

He was confronted by Katherine.

Behind her stood several attendants, staring with considerable amazement at the lady and at the pursuers. On the floor at her feet lay the cloak and hat which had beguiled the enemy.

"Where is the man who entered here but now?" he demanded, fiercely.

"No man has entered here," she replied, calmly.

"It is false. I saw him not a moment gone."

"You were mistaken, sir. Appeal to these gentlemen, if you still doubt me."

"I have been here for the last half-hour, sir," said one of the pages in waiting, "and during that time no stranger has entered here. But her ladyship came in just now as if she had been masquerading, and there lie the garments she has thrown off."

Cochrane looked at the cloak and hat, and comprehended the trick which had been played him.

"Where is the knave Gordon?" he said between his clenched teeth, and grasping her arm with a gripe that made the blood tingle at her finger tips.

"Secure from your malice," she replied, without wincing under the pain of his gripe.

"You know, and you shall tell me where he lies hidden."

"You cannot invent any torture which will force that from me."

He was sure of it when he looked into her eyes, so clear, so steady, and so scornful. He released her, wheeled about, and quitted the apartment. He cursed the stupidity of Ross, but he consoled himself with the reflection that the fugitive could not be far away when such a decoy as that by which he had been deceived was necessary for his protection.

He retreated quickly, and halted at the foot of the stair which conducted to the roof of the tower. Having explored the opposite extremity of the corridor, posting guards at every point of egress as he went along, he began to ascend to the ramparts.

The staircase was narrow and steep. Lamington had mounted it lightly, and at the top he came to a doorway which gave to the battlements of the palace. There he paused, peering forth cautiously to discover the whereabouts of the sentinel.

The night was gloomy as the fortunes of the man who gazed at it. Big heavy clouds were drifting rapidly athwart the sky, presaging another storm. Occasionally they left clear spaces of deep blue, which reflected a faint light on the carth, at other times there prevailed a darkness in which it became difficult to distinguish objects at only a few yards' distance.

Turrets and ramparts rose in shadowy outline before him, and offered many dark corners in which he might lie

concealed, if the search were not too vigilant, and the searchers were not provided with torches. But these were the very conditions upon which he could not count; and there was the pressing probability that the watch would detect him before he could reach even a temporary coign of vantage. The drifting clouds cleared a space and permitted him to see the trooper, who guarded that side of the tower, marching slowly away from him with his halberd resting on his shoulder.

Gordon's resolution was promptly taken.

With the celerity of an antelope and the caution of a man whose life is at stake, he followed the sentinel, keeping well under the shadow of the ramparts, so that even had the soldier turned unexpectedly he would not have seen him. The man did not turn, however, and Lamington got close behind him without his presence being suspected.

Then with one bound he had his arms upon the soldier's throat, stifling the cry of alarm which the affrighted fellow tried to utter. Gordon snatched the halberd from his nerveless grasp, and with the butt end of it struck him down insensible.

This noiseless victory gave him an unpremeditated advantage. None of the other sentinels who were silently patrolling the battlements had observed any sound of the brief scuffle. But discovery was imminent whenever they happened to miss their comrade at the points where they were accustomed to meet and interchange the word of assurance that all was right.

Gordon expeditiously removed the man's steel cap, and adjusted it on his own head. Next he unbuckled the belt and removed the jerkin; last he drew off the heavy jack-boots, and assumed them himself. They fitted well enough for his purpose, and so he thrust the unconscious trooper close to the rampart, shouldered the halberd, and marched forward in time to meet the next watch.

"All goes well," he muttered, indistinctly, in reply to the man who saluted him as his comrade.

He wheeled round, and paced slowly back, the other doing the same without heeding the churlish mood in which he had been greeted.

When Gordon halted at the head of the stair, he breathed with something of that sense of relief which one

experiences in having escaped an accident, and he began to balance the probability of being able to pass the main body of the guard undetected. He could risk it if he only knew the watchword. But how was he to learn that? To say that he had forgotten it would attract a degree of attention which must prove fatal to him.

Meanwhile there was the danger of the sentinel whom he had overthrown recovering and giving the alarm.

His reflections were presently interrupted by the sounds of Cochrane and his followers approaching. The crisis of the adventure was at hand; success or failure would depend upon the results of the next few minutes.

"One certainty there is," he muttered, setting his teeth; "if he recognizes me, Cochrane's flight downward will be a swift one."

And he cast a grim look towards the ramparts, resolved at the first movement of suspicion to hurl his foe down to the depths below. For once his own luck and that of the royal favourite depended on the same event. If Cochrane failed to identify him his life would be saved, and Gordon would gain the knowledge of the watchword, which was essential to his escape.

Up sprang the pursuers, Cochrane first, dark and wrathful.

The false sentinel crossed the door with his halberd.

"Who goes there?" he demanded, in a hoarse, gruff voice.

"Friends."

"The word?"

"*Hold fast for the King,*" answered Cochrane, impatiently, thrusting the sentinel aside, and stepping out on the battlement.

He unsuspectingly placed himself between the ramparts and the man whom he pursued with so much rancour.

"Now," thought Gordon, standing within arm's reach, "one blow from this halberd or one touch of my hand, and you go to your long reckoning."

The opportunity to settle old scores was indeed so favourable that it was with some difficulty he resisted the temptation to hurl the knave over the walls and take the consequences, whatever they might be. That would have been a poor as well as a mean retaliation, however, in which,

for an instant's agony, all his crimes would be paid in this world. That was not enough for Lamington—he had been too deeply wronged.

“Have you had any strangers with you?” queried Cochrane, hurriedly.

“None, so please you, sir, during my watch,” was the response, in the same hoarse voice as before, and with a fair assumption of the respect belonging to the character he represented.

“Have you been on guard at the door all the time?”

“No, sir, I have been patrolling between this and the north tower.”

“The knave may have crept up, then, whilst your back was turned. Advance with the torches, and search all of you.”

Cochrane set the example. Snatching a torch from the hand of one of his followers, he sped along the ramparts, thrusting the light into every dark corner, and leaving no nook in which a rat could have lain hidden uninvestigated. The men spread themselves rapidly over the battlements, and left Gordon alone.

“I have got the watchword,” he muttered, joyfully, “and it shall go hard but I will turn it to good account.”

Grasping the halberd firmly, he darted down the stairs, which seemed to have been left to his care as the sentinel.

But when he reached the foot he was suddenly arrested by a couple of stout fellows who wore the Cochrane badge.

“Where away so fast, comrade?” said one gruffly, and holding him by the arm.

One glance at them, and his scheme was formed.

“To the ramparts, comrades!—to the ramparts! It is our master's command.”

“Has he found the prisoner, then?”

“They are close upon him. Away; why stand you questioning me? I am in haste to summon assistance.”

His haste and apparent frankness, combined with the probability of his announcement, deceived the men. They hurried up to the aid of their master.

Gordon sprang down the staircase to the corridor which gave egress to the square.

His course was arrested again, this time by a couple of

troopers, and his nerves were thrilled in brief suspense lest they should discover the faults of his attire.

"To the ramparts, comrades!" he shouted again. "I go to give the alarm."

At that instant he heard a shout far up in the tower which, to the men, confirmed his intelligence that their help was needed, but which to Lamington intimated that his stratagem had been discovered. The insensible watch had been found, his senses revived, and he had made the pursuers aware of the mishap which had befallen him.

The troopers who now stayed Gordon released him at once, and they hastened to join the other dupes whilst he dashed out to the square.

With the fleet steps of a stag in full career he crossed to the heavy archway, and there, as he had expected, the guard commanded him to halt.

"*Hold fast for the King!*"

"Pass on."

Next, to the warder's gate, where the same question and answer were made.

"You cannot pass the gate until we receive commands," said the warder.

"I must pass," answered Lamington, with the boldness of desperation; and happily here the darkness aided his disguise, for as he was obliged to stand longer parleying with the man than he had done with any of the others, the incompleteness of his costume would have been detected had there been light. As it was, the guard only saw the steel cap, jerkin, and halberd of a trooper.

"My orders are plain, comrade, that no living creature is to pass hence till Sir Robert Cochrane himself appears at the gate or sends a warrant under his own hand or the King's."

"But I tell you, it is Sir Robert Cochrane himself who sends me hither. He fears that the prisoner who has escaped has already made his way beyond the bounds of the palace, and I am bidden to speed to the town to raise the alarm there."

"Have you no token?"

"What need was there for token when you see what badge I wear? But refuse, if you please. I am content to bide here—only if the knave make clear away you must answer for it to Sir Robert Cochrane."

"Nay, if such be his command you must pass," said the man, unwilling to accept the responsibility which was thus forced upon him.

The postern was opened, the drawbridge lowered, and Lamington cleared the outworks with a dozen strides.

As the chains clanked in raising the bridge again, the fugitive heard the loud murmur of his pursuers and knew that they were already in the court, that in a few moments more they would be rushing out upon him in full chase. The hunters were so close at hand that he was uncertain which way to fly.

He stood hesitating, listening to the threatening sounds of his enemy's approach—he was like one fascinated by the very imminence of his peril. He dared not seek hiding in the town, for there the search would be hottest, and every other direction seemed to be equal in danger.

He was still near enough to the palace to hear the harsh grating of the portcullis in its socket, as it was raised to give egress to the pursuers. Then he fled.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SLOOP "HELOISE."

"I saw the new moon late yestreen,
Wi' the old moon in her arm;
And if we gang to sea, master,
I fear we'll come to harm."

Sir Patrick Spens.

LAMINGTON made straight across fields and morass to the Forth. He procured a boat and rowed down with the tide to the Leith roadstead, where he found the French sloop *Heloise*. It was the same vessel which had brought him with the Abbot Panther from France, and by the direction of his lordship it had remained at anchor ready to serve them in such an emergency as the present. The Abbot was already on board, and received Lamington with hearty congratulations; but he would explain nothing until the fugitive had refreshed mind and body by sleep. Gordon was conducted to a comfortable berth, where, utterly worn out by his exertions and anxiety, he soon slept soundly.

When he wakened he was at first perplexed by the discovery that the gloomy walls of his prison were transformed into a pleasant cabin. But one by one the events of the preceding day and night recurred to him until he had traced them to the moment when he had stepped on board the sloop.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Panther, who, before replying to Gordon's eager questions, desired to know how he was disposed to bear himself in the matter of the conspiracy to overthrow Cochrane.

"As the one who wishes to be entrusted with his death-warrant," cried Lamington, excitedly.

The Abbot smiled with the utmost satisfaction at the warmth of his companion.

"I thought your humour would run in that direction," he said, "but remember that you are pledging yourself now to desperate measures, for nothing less can help us."

"There is no measure so desperate that I will not venture upon it, if it promise me the destruction of Robert Cochrane. I exist only for that purpose now, since this hand, stained with her brother's blood, can never clasp Katherine's as that of my wife."

His brow darkened, and his head sunk on his breast as he reflected upon the impassable barrier which had arisen between him and the dearest hope of his existence.

"Are you sure that Janfarie is dead?" queried Panther, meditatively.

Gordon started at this expression of a doubt, which seemed like the echo of a lingering fancy in his own mind. But he felt that it was a foolish fancy, which could only distract his thoughts from the steadfast pursuance of the one object he had now in view.

"She is assured of it," he answered, gloomily, "and I cannot doubt, since it was Nicol Janfarie who gave her the tidings, with such proofs that she who desired as eagerly as myself to discover some loophole of escape from the doom of separation her brother's fate brings upon us could not find any."

"Still she might have been deceived."

"No, for Nicol is an honest youth, who would not for any bribe join so base a league."

"He, too, might have been deceived."

"Do not torture me with these surmises. I am too willing to give them lodging in my thought; and to rise into the bright land of hope only to be hurled back to despair would be torture, sharper even than that I now endure. Give me work to do, and the madder the enterprise in which you engage me the readier I will be to undertake it."

Panther, whose mind was too busy with the political intrigues in which he was involved to give much consideration to the finer sentiments of life, was too generously disposed toward his friend not to feel some sympathy with his passionate anguish.

"I will be silent," he said, "but I will not forget. Meanwhile, such service as you seek is ready for you."

"Will it help me toward Cochrane?"

"Straight."

"Then I am ready."

"You have not asked what is the service on which you are to be employed?"

"It is work that only a desperate man may do, I understand, and that is enough for me."

"So desperate that every step you make will be at the points of a thousand swords and halberds."

"That is what I wish to find. Life is the hazard that I throw, Cochrane's ruin is the prize I have to win, whilst death is the grim supervisor of my play."

"If you succeed, your foe will see the failure of the crowning exploit of his career; and a gibbet will reward his ambition and his knavery."

"Quick! let me begin the task. I am like a man parched whilst standing within sight of water."

"The task is to rescue his highness the Duke of Albany."

"He is still a prisoner in the castle of Edinburgh?"

"Yes, by Cochrane's treachery."

"What fatal influence does the knave possess that he can drive the King, who is so gentle in himself, to such foul dealings with his nearest kin?"

The Abbot shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"His Majesty's gentleness proceeds to the extremity of timidity, and it is by that weakness his minion rules him. He is obstinate, too, and is unwilling to acknowledge, even

to himself, that he has erred in judgment. He knows the unpopularity he has earned by his persistent support of Cochrane and the other parasites who have fastened upon him, and who will destroy him. But he lays the blame on the wrong shoulders; he blames his nobles and the people for their opposition, and he refuses to take the one step which would satisfy them—which would ensure their fidelity and avert rebellion—that is, to remove his favourites.”

“Something of that I have observed; and I have had too sure a proof of his credulity in the continuance of his favour to Cochrane after the fate of Mar, to believe that any measure short of revolution will persuade him that his policy is false and cruel.”

“It is not his Grace’s policy; it is that of his parasites. They know that when the King learns to trust his friends their downfall is fixed. And so the discontent which has been with good reason loudly expressed by nobles and commons has been represented to him as the advanced signals of a civil war.”

“But can he not see that they are the outcries of a country oppressed by the measures he has imposed at the instigation of greedy satellites?”

“No, he cannot see, for he listens only to those whose business it is to misrepresent everything that may affect their own interests. On the night of Mar’s assassination and of your arrest the King dismissed Cochrane with the determination that in the morning he would investigate every detail of the strange transaction, and punish the guilty without mercy. He even suspected his favourite.”

“In the saints’ name, then, how did he alter his purpose so completely before the council met?”

“You will see! Early in the morning Cochrane prayed for an audience. He was refused at first; but he knew that his head was in the balance, and he tried with new energy the argument which has served him so well at other emergencies. He declared that his Majesty’s throne and life depended on an immediate audience being granted to him.”

“And he prevailed?”

“Ay, unhappily so. He showed the King proofs of a powerful conspiracy to dethrone him, and to place the

crown on Albany's head. His Majesty swore that they might place the crown on the duke's head if it pleased them, but they would have to seek the head in his black kist—which was equivalent to an order for the instant execution of his brother."

"Gracious heaven! what proofs had the villain which could drive his Grace to such extremity?"

"Letters which had been found in the possession of Mar, and on the unguarded words of which the worst interpretation might easily be put, for they were written chiefly by gentlemen who were smarting under the indignities and wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the royal favourites by the King's permission, if not his sanction. By some accursed agency the tablet containing the list of our friends which I entrusted to you formed one of the proofs, and helped to swell his Majesty's wrath and alarm."

"My evil fortune follows me in everything," muttered Gordon, chagrined that he had contributed in any way to the success of his enemy.

"Well, you must overcome it. We must not lament now, but act; and for that reason I wish you to understand the whole position. When Cochrane had wrought his Majesty into the state of frenzy in which he gave vent to that threat, the knave was sensible of victory, and he pushed it to the utmost."

"In what fashion?"

"First he obtained an assurance that no blame should be charged to him for the death of Mar, and as a testimony of his master's confidence he was to receive any gift that he might consider sufficient. Then, what think you the ambitious loon demanded? Why, nothing less than the title of the murdered earl. Ay, and by my soul, the request was granted, although it was agreed that all the properties appertaining to the earldom should revert to the crown, save some trivial effects not worth counting. You see even at that moment of exasperation and terror our gracious monarch did not forget how to make a bargain. He would have made a rare packman if it had not been his ill-luck to be a king. So he gave with one hand the empty title which quite satisfied him who received it, and with the other he grasped all that his dead brother had owned, which consoled him for the new peril he entered upon in reward-

ing his favourite for an act for which he knew his court and people thought the scaffold too poor a punishment."

"What followed?"

"Cochrane, restored to greater favour than ever, represented the popularity of the duke as a monstrous danger which there was only one method of removing. That method was to sweep away the friends of his highness by decrees of outlawry, and by the headsman's axe; and by attainting Albany himself of high treason, which would be the shortest road to the block. Then his head might be preserved in the black kist amongst its other treasures, if such were his Majesty's pleasures."

"But the King could not consent to such a diabolical measure?"

"He was wrought up to a pitch of alarm in which all his wit deserted him, and he was ready to yield to any proposition that might be made to him, and that promised him security from the evils and dangers he believed to be pressing around him."

"Have you certain information of this?"

"Yes. I have it from the page Ramsay, who, being in attendance on the King, had been commanded to retire only to the embrasure of the window. His Grace had little thought then of the turn his audience was to take. He forgot the presence of his page, who, in consequence, heard most of what was said. Ramsay is a simple lad, owing me some favours, and by assuming some knowledge of the converse, I elicited everything that it was necessary to know."

"It seems almost too horrible that almost immediately after the murder of one brother he should assent to the death of the other," exclaimed Lamington, astonished by what he heard.

"Do not blame him too much," proceeded Panther, quietly; "remember, he has been persuaded that it is a question of his crown and life against the head of Albany; and in truth Albany has passion and ambition enough to place himself on the throne at any cost if he saw fair opportunity. But he has happily discretion enough not to attempt such a project without the most potent reasons for doing so—without, indeed, reasons which would be tantamount to an assurance of success. He has a daring heart,

but he has a cool head; and for the honour of Scotland—ay, for the King's own conscience' sake—he must be rescued from the doom to which Cochrane's villainy would consign him."

"He shall be rescued," returned Gordon, with fierce resolution.

Panther grasped his hand.

"I believe you will do it," he said, with a gratified light in his eyes which imparted to his visage somewhat of its ordinary jovial expression. But presently it resumed the calm, reflective cast which characterized it whilst he had been making his important communication.

"I have not done yet," he continued. "When the council met it was only to be broken up in the abrupt fashion you have heard of; for the King was again utterly under the control of his minion, and obstinate in what he believed to be his own judgment of the affairs we were met to discuss."

"Could none of you influence him?"

"It is not easy to influence an obstinate man who is convinced that all those about him, save his especial friends, are hungering for his life. But what little effect our arguments might have had, we had no chance of trying. The injudicious haste of Angus afforded his Majesty the opportunity he desired of dismissing the council before we were able to make any decisive movement. I hastened to the Queen, begged her to give you what protection she might, and then quitted the palace, having too much reason to dread that since my presence there had become known, I might be provided with a lodging of a kind that disagrees with most liberal spirits."

"Angus and the others have withdrawn to their fortresses?"

"No—I joined them at the hostel, and when I had acquainted them that I had directed a French sloop to put into Leith roadstead, as a precaution on my own account, they agreed that we should use it in securing his highness of Albany's retreat. So all journeyed to Edinburgh, where they await in secret lodgment to give what help they can in effecting the rescue. While you have been sleeping there, I have received further tidings."

"To what purpose?"

“A warrant has been granted for the execution of Albany, and to-morrow he will be beheaded if he escape not meanwhile.”

“So soon. Then there is little time to take a fortress like the castle.”

“Our stratagem must be the more promptly put into action, that is all.”

“You have arranged the scheme, then?”

“Ay, and you must execute it.”

“Give me your commands; I shall obey them to the letter.”

There were two casks, one filled with Gascony wine, the other containing, besides wine, a coil of rope and a letter of instructions to the Duke of Albany, rolled up in a ball of wax. It was Gordon's task to convey these two casks to the prisoner in the castle, and, in the disguise of a French sailor, he succeeded.

The Duke found the rope and the letter warning him that his execution was fixed for the following day. Albany was a stalwart man, brave and prompt in action. That night he bade the captain of the guard sup with him, filled the unfortunate officer with wine, then stabbed him, and so obtained the keys of the apartments. Next, with the aid of the rope which Lamington had conveyed to him, Albany and his chamberlain escaped from the castle. His highness soon reached the waterside, where a boat lay in readiness to convey him on board the *Heloise*.

Upon finding himself safe on the deck of the sloop, his first thought was one of gratitude to Lamington.

“I cannot well offer you recompense, Gordon,” said the Duke, earnestly; “for such service as you have rendered cannot be requited. But name what acknowledgment my sword or will can make, and I pledge myself to it, be it what it may.”

“Secure me the doom of Robert Cochrane, my lord, and you may hold yourself quit for any help I have been fortunate enough to give you.”

“Nay, man, that is a purpose so near to my own concerns that I cannot count it so much to your gain as to mine. Name something else.”

“Formerly your Grace partly promised your aid in obtaining justice to my father's memory.”

“And I will keep my promise to a larger measure than you can have hoped for. Now, my Lord Abbot, bid our captain make for Dunbar, that I may see the place garrisoned; then ho, for France, and if cunning Louis will not aid my cause, then England shall, if I pay all Scotland for her arms.”

During this brief colloquy the sails had been set, and a favouring breeze springing up, the sloop stood out to sea.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFFAIRS OF STATE.

“Then reid, reid grew his dark brown cheeks,
 Sae did his dark brown brow;
 His luiks grew kene, as they were wont
 In dangers great to do.”

Hardyknute.

COCHRANE'S detached parties of pursuers returned one after another to Linlithgow with the same report of failure. Cochrane himself was the last to give up the chase.

He consoled himself with the thought that at any rate his rival was removed from his path as effectually almost as if death had been the instrument of his removal. He could not believe that it was possible for Gordon to hover around him, knowing that he would pay the penalty of his life if detected on Scottish ground. But to make sure even in a matter which seemed so certain, he despatched spies in all directions, so that if Lamington were mad enough to remain in the country his whereabouts would speedily become known; and as he offered a considerable reward for the traitor's head, he believed that he would soon be gratified by the utter extinction of an enemy who surpassed him in courage, and seemed to be able to rival him in cunning.

When he had taken these measures, Cochrane proceeded to the King, and informed his Majesty of the escape which had been effected, praying him to show his displeasure for the negligence, if not complicity, of Captain Murray by some fitting punishment, and to mark his royal indignation with the conduct of the Queen's lady, Mistress Katherine, by

some decisive command, to bring her under the control of her lawful husband.

The King was surprised by the adventure, and rather amused by the result than indignant at it. He had slept well, and being really of a nature which shrank from extreme measures, save when excited by some outburst of passion, he was glad rather than otherwise that the prisoner had escaped from his favourite's clutches, whose resolution regarding him he suspected, although he did not know it.

"Man Rob," he said, playfully, "let the chiel go; he deserves free passage since he has been clever enough to get out of your gripe. Let him go, I say, and let Murray be. He has ay been a faithful servant to our person; so we will just hold this delinquency over his head to frighten him from doing the like again."

"But how can your Majesty be assured that your present clemency will not be the cause of his attempting the like again, when occasion shall arise in which your gracious person may be more intimately concerned even than in the present case?" said the favourite, suppressing his own annoyance in affected interest for the safety of his royal master.

"Hoots, Cochrane, what's the use of perpetually worrying us and yourself with possibilities? Let him be, I say, and never fash your thumb about to-morrow."

"What of the lady, then, my liege?"

"Ah, that's the sore place of it all, I doubt," answered his Majesty, who was evidently in excellent humour this morning, with which the gloomy mood of his fatigued minion ill accorded; "she's a clever lass, and a true; and on our faith, man, we like her all the better for what she has done."

"But your Majesty will not permit her offence to pass unnoted."

"No; our Majesty will place the errant damsel under strict surveillance until such time as our royal pleasure be further known. But, hark you, sir, she must be used with due respect, for which we will hold you accountable in every particular."

The pleasantry with which the King was disposed to treat everything this morning, and his impatience of any serious discussion, would have dismayed any intriguer who

had less knowledge of James's humours than Cochrane. But he had studied the impulses of his master so carefully, that no matter in what mood they were exhibited he knew how to deal with them so that they might be turned ultimately in the direction of his own purposes.

Therefore, on the present occasion, he made his obeisance, and maintained a discreet silence on the affairs which were uppermost in his thoughts. He was satisfied that the events of the previous day, and the passionate resolutions which they had inspired in the monarch's breast, would recur to him by-and-by when he grew weary of the study of his art treasures with which he was for the time disposed to amuse himself.

The event justified his expectation. The Lord Chancellor had an audience of the King, and immediately thereafter Cochrane was summoned in haste to the royal presence. He was required to produce the documents in proof of the treasonable intents of the late Earl of Mar, the chief of which was calculated to show that the earl had, by the wicked art of witchcraft and magic, conspired to bring about the death of his sovereign Majesty the King, whose effigy he had burned to that end.

In the examination of these papers all the superstitious alarms of the King, and his jealous suspicions of the projects and power of his remaining brother Albany, took possession of his mind again with new force. They blinded him to every sense save that of the necessity of protecting himself against the evil machinations with which his imagination surrounded him, and left him weakly susceptible to any dark suggestion that might be offered to him.

On the following morning a courier arrived from Edinburgh with the tidings of Albany's escape from the castle. The news intensified the monarch's fears, and caused him to draw closer to his favourite by the confirmation these events appeared to give to all that Cochrane had represented.

But at first the King refused to credit the news. He rode to the castle with all speed to investigate the matter himself.

He surveyed the tower, the wine casks, and the dead soldiers; he traced the route of the fugitives to the battlements, where the rope by which the descent had been made

still dangled in the wind, and then the King stood for some moments in speechless bewilderment, gazing blankly at the precipice and at the expanse of country beyond, his eyes lingering long on the glistening bosom of the Forth.

The discovery had not been made until the morning light revealed the rope to the watch. That excited the suspicion which had been lulled by the knowledge that the captain and three of the guard were carousing in the duke's lodging. Probably this circumstance had rendered the sentinels of the night less sedulous in the discharge of their duty, and contributed to the success of the prisoner's bold venture.

Instant search was made; the door of the chamber was forced, and the unpleasant truth was thrust upon the governor of the castle that the captive had slipped through his fingers.

The same truth was forced upon his Majesty as he stood on the battlement vaguely surveying the picturesque plain beneath. When he roused himself from his reverie, he issued his commands for an immediate pursuit with more promptitude and decision than was his custom.

He was haunted by the prediction of the astrologer—of which his favourites reminded him often enough to keep it firmly fixed in his memory, even if he had been of a nature to forget such things—and the present circumstances seemed to be tending so directly to the realization of the prophecy—that a lion was to be killed by his own whelps—that the unhappy King obtained a species of firmness from the apparent desperation of his cause.

But it was a firmness which prompted him to the darkest measures for his own protection, and placed him more than ever in the hands of Cochrane and the others, of whose fidelity he deemed himself secure, since their interests were wholly dependent on him. The consequence of this wretched policy was naturally to render his position still more antagonistic towards the nobles upon whose honour and strength he should have relied for support against whatever treasonable purposes his brother might entertain.

The knowledge that some blame might attach to him for the death of Mar, and that Albany obtained additional favour from the populace, on account of that dismal affair, rendered the King all the more suspicious of every one

who was not directly under his control, and absolutely bound to him by personal necessities.

The pursuers returned on the night of the succeeding day, having had no better success than the discovery that the duke had garrisoned Dunbar castle, and sailed for France, leaving Gordon of Lamington behind in charge of the affairs of his highness.

A strong force, under command of Lord Evandale, the Chancellor, was mustered, and marched against Dunbar to lay it under siege, with directions from the King to obtain possession of the fortress at any cost.

Whatever leniency his Majesty might have been disposed to show Lamington before he had been made aware of that gentleman's reported activity on behalf of Albany, he was not likely to give him the benefit of it now. He regarded the knight with a feeling that was almost vindictive, and bade Cochrane deal with him in what manner he deemed best.

But during the days occupied in preparations for the expedition against Dunbar, and whilst the siege was in progress, the King was moody, fretful, and suspicious of every one who approached him. He secured his treasures in his black kist with new locks; he spoke little, and that little was of a melancholy and nervous character, which alarmed the Queen for the state of his mind. That his body suffered from the unhealthy nature of his broodings was plain to the most careless eye.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE KING'S COMMAND.

"Now wae be to you, fause Blackwood,
Ay, and an ill death may you dee!
Ye were the first and foremost man
That parted my true love and me."

Marchioness of Douglas.

KATHERINE JANFARIE sat by the window of the chamber which had been really her prison for some time now; for although the kindness and favour of Queen Margaret obtained her many indulgences, even her Majesty's inter-

cession failed to obtain for the unhappy lady little more liberty than the most closely confined tenant of a dungeon enjoyed.

She was dressed in deep mourning, which made the deathly pallor of her face the more striking. It was a pitiable face to look on—it was so very fair, and yet so sad. So still, so full of sorrow, utterly without hope, that it might have been limned as the countenance of despair.

The expression was that of one weary of life, and waiting for its close in a state of cold insensibility to all that passed around her.

The expression never changed—there seemed to be no joy potent enough to dispel her gloom, and no further sorrow capable of deepening it.

Her head was slightly bowed, and her eyes seemed to rest on her hands, which, worn almost to transparency, lay crossed on her lap, whilst she listened to the passionate utterances of the youth who stood near her.

It was Nicol Janfarie, whose garb bore traces of recent conflict. In several places it was rent and pierced; the breastplate which he wore was dented as if by blows, and his left hand was rudely bandaged, indicating a wound which, for lack of opportunity, had not been properly dressed.

But most of all, his usually frank and generous boyish countenance betokened the strife he had recently passed through. It was now begrimed with dust, and set in an expression of fierceness which made him appear much older than his years warranted. His hair was tossed confusedly, and his eyes were animated with a light in unison with the expression of his features.

“Are you deaf, sister, or dumb, that you make no answer?” he exclaimed hotly, and not without a degree of that petulant irritation which a youth displays when disappointed of the approbation which he feels his deeds have merited.

“I hear you, Nicol,” she said, in a low, abstracted tone.

“And you are not moved?” he cried, amazed by her indifference.

“Moved? The clang of arms fills me with sickness; the thought of the honours they may win reminds me of the hearts they will make desolate in the struggle, until I

could wish every man a coward that he might shrink from the glitter of a sword with my horror."

"Yet you are the daughter of Janfarie, and my sister! I tell you that the castle of Dunbar has yielded to the King's arms, and his troops are in possession of the stronghold. Every knave who stood against us, save three loons who dishonoured themselves by early flight, is prisoner, or lies cold and stark at his post. We won it by a pretty assault," he went on with glowing enthusiasm; "and my share of the work was not ill done, since the Lord Chancellor charged me with the despatches for his Majesty, as a token that I had acquitted myself fairly. I tell you this, and you answer by wishing that all men would shrink like cowards from a sword!"

"It was Lord Evandale who sent you hither, then?" she said, musingly, and without heeding the intelligence which was to him of the first importance.

"Ay, his lordship; and I have ridden without pause to care for my wound or to make myself presentable to his Majesty. But Cochrane also had directed me to ride hitherward the instant after the castle submitted to our arms. I have not brought the tidings he longed for, though, and that I longed to bring. I would have given all else to have been satisfied in that one matter."

His young face darkened with rage, and his right hand became clenched.

Katherine observed this change from the enthusiastic remembrance of a successful battle, to the moody chagrin of disappointed vengeance. Her own face became a shade paler.

"You mean?" she queried, with a faint sign of interest in what he said.

"I mean that Lamington was not amongst those who fell, or amongst those who were taken," he returned, scowling on her.

"Then he was one of the three who escaped," she said, her breath quickening, and a scarcely perceptible tint of colour overspreading her face.

Nicol ground his teeth and stamped his foot angrily.

"I have found the means of interesting you at last, sister," he cried; "but though the words choke me I will satisfy you, on condition that, after, you will answer me."

"I will answer if it be in my power to do so."

"I know it is—therefore, will you or not?"

"Surely, if it can advantage you——"

"There must be no ifs," he interrupted. "Do you promise?"

"As you will."

"Then, if it content you, know that the murderer of our father, the slayer of our brother, the destroyer of all our fortunes, was not amongst those who fell or who were captured, and neither was he with the three who fled!"

"Are you sure of that?"

She looked at him, and there was eagerness in her eyes, although so faint that it was the movement rather than the expression which denoted it. Nicol paused an instant to gaze searchingly in her face; and then, with a calmness which contrasted strangely with his previous passion, he answered—

"You mind, sister, with what joy I used to follow the stag over mountain and dale, and with what pride I used to bring my trophy home. Lad as I was, the foresters counted me no mean sportsman, for my hand was steady and my eye was keen at the moment when both were needed most. But I never tracked quarry with zest so deep, with hand so steady, or eyes so sure as I now follow Gordon. The spirit of our father stalks by my side, the spectre of our brother leads me on—the prey may baffle me a thousand times, but he will fall at last."

"Well?"

She seemed indifferent or insensible to the fierce hate and the greedy hunger for revenge which his regulated tones breathed; at any rate she made no effort by word or look to turn his purpose. But, indeed, she knew that to have attempted it would have been like dropping oil on fire in the hope of extinguishing it.

"Well," he continued, still without the least recurrence of his boyish passion, "do you think that I am likely to be deceived as to his whereabouts? If he had been lurking in the darkest hole or on the highest tower of Dunbar, I would have found him. I went there, not as a little while ago I would have done, to prove myself worthy of our name; I went there to find him."

"And failed."

"Ay, failed. He was not there, and the captain of the garrison acquainted me that he had quitted the fortress on the same day that he had entered it with Albany. None knew whither he had gone or with what intent."

Her breast seemed to fall and rise very gently, as if relieved. She removed her eyes from his face and said in the low, listless tone with which she had first spoken to him—

"I am glad of that."

Her words appeared to wound him sharply, and he had difficulty in restraining an exclamation of rage at the revelation of the sentiments with which she still evidently regarded one whom she ought to have loathed, as he thought.

"You still think of him," he said, gloomily; "but we will not talk of that. I claim your promise, and I conjure you by the memory of the dead, and by the gracious powers of heaven, answer me truly."

She was awed by the solemnity of his words and manner; for the occasion seemed to render the youth a man of grave purpose commanding respect.

"I have not heard your question," she replied, trembling slightly, for instinct warned her of the nature of what followed.

"You know where the assassin has sought shelter—declare his hiding-place."

She remained silent, gazing at her hands.

He stood watching her, and struggling with wrath and emotion of various kinds. Suddenly the lad dropped upon his knees, clasping his arms around her, and there were tears in the eyes he raised to her pallid face.

"Kate—Kate," cried the brother, imploringly; "before this man came like a curse to our hearth, I loved you, and you cared something for the wild boy who knew no desire that he would not curb for his sister's pleasure—no task so difficult that he would not undertake for her sake. See him now on his knees, praying you to denounce the slayer of his father and yours—of his brother and yours. You cannot—you DARE not deny him."

His youth, the simple memory of happier days, which he recalled, his half-suppressed passion, and the authority his position gave him—all these combined to strengthen his

appeal, and disturbed the torpid sensibilities of her heart more than anything which had passed between them yet.

She sobbed feebly, and she passed her hand through his tangled hair with the manner of one who seeks to soothe a child; but for a while she could not speak. He seeing that she was yielding, renewed his entreaty, reminding her of the duty they both owed to the dead, and beseeching her to purchase her own peace and his by divulging Gordon's hiding-place.

"The Sacred Mother knows the agony I have endured," she said at length; "and I am glad in my heart that I am spared the new misery of being the instrument of his death or yours. I am glad that I cannot answer you, Nicol."

"Cannot?" he said, suspiciously and disappointedly drawing his head back.

"Cannot, and would not, if it were in my power. Do not start from me till you have heard all. When you first brought me the tidings of Richard's fate, it was I who ventured everything to release Gordon from his prison."

"Accursed be the hands that——"

"Hush!" she cried, firmly, and holding him as he attempted to start away from her; "I am your sister still. Spare me your hatred if you can. Since Gordon's escape I have been kept close prisoner here—not treated harshly, but yet a prisoner. You have been kept ignorant of my state whilst you have been urged on like a sleuth-hound to the destruction of one who would have been our truest friend, but whom misfortune and the evil intrigues of an enemy have separated from us."

"You speak of Gordon?"

"I do. The blame is not his, but mine. The vengeance which you desire should be wrought on me; for the blood of father and brother are not on his, but on my hands. So, Nicol, go no farther afield, but take your vengeance now and here."

The dolorous condition in which he had found her, and this wild self-accusation, impressed Nicol with the fear that her reason was failing. He was dismayed in consequence, for although he had all the impulsive passion of youth, he had a generous nature, capable of making great sacrifices for those whom he esteemed. For his sister he had the warmest affection, and he would have been glad to find any

means to alleviate her sorrow, short of renouncing the sacred duty which he believed to be imposed on him of avenging the fate of his father and brother.

But he was unable to understand her rooted antipathy to Cochrane, who had shown himself the real friend of their house, and he was not a little incensed by her persistent regard for Lamington. This feeling contended now with the tenderer sentiments which the spectacle of her grief aroused.

There had been some appearance of excitement in her manner whilst she spoke, and yet the accent was one of such utter despair that it was like the melancholy chime of a funeral knell in the brother's ear.

She had risen ; and he now pressed her back on her seat, gently but firmly.

"You are mad, sister, to speak thus," he said gloomily. "I know that you are speaking in this fashion only that you may baffle me in the pursuit of one whom you still so unnaturally love."

"I would baffle you, Nicol, for your own sake," she answered.

"That is a slight to me, and makes me only the more eager to encounter him," he said, hurt by what seemed to be a doubt of his prowess.

"But most of all," she went on, unheeding his words, "I would prevent your meeting for my own sake. Blood enough has been shed already on my account : and day and night I pray to Heaven to spare me from being the cause of further strife. Oh, Nicol, if you care for me as you would have me believe, pity me and renounce this hateful feud."

"Renounce it!" he exclaimed, passionately. "Shame upon you!—daughter of Hugh Janfarie ; shame upon you!—sister of Richard Janfarie, who can forget their fall, and ask me, the last man of our house, to forego the one achievement that can make me worthy of the name I bear. Renounce the feud! The spirits of my father and my father's son would follow me through life and torture me with the memory of my falsehood to them. They would make my hand falter and my heart fail me at my sorest need if I forgot the requital which their fate demands of me."

"Can no prayer move you from this bloody purpose?"

Oh, Nicol, Nicol, will not they—cannot you be satisfied with the misery that has befallen me? Will you not be satisfied with my lingering death?”

“Your death?”

“Ay, brother, my death, for this torture cannot endure very long. Body and mind must speedily fail under the agony I suffer. Can you not understand me? I tell you, brother. Gordon was more precious than life to me; yet I have renounced him. I have parted from him for ever for the sake of our father and Richard. You cannot know how much the separation has cost us both; but we have submitted to it for their sake. The sacrifice has left me hopeless and indifferent to life. I hold myself accountable for all the ill that has happened, and the weight of my sin presses upon me until I weary for death; and my imprisonment, even under Robert Cochrane’s control, is of little moment to me. Is not all that atonement enough to you? Must you add to my anguish by the bloody fall of Gordon or yourself?”

He was moved by her appeal, and he responded huskily—

“I pity you, sister, and I would give my right hand to spare you.”

“Then you will consent to withdraw from this cruel purpose?”

“I dare not; there is no mortal power can move me from that. But I will spare you so far as may be—I will not trouble you again by seeking your aid in discovering his hiding-place.”

She clasped her hands as if resigning herself to fate.

“There is no hope,” she murmured, “and the evil work must be wrought out to the end.”

“Farewell, sister,” he went on hastily; “if we meet again you will know that Lamington is no more.”

He touched her brow with his lips, wrung her hand, and hurried away to hide the emotion which he could not help feeling at sight of her affliction, and the exhibition of which he thought unmanly even under such circumstances as these.

Katherine received his embrace as coldly as a statue might have done; and she made no movement to recall him when the door closed, deep as was the affection she

entertained for the generous youth, in whose companionship she had spent so many of her happier days.

But although she failed to respond to his embrace his absence produced a marked effect on her, for those last words of his betokened that he had gone forth to deadly strife, from which he might never return.

A few moments after he had gone she started from the species of lethargy that had become almost habitual to her during her imprisonment, and since she had parted with Lamington for ever.

The thought which quickened her now was that of Nicol's danger ; for her heart seemed to stand still in horror at the bare possibility that he too might fall by the hand of the man she loved—ay, loved still in spite of all that had passed. Her pulse quickened as she strove wildly to find some means of saving him, for her terror made his fate appear certain.

“There is only one hope,” she reflected, distractedly ; “Gordon must be warned, and by me. He will not deny my prayer to avoid, even by flight, the encounter which Nicol is madly determined to bring about. But where and how am I to communicate with him ?”

That was a difficulty which she had no power to overcome ; for, besides not knowing where Lamington might be found, she had no messenger whom she could entrust with her warning.

Since the day following the escape of Gordon she had been placed under restraint ; she had not been permitted to quit the apartments appointed for her use, and she had been strictly prohibited and guarded from holding communication with any one, save the persons charged by Cochrane with her safe keeping. Of these, Ross was the chief, and no bribe could tempt him to be false to his master, of whom he stood so much in awe, and in whose power he had such firm reliance.

Occasionally she was allowed to have Mysie Ross to wait upon her ; but the girl had evidently been cautioned and threatened, for she was timidly shy of conversation which had the slightest relation to the doings without the walls of the lady's chamber. Once Katherine had asked her to convey a missive to the Queen, but the girl with a frightened look had told her that she dared neither carry

letter nor word of mouth for any one without the sanction of Sir Robert Cochrane—now becoming known as the Earl of Mar.

But the kindly lassie looked so distressed in giving the refusal, that it was easy to perceive how gladly she would have consented if there had been any probability of accomplishing the task without detection. Katherine did not attempt to persuade her, for she feared that the discovery of the attempt to appeal to her Majesty for help, might end in depriving her even of the occasional visits of Mysie. Therefore, she had concealed her disappointment as best she might, and told Mysie not to heed the unhappy circumstances which rendered her compliance impossible.

The imprisonment proceeded no further than this entire seclusion. She was served with every delicacy the royal pantry could supply, and she was waited upon by her gaolers with the utmost deference. Above all, Cochrane did not take advantage of her position to obtrude his society upon her. During the weeks which had elapsed since he had intimated to her that she was to be placed under restraint until his Majesty's pleasure should be made known, he had not once presented himself.

She was not deceived by this apparent consideration: at every turn she was made aware of the man's influence, and she knew that his silence was the result of his conviction that she was in his power, and of his desire to impress her with a due sense of that power. But if that had been his object, it had miscarried; for she was so sick of life that her bondage gave her none of those pangs she would have suffered had there been the least hope for her beyond the walls of her prison-house.

There was none, and she suffered without one word of complaint more than might have been implied in her desire to obtain an audience of the Queen.

Now, however, the anxiety to save her brother from the consequences of the deadly feud in which he was engaged, quickened the springs of life, and her silken bonds became as hard to bear as fetters of hardest iron.

The only prospect she possessed of accomplishing the object which reanimated her was by the aid of Mysie, and she determined to make another effort to win the girl's service at their next interview.

Some hours had elapsed since the departure of Nicol, when she arrived at this resolution. Her pale cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were brighter than they had been for many days.

The door opened and the man Ross appeared. He was slightly amazed by the satisfactory change in her aspect and manner—for she had been pacing the room, and she confronted him with something of her old dignity and resolution.

With a respectful inclination, he intimated that the King's page, John Ramsay, of Balmain, desired speech with her.

Somewhat surprised by the arrival of this special emissary from his Majesty, she assented to the interview, and Ross retired. Ramsay, who afterwards became a man of some account, was at this period scarcely sixteen years of age. He had a comely person, polite manners, and arrayed in the gay trappings which became his years and office, he seemed a gentle lad, worthy of the esteem his royal master bestowed on him. His brow was unmarked by the furrows of anxious thought, for he had yet little to do with the numerous State intrigues which surrounded him. This was the more fortunate for him, as he had the courage and audacity natural to high-spirited youth, and therefore, placing some dependence on his manhood, he might have been easily led into several conspiracies, but for the simple fidelity with which he served the King.

Entering with cap in hand, he gracefully saluted the lady. But when he had performed that act of courtesy, he stood dangling his hat and hesitating, as if the duty he had to discharge were a somewhat awkward one. At length—

"I have to greet you, madam, in the name of his Majesty the King."

Katherine inclined her head, acknowledging her submission to the royal pleasure. The page, Ramsay, gained confidence and proceeded—

"His Majesty is graciously pleased to inform you, madam, that in consideration of your loyal services at a moment of some excitement, he deigns to overlook the active part taken by you in aiding the escape of the

prisoner Gordon of Lamington, of which your own lips made free confession."

"His Majesty's generosity is greater than my deserts might claim," she answered quietly, but with brightening eyes in anticipation what might be to follow.

"It is my good fortune, therefore, madam, to be privileged to acquaint you that from this hour no further restraint will be placed upon your movements."

Her heart beat quick with joy at this announcement, for it seemed to provide the opportunity she so much desired of finding a messenger by whom to communicate with Lamington.

The obstacles to this purpose which a moment before had been so huge were dispelled as by the touch of a fairy wand. She checked the eager thanks she was about to express on observing that Ramsay had something more to say.

"The only condition, madam," he went on, "attached to this gracious remission of your offence, is that you shall not quit the palace, save in the train of her Majesty the Queen, or when attended by an escort befitting your position."

Her joy was not abated even by this limitation of her privilege, although she perfectly understood that the polite phrases of her informant implied a much greater degree of restraint than might be at first apparent.

"My position, sir," she said, "demands little state; but I submit myself in all things to his Majesty's pleasure, and hold myself bound to him in all gratitude for the clemency with which he visits my offence, and for the release which he has been pleased to grant me now."

"Pardon me, madam," said Ramsay, with a slight return of his former awkwardness; "but I have not yet discharged all my instructions, or you would understand why your position becomes a matter of consideration."

"I attend, sir," she rejoined, with a degree of surprise.

"It is further his Majesty's pleasure that you, madam, should conduct yourself as becomes the bride of the Earl of Mar——"

"Robert Cochrane?" she exclaimed, starting.

Ramsay bowed.

"The same, madam; for it is the will of his Grace that

you should prepare yourself for the re-performance of the ceremony of marriage with his lordship, as his Majesty is given to understand that there were some informalities in the celebration of the first ceremony at Johnstone. His Majesty therefore desires that you will hold yourself in readiness for the bridal, which will be appointed for an early date."

Katherine was stunned by this intimation. This was the cause of the King's clemency, and the real purport of his message: that she should prepare herself, under the penalty of his royal displeasure, to accept Robert Cochrane as her husband.

The days of solitude and miserable reflection through which she had passed had fixed upon her mind the conviction that union with Gordon was impossible. She had come to believe also, in the gloomy meditations of her solitude, that the anguish she experienced on account of the eternal separation from her lover was even sinful; but she had not come to regard Cochrane with one degree less of abhorrence than before.

And so the verdict fell upon her like a thunderbolt. An innocent prisoner unexpectedly condemned to die could not have endured greater torment than Katherine suffered when she heard the King's command to prepare for this marriage.

But Nicol was to be saved, and any violent opposition at this juncture would deprive her of the opportunity of accomplishing that purpose. She therefore, with a mighty effort, composed herself to answer with seeming calmness.

"I am his Majesty's loyal servant," she said, inclining respectfully, "and will give his behest all the obedience my circumstances permit."

"Is that your answer, madam?" said the courteous page, as if doubting whether or not it were enough.

"That is my answer."

Ramsay bowed low and retired.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A TRIAL OF SKILL.

“ She looked east, and she looked west,
 To see what she could spy ;
 When a gallant knight came in her sight,
 And to the gate drew nigh.

“ You seem to be no gentleman,
 You wear your boots so wide :
 But you seem to be some cunning hunter,
 You wear the horn so syde.’”

Lady Margaret.

AFTER the first shock of the intimation that the King was to give all the weight of his authority to the purpose to which Cochrane held with a persistency out of all proportion to the object to be gained, as it seemed to her, Katherine endeavoured to compose her thoughts. She strove to direct them away from her own affairs to those of her brother. She could not altogether escape the consciousness that the dismal events which had transpired since she fled from the tower of Johnstone had proved impotent to save her from the fate which she had hoped to elude by her flight ; but that consciousness helped to quicken her desire to prevent the final catastrophe of a meeting between Gordon and Nicol, and so strengthened her for the task.

What she was to do when that object was accomplished she did not know. Whether she was to resign herself hopelessly to the destiny against which she had struggled so long, and which now seemed more inexorable than ever, or whether she was to accept the last refuge left open to her—death—she had not time to think. One thing only was clear, that in the mean while she must display no greater opposition to his Majesty’s will than by praying the Queen to obtain for her as much delay in the appointment of the ceremony as possible.

The difficulties in the way of communicating with Gordon appeared to be almost insurmountable. Every one in the palace still seemed to be subject to Cochrane, either

by fear of his power, or by hope of his aid to advancement. Where, then, could she hope to find a faithful courier? She was not one to be intimidated by apparent obstacles, and she set to work, determined to hazard everything. First, she examined herself in a mirror, and tried to remove all traces of agitation from her countenance. Having done that she summoned her attendant—or gaoler, as he might have been more fitly designated—Ross, and requested him to permit his niece Mysie to wait upon her, as she was about to prepare for an interview with the Queen.

The man was unusually civil.

“I will send her to you instantly, madam,” he said, humbly; “and if there be any other matter in which my poor services may avail you, I will be proud to obey your commands to the uttermost.”

This address was sufficiently curious, considering the former taciturnity of the man, to attract her attention, and she regarded him with unconcealed surprise.

Observing the effect his words had produced, he hastened to explain.

“You’ll no think this odd, my lady, if you please, because, though I may have appeared a wee thing dour heretofore, it has not been wi’ my will.”

“Thank you, Ross,” she replied, cautiously; “if I should need your assistance, I will remember what you have just said.”

“You will do me great honour, madam;” and with much apparent subservience he withdrew.

She was much in need of the help this man could afford her; but his sudden proffer of it rendered her suspicious, for it resembled the clumsy effort of a maladroit knave, to win her confidence for his own ends.

Still her need was great, and the very clumsiness of the apparent knavery was an argument in favour of the man’s sincerity. He might be deficient in cunning, but his master was too shrewd to permit him to make a proposition so openly as this had been made with any expectation of success.

Thus driven by her extremity to grasp the frailest reed of hope, she sought reasons to justify belief in Ross’s good faith, notwithstanding his relation to Cochrane, and the

strongest reason of all was what seemed the clumsiness of the attempt to deceive her. The idea did not occur to her that on this very clumsiness the subtle calculation of the favourite might depend for success.

Her suspicion, however, was not altogether appeased. She saw with what ease this man might relieve her of the difficulty in which she was placed; he could at once secure her a suitable courier, if his position would not permit him to become the courier himself; and the temptation to trust him was strong in proportion to her anxiety to find any means of achieving her object. But she was shy of every one who owed the remotest allegiance to Cochrane, and she resolved to test the man in some way before placing too much credit on his words.

A timid knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Mysie.

The girl appeared to be ill at ease, and held the corners of her apron with nervous fingers. She hung her head as if in shyness; and when desired to approach, she did so with apparent trepidation, as if afraid.

Katherine was not a little amazed by this behaviour, for the girl, although always respectful, had been previously prompt and self-possessed in obeying any direction. She was still more amazed on observing that Mysie's usually ruddy complexion was now pale, and her eyes showed traces of tears.

"Why, how is this, Mysie?" she asked, taking the girl's hand kindly; "you have been crying, and you look as timid as if——"

Mysie interrupted her by a quick gesture of distress, and a glance towards the door, as if she feared that some one might be listening. Then she answered, reservedly—

"There's naething wrang wi' me, my lady."

Katherine was perplexed; the manner and the words so directly contradicted each other. Lowering her voice, she said—

"There is something wrong with you, Mysie. Who has frightened you?"

The girl looked up as if imploring her not to inquire further, and answered, but without any attempt to lower her voice—indeed, she seemed almost desirous that some mysterious taskmaster should hear her diligently repeat his instruction—

"I'm to wait on your ladyship constantly now, and I'm to go and come whenever and wherever you may bid me."

The restraint was so inexplicable, and yet so marked, that Katherine was at some loss how to deal with the girl. She, however, answered discreetly, as she thought—

"I am glad you are to be allowed to remain with me, Mysie, as I shall require your services in many ways."

But this seemed to disturb Mysie more than anything else. Abruptly she stooped down on her knees, and began to arrange some imperceptible defect in the folds of the lady's skirt. Then, without raising her head—

"Dinna ask me to do anything that you wouldna like ither folk to ken about."

"I will have to ask you to do much that none but my friends know about."

"No—no! Dinna ask me, for I can do naething. I'm watched and you're watched on every hand. I'm sent here only to betray you—that is what is wrang wi' me."

"You must explain what this means. Let us go into the bedchamber."

"No yet—bide a wee."

Katherine waited. Mysie busied herself about various trivial matters, and by-and-by went out on the pretence of fetching something. She returned in a few minutes, and by a slight movement of her hand indicated that they might retire to the inner apartment now.

Katherine obeyed the signal, and was followed respectfully by Mysie, who left the door of communication open.

"We had better have the door that way," she whispered, "so that if anybody tries to come in we'll see."

Katherine sat down and eyed her companion curiously.

"Now, Mysie, tell me what all this strange conduct means," she said, cautiously, lowering her voice as her attendant had done.

Mysie placed herself in a position which enabled her to command a view of the outer chamber.

"It means, my lady," she answered, agitatedly, "that you have been told you are free to do what you like, just that you may be made to betray yourself, and to decoy your friend to his ruin."

Katherine was startled by this disclosure, for it gave a

very unpleasant explanation to the sudden alteration in her position from that of imprisonment to one of comparative liberty. It showed her that she had been set free in order that she might be made the instrument of destruction to Lamington.

"How do you know this?" she queried.

"I wish you wouldna speir," was the constrained response.

"I must ask you, Mysie; for be the danger what it may to me or those I love, it must be encountered. But if I know what the danger is, and from what quarter to expect it, I would be the abler to cope with it. You will not deny me, then?"

"Have I no said enough in telling you to trust naebody, and to do naething that can bring harm to you or your friends?" cried the girl, distressedly.

"Well, if you refuse, I must ask your uncle—he offered to assist me."

Mysie cast a quick, terrified look at her mistress, and the desire to help her seemed to be struggling in her mind with the dislike to speak ill of her relative. The former feeling got the best of the struggle.

"I shouldna say ony ill of him," she said, hanging her head, as much abashed as if she had been confessing a fault of her own; "he has been a guid friend to me; but he is my lord's most faithful man, and to serve him would cheat his nearest kin."

Katherine clasped her hands and eyed the girl piteously. The barriers between her and the object she had at heart seemed to be growing more stupendous every moment.

"He wished to gain my confidence, then, only that he might disclose my secrets to his master?"

"Just that."

"But I can trust you—I will trust you, Mysie."

"No, no—dinna trust me either," cried the girl, tears starting to her eyes; "for that's just what they want you to do."

"You surely would not betray me?"

"Oh, I dinna ken what I might do," rejoined Mysie, wringing her hands in bewilderment. She was sorely afflicted by her strong wish to help the lady, in spite of her uncle's commands, whilst her sense of the duty she

owed him restrained her. At the same time she was frightened by the bare thought of doing anything in opposition to the will of her uncle's master and patron.

Katherine had little difficulty in comprehending the girl's sentiments, and although she was ready to give her the utmost confidence, she hesitated to involve her in any way in the troubles which she ought to endure alone.

"But I know what you will do, Mysie," she said, quietly; "you will warn me when I am in danger of exposing my plans to any of the spies who surround me, and you will keep faith with me whenever I may ask you to do so."

"I would bite my tongue off rather than tell anything that would hurt your ladyship."

"I was sure of it. Now be content. I will not ask you to do anything that you do not feel yourself able to accomplish without much risk."

"It's no the risk to mysel' that I heed; it's the risk to you."

"Take no account of that," answered Katherine, sadly. "I am prepared for the worst that can happen to me."

"You may escape from this place."

"I have no wish to escape."

"No wish to escape?"

"None; for where could I fly to? Not to Johnstone, for my mother would only deliver me back into the hands of the man whose fatal power has destroyed every hope that made life precious; not to Lamington, for the dead forms of my father and brother stand between us, parting us eternally."

"What is it you seek to do, then, my poor mistress, since you are content to remain here?"

"Only to bid Gordon avoid Nicol Janfarie—to spare him for my sake at any cost, at any disgrace to himself."

Mysie was silent for an instant, and then, with a glow of simple enthusiasm on her honest face, she said—

"I will help you, if I should have to be your messenger myself."

With that promise the generous girl renounced her allegiance to the servile kinsman who had claimed her obedience in an act of cruel treachery.

Katherine embraced Mysie and kissed her affectionately:

it was so much to have found one friend in the midst of so many enemies.

"It is the wit of two women against the knavery of Robert Cochrane and his myrmidons," she said, with a flush of scorn at the name; "and we will overreach them with Heaven's help?"

"We'll try," added Mysie, who trembled slightly at the reference to the potent favourite of the King.

That day passed without any scheme being devised by which a message might be conveyed to Gordon. The thing looked so simple, and was yet so hard to achieve, that the thought of it became tantalizing in the extreme.

No advance was made by the following morning, and every hour that elapsed rendered the probability of the encounter taking place before the warning could be given more and more appalling. Mysie had failed to discover any one who could be entrusted with the message, and who would not use the advantage which he would obtain as Katherine's courier to betray Gordon into the hands of Cochrane's men. The woman began to fear that Mysie would have to fulfil the extremity of her promise and become the courier herself. But they resolved to wait another day before adopting that last resource.

Katherine was commanded to wait upon her Majesty, who was bound upon a hawking expedition, accompanied by the young prince. She received a gracious welcome from the Queen, but she had no opportunity of pleading her suit for delay of the marriage ceremony. She, however, did not wish to be precipitate in her appeal, and as the day had not been appointed yet, she deemed it wiser to refrain from all reference to it, until the crisis arose.

The hawking party rode slowly through the great gateway of the palace, and Katherine, with heavy heart, void of every gleam of interest in the sport to which she was proceeding, occupied her place amongst the other ladies in waiting. The morning was fine, and her companions merry; but the contrast of her dolour with their gaiety only made her position the more dismal.

By the roadside, not far from the palace, a big, loutish-looking fellow sat, with a large hound lying at his feet, its bright eyes watching the face of its master with an expression that might have been taken to indicate the greater intelligence of the two creatures.

Katherine had never witnessed a more joyful spectacle than that peasant and his hound, for she recognized in the former Gordon's faithful follower, Muckle Will, and her blood tingled with delight.

Will sat staring with dull clownish curiosity at the cavalcade; but as it advanced he rose slowly to his feet, and although he preserved his simple manner he was busy scanning the faces of the ladies with much more than common interest.

When nearly opposite to him, Katherine's horse performed a rapid caracol which removed her a little way from her companions, and she dropped her glove.

Will jumped forward and picked up the glove before any of the attendants had time to observe what had happened. As he returned it to the owner, Katherine, whilst appearing to thank him, said in a quick whisper—

“Can you get into the palace?”

“I might get in, but the job would be to win out again.”

“I will arrange that—I must see you.”

She touched the horse with the whip and resumed her place in the cavalcade.

Never was sport so wearisome as that day's hawking to Katherine Janfarie, although everybody else declared it to have been one of the most successful days known for years.

As the train returned to the palace, she saw Will and his hound still at their post.

She told Mysie that every obstacle would be overcome now if she could only obtain a few minutes' speech with Will, and Mysie devised a plan on the instant.

She went out, and in about an hour returned with Muckle Will and his dog following her.

“How have you managed this?” inquired the mistress, amazed and delighted by the success of her coadjutor.

The maid blushed, smiled, and looked awkward.

“I just told the sentinel that the chiel was a particular friend of mine, and we wanted to hae a crack about auld acquaintances, and so I got him through the gate.”

“And, my certes! I would just like to be the particular friend of sic a braw lass,” muttered the giant Gallowegian, grinning with pleasure at the bare prospect.

Mysie blushed again, looked slightly angry, and then, with much meekness, went on—

“I waited till I heard my uncle was sent for by my Lord Mar; and as soon as I ken’d that, I brought the lad up by the back stair, and got him in here without anybody seeing us.”

“You are as clever as you are kind, Mysie,” said Katherine, gratefully.

“And bonnie into the bargain,” chuckled the simple giant. “Eh, Stark?”

Stark wagged his tail, expressive of entire concurrence in his master’s views.

“But dinna keep him here a minute longer than is needful,” proceeded Mysie, quickly. “I’ll watch the door.”

Katherine turned to Will, who repeated the clumsy salute he had made on his entrance.

“You know where your master is?” she queried, anxiously.

“Ay, my lady, I ken.”

“He is safe?”

“Aye, safe eneuch, so far.”

“Is he well?”

“Just as weel as a man wha has got nae sowl left in him for onything can be.”

The lady, with an effort, repressed a sob, and continued—

“Did he send you here?”

“Ay, he told me to bide about the yetts, or onywhere, so that I might get a glint o’ your face, and be able to tell him what like you were looking. I was to try and speak to ye, if possible, and to tell ye that ye will hear queer news before many days have passed.”

“Does he—seem happy?” Her voice faltered with the words, and she clasped her hands tightly.

“Happy?” echoed Will, shaking his shaggy head gloomily; “he’s as dour as a broken-legged hound, wi’ its nose on the quarry that it canna follow. But he’ll be better when he kens that I hae seen ye.”

There was a pause, during which the lady’s head was bowed, and she struggled against the wild temptation to fly to him, and try to comfort him in spite of the fell deeds which parted them. When she looked up, her glistening

eyes, her pallid cheeks and quivering lips, denoted how severe had been the mental strife.

"Take this to him," she said, delivering a letter which she had ready sealed for the purpose; "deliver it into no hands save his, as you value his peace and mine."

"I'll do your bidding," was the simple response.

"But if by any ill fortune you should lose that paper, say to your master it was written by me to implore him to avoid Nicol Janfarie, and to beg of him if they should meet to let no words or actions tempt him into strife. All this, say, is for my sake, and that only the assurance of his compliance with this prayer can give me any comfort. Will you remember?"

"We'll mind every word—will we no, Stark? That will we."

Katherine thanked him, gave him a piece of silver, which he accepted on Stark's account, and dismissed him under the care of Mysie.

The task which had presented so many obstacles was accomplished now with more ease and certainty than she had expected: and being accomplished, she sat down, sad and hopeless. Her sorrow was unrelieved by any demand for exertion outside herself, and there seemed to be no object in her own life that was worth striving for. She relapsed into the state of despair from which she had been roused by the desire to prevent the meeting between Gordon and Nicol. Even the thought of the approaching union with Cochrane only made her start shudderingly and droop again into helpless inactivity.

Mysie having seen that the way was clear, conducted Will down to the court by the same stair by which they had ascended to the lady's apartments. They reached the court in safety, Will following the movements of his winsome guide with admiring eyes; and he was about to address her when she was startled by the voice of her uncle calling her name.

"Bide here, bide here," she whispered quickly, and sped away in the direction of the voice.

Will and Stark halted obediently, the former very much puzzled by the abrupt flight of the damsel.

But he had presently another matter for dissatisfaction. Some one touched him on the shoulder, and on turning his

head he observed that six soldiers stood behind him. The one who had touched him spoke—

“His lordship, the Earl of Mar, desires to see you, comrade.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“MUCKLE” WILL.

“The Douglas turned him on his steed,
And I wat a loud laught leuch he—
‘Of a’ the fools I have ever met,
Man, I hae never met ane like thee.

“‘Art thou akin to lord or knight,
Or courtly squire, or warrior leal?’
‘I am a tinkler,’ quoth the wight,
‘But I like crown-cracking unco weel.’”

Jock Johnstone.

FINDING himself surrounded by six stalwart fellows, fully armed, Will’s first thought was to fight for his liberty; but his second thought showed him of what little avail his weaponless hands could be against so many. He therefore thrust his hand into the pouch in which he had placed the letter Katherine had entrusted to him, clutched it, and crumpled it into a ball. He closed his big hand over it, and held it there securely.

Then he grinned in the face of the officer who had addressed him, and answered—

“His lordship does me muckle honour; but wha’ might he be, for I never heard o’ the chiel afore?”

“You’ll have the chance of knowing him now—march,” said the officer.

The men moved. Will attempted to expostulate, and promised to come back and see his lordship another time; but he was roughly hustled forward, and his words were unheeded.

Stark during these proceedings kept closely by his master’s side, looking up occasionally at his face, and growling as if only waiting for the command to spring at the soldiers. Will, however, had no desire either to risk his own skin or the hound’s in a useless struggle, and so

he permitted himself to be driven forward, and the dog followed.

The party was obliged to halt in the ante-room of the earl's apartment, and there Stark gave vent to another protest against the whole proceedings by a low, prolonged growl. Will for the first time spoke to the faithful companion of his troubles.

"Haud your tongue, you ill-mannered brute," he said, as if angry. "Do you no ken you're in the King's ain house, and gaun to seen ane o' the King's ain lords? There, take that bite atween your jaws, and haud it there just to keep your tongue quiet."

Stooping, he thrust the crumpled letter into the dog's mouth, and managed it so adroitly that none of those around him saw or suspected what the "bite" was with which he attempted to quiet the animal.

Will held up his finger warningly, and grinning, so that the soldiers and attendants looked at one another, smiling at the evidence that the fellow was a half-wit.

"Noo, Stark," said Will, confirming the impression of his imbecility by addressing the hound as if it had a human comprehension, "dinna ye be swallowing it a' at ance; keep it atween your teeth, lad, for Guid kens whan ye'll get sic a bite as that again."

He was at this moment commanded by an orderly to follow him, and he was conducted into the presence of the newly dubbed Earl of Mar—a title which Cochrane quietly and resolutely required every one to remember. He who forgot the fact of the favourite's elevation, or failed to respect it, was made to suffer for it by some prompt penalty inflicted on him in whatever most nearly concerned him. Conscious of his inability to enforce the recognition of his newly acquired dignity on those discontented nobles and gentlemen who were powerful enough or bold enough to stand in open opposition to him, he lost no opportunity of compelling the acknowledgment of his position from all who could not or would not risk the loss of place and influence by offending him.

The successful statesman was seated by a table, upon which were spread numerous documents and charts with which he appeared to have been deeply occupied. When Muckle Will was ushered in, Cochrane looked up from his

papers, scrutinized the man narrowly, and then signalled to the attendant to withdraw.

Will made his salute with respectful clownishness; and whilst Stark amused himself by diligently gnawing a piece of paper, and tearing it in fragments, his master began to stare about him until he was abruptly accosted by a sharp clear voice—

“What are you doing here, my man?”

Will almost jumped from the floor, so sudden and penetrating had been the utterance. But if the speaker had been attempting to throw him off his guard, he failed.

“Saunts be wi’ us,” cried Will, in simple wonder; “but ye gar’d my heart loup. What am I doing here?—’deed—and ye’ll first hae to tell me that yoursel’, sir; for I came here on your honour’s lordship’s invitation, and no for any errand o’ my ain ava. I’ll be thankful when ye let me awa’ again, for I couldna thole to bide in a place wi’ sodgers on ilka hand, and prim-mouthed serving men everywhere glowering at ye at every step and turn as though they were feared ye was gaun to lift the house on your shouthers and make awa’ wi’ it.”

Cochrane permitted him to run on, apparently trying to fathom the character of the man, whose freedom of speech did not seem in any way to betoken disrespect.

“Ah, you do not like the place. How did you enter it, then?”

Will looked sheepish, twisted his shoulders, and grinned slyly in the face of his inquisitor.

“Weel, my lord,” he began slowly, “if I maun tell ye the real truth, it was a lass that tempted me in, and mony wiser folk nor me hae been led out o’ their gate by the same temptation.”

The inquisitor nodded and smiled approvingly, as if interested in Will’s adventure.

“And the name o’ the lass?” he inquired.

“Hoots, my lord, I couldna tell ye that, for wha kens what use ye might make o’ t, and she’s no fit for the like o’ you, though she is a braw lass. Na, na, my lord, ye maun keep to your ain side o’ the wa’.”

“Where are you going when you leave the palace?”

“Hame.”

“Where is your home?”

"No very far frae the Rhinns o' Gallowa."

The inquisitor pounced upon him now, having, as he thought, confused him by the diversity of his questions.

"You are in the service of Gordon of Lamington?"

"I'll no say but I might hae been," rejoined Will, quite composed.

"And you have received a letter for him from the lady who was known as Katherine Janfarie?"

"Have I so?"

"I know it."

"Weel, if your lordship kens a' about it, what's the good o' speering?"

"You must deliver that letter to me."

"But whar is it?"

"You have it. Come, come, my man, do not waste time, for you must obey me sooner or later, and it will be better for yourself to obey instantly. By proving yourself ready to serve me, you will find that I can be a good master."

"I would be loth to doubt that, or to disobey your lordship; but when a body hasna got the thing that's wanted, what way is he to do your bidding?"

"By telling me where you have hidden it."

"Hidden it?—me hide it! What would I do that for?"

The evident simplicity of the man, and the cunning with which he admitted everything he could not deny, yet held back, by clever equivocal answers, the most important information required, puzzled the inquisitor not a little. Observing the fellow on his entrance, he had not anticipated any difficulty in obtaining from him a full confession, and he was therefore surprised that, after a conversation of several minutes' duration, he felt that so far he had been baffled by the shrewd yokel.

He did not like the feeling at all, although he had a sufficient appreciation of character, even when opposed to him, to be somewhat amused, knowing that ultimately his power must prevail.

"What is your name?" he said quietly, again changing the subject.

"Will."

"What else?"

"Muckle Will."

“What else?”

Will scratched his head as if unable to conceive what more a man could require in a name; then, as if with a sudden recollection, he cried—

“Oh, folk whiles call me Muckle Will Craig.”

“Well, Muckle Will Craig, you are well named, and you have more wit than you seem desirous of appearing to possess; which is something in your favour, since most men are anxious to seem possessed of more than Heaven has given them. I like you the better for it; so now tell me, have you ever heard of the boot?”

“Ay, I hae heard tell o’ boots, and shoon too.”

“Yes, yes; but this is an iron boot which we keep in the Castle of Edinburgh. It is a wonderful boot, and has been known to make even the dumb speak.”

“Od, man, it maun be a useful implement,” said Will, grinning as a child might have done at a fairy tale.

“Very useful,” continued his lordship; “and especially so, when we have a dour or a foolish person to deal with, who refuses to answer civil questions. We just put the boot on him and wedge it up tight until he has spoken, or his bones are crushed into jelly.”

Will’s face gave a wry twist at this, and he muttered uneasily—

“I wouldna like to try on your boot, master.”

“Then we have, besides, some pretty little instruments which grip the thumbs in much the same fashion, and various other contrivances by which to test the strength of stupid knaves who continue sullen and silent. Last of all, we have a gallows.”

Will’s uneasiness increased; he shuffled with his feet, and drew his hands behind him as if the instruments of torture were already in sight.

“They maun be a’ wheen ugly things.”

“Would you like to see them?”

“No, I’m muckle obliged to your lordship, but I hae nae curiosity about sic affairs.”

“I thought so; but I am afraid, my man, we shall have to try the effect of them all on your sturdy frame—a course which I would be sorry to adopt with you, Will, because I would rather offer you a snug place in my service than make a cripple of such a brave-looking fellow.”

"Dinna do that, for ony sake, my lord, for syne I would be nae use to onybody."

"There is only one way to save yourself."

"Weel, I'll take that. What is it?"

"I am glad you are to be sensible."

"Oh, I'll be uncommon sensible if that will save me frae your boots and your irons and sic things."

"Well, then, you must give me the letter you have got; and you must guide a small party of my friends to the hiding-place of Lamington. We are only anxious to show him a little courtesy, and to give him the attendance a knight of his position should have."

Will scratched his head harder than ever, and glanced ruefully at the calm face of the gentleman who made this proposition so quietly, just as if there had been neither falsehood nor treachery connected with it.

"I havena got the letter, as I hae tauld ye," he said, distressedly; "and as for taking your sodgers to surprise the master—Lamington, I mean—I canna do that."

His lordship tapped on the table with the hilt of a poniard. Two troopers and the officer who had arrested Will appeared instantly to answer to the summons.

"Take that man," said Cochrane, with a slow distinct utterance, as if to impress every word on the mind of the person most concerned, "and convey him to the castle. Let him be put to the torture until he has given the information required by this despatch; and if he continue obstinate——"

He paused as if to notice whether or not his words had produced any signs of submission; but Will remained silent and bewildered.

"If he remain obstinate," proceeded the statesman, "under the torture, let him be hung in chains on the public gibbet as a warning to all traitors and knaves."

Still the man made no sign of repenting his resolution to remain faithful to his chief, and the guard laid hold of him to drag him away. But as they advanced for that purpose one of them trampled on Stark's toes; the dog uttered a sharp whine, and showed its teeth as if about to retaliate or defend its master. The officer was about to strike him when Will stopped him.

"Diinna harm Stark, ye brute; he canna tell ye ony

secrets, sae ye needna put him in your boots and shoon. Let him be, will ye?"

Cochrane eyed the master of the dog attentively; and then, half amused by the display of affection and by the fancy which it suggested, he said, coldly—

"Let the dog be quartered before the rascal's eyes."

"Mercy, man, ye wouldna do that," cried Will, becoming excited on Stark's account, although he had remained quiet enough on his own. "What guid will it do ye to harm a dumb brute like that? He's been a true friend and brither and neighbour to me ever since he was a pup nae bigger nor your hand—dinna harm the dog."

An impatient gesture of his lordship was the only answer to this extraordinary appeal.

The soldiers began to drag the prisoner away.

"Let the poor dog be," he cried again, his huge frame shaking with agitation, "and I'll do onything ye want wi' me."

"Where is the letter, then?" said Cochrane, sharply.

"That's it lying there, if ye maun ken," answered Will, pointing to the fragments which Stark had gnawed into pulp, so that not one legible character could be deciphered on them.

Cochrane gazed at the useless bits of paper, and although his countenance indicated nothing, he was amazed at the coolness and dexterity with which the half-witted fellow, as Will had been regarded, had overreached him.

"Very well," he said presently, "since you have disposed of the document in that manner, it is now of little consequence to any one; but if you wish to keep your head on your shoulders, you must serve me all the more faithfully in the second matter. Where is Lamington concealed?"

"There are different places, according to the humour he is in and the chances o' a surprise; but he leaves a sign at every ane he quits, sae that I may ken whaur to seek him."

Cochrane turned to the officer.

"Take twenty of the hardiest troopers of your regiment, and accompany this fellow. He will guide you secretly and surely to the hiding-place of the outlaw, Gordon of Lamington, whom you are to arrest, alive if you can; but

show him no mercy if he resist. Keep close to your guide, and at the first sign of treachery on his part hew him down. Go.”

The officer acknowledged his instructions and departed, followed by Muckle Will, who was very glad to escape the terrible presence of his catechiser, even in the company of a man who might on the merest breath of suspicion become his executioner.

When alone, Cochrane vainly endeavoured to make something out of the fragments of Katherine’s letter ; but Stark had done his work effectually.

“No matter,” he ejaculated, disappointedly, “these fragments will suffice to satisfy his Majesty of her attempt to communicate with the rebel. The day shall be appointed before another hour has elapsed, and the ceremony performed with what expedition the churchmen will permit.”

He rose and paced the floor thoughtfully.

“There shall be no further delay, lest the weightier matters of State interfere, and some hazard—who knows what?—alter my master’s humour. Every obstacle is removed now, save her own perversity, and that must yield too ; for she cannot become his bride even were he free and I a prisoner. But his doom is sealed. Yonder knave cannot, supposing he dared attempt it, deceive me. My gallant foeman of Lamington, you may count your hours. Richard Janfarie and the boy Nicol have missed you, but my hand strikes with unerring force.”

His cogitations were interrupted by the sudden entrance of his coadjutor, Leonard the smith, to announce the arrival of a courier with secret despatches from England.

The information contained in the despatches was to the effect that a powerful English army was being mustered by command of Edward IV. to invade Scotland, under the combined leadership of the Duke of Gloucester, and Alexander, Duke of Albany, who had been summoned from France for that purpose.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SECRET DESPACHES.

“The tidings to our gude Scots king
 Came as he sat at dyne,
 With noble chiefs in braif array,
 Drinking the blude-red wine.

“‘To horse! to horse! my royal liege,
 Your faes stand on the strand;
 Full twenty thousand glittering spears
 The King of Norse commands.’”

Hardyknute.

COCHRANE was grievously disturbed by the intelligence conveyed in the secret despatches from England. They intimated that the Duke of Albany laid claim to the throne of Scotland, on the plea that the reigning monarch was a bastard, therefore an usurper, and that he was otherwise unfitted to govern the country in consequence of weakness of intellect.

On these grounds the duke had besought the assistance of the English monarch to place him on the throne. In return for that service he had given his bond to restore the town of Berwick to the English, to acknowledge the suzerainty of their sovereign, to renounce all alliance with France, and to marry one of King Edward's daughters if the Church would permit. The latter event was somewhat improbable, as Albany had been already twice wedded, and both wives were still alive, the first having been divorced. Notwithstanding the nefarious nature of the proposal, Edward IV. received it with satisfaction, for he had been worsted in all former attempts upon the north country, and this seemed to promise the opportunity of conquest which he desired. A force of twenty thousand men was placed under the command of the Duke of Gloucester—the same who soon after became Richard III.—and the army was already on the march northward, accompanied by Albany, who was confident that many of the Scottish Borderers and nobles would flock to his standard as soon as it was unfurled.

These were the tidings which startled Cochrane, and which he had now to communicate to the King. The openly expressed discontent of the nobles, and the no less disaffection of the people, imparted to Albany's invasion a probability of success which indicated extreme peril to the life and government of James, and to all whose fortunes were linked to his.

Cochrane was well aware that he himself would be amongst the first of the victims to the duke's wrath.

The news fell on the King like a thunderbolt; and for several minutes he was overwhelmed with dismay. From the date of the duke's escape he had been restless and misanthropical, anticipating evils on every hand; and now his worst fears seemed about to be realized.

"Ay," he muttered, disconsolately, and pressing his hand on his brow, "the prediction of the stars is to come true, and the lion is to fall by his own whelps."

His favourites were standing around him, and the countenance of every one was as gloomy as their master's. None seemed to have any hope to offer him.

"You are dumb, sirs," exclaimed the monarch, bitterly, and glancing at his attendants as if disposed to blame them for his misfortunes. "You are dumb, and your souls quake. Angus and the rest have deserted me, and doubtless you, too, will flee like the rest when you smell the burning of the house that has sheltered you. Have *you* no word of counsel or hope to offer us, my Lord of Mar? Or are you, as the one who has received the highest favour from our hands, the first to calculate the means of saving your own head by the help of your heels?"

Cochrane stood nearest to the King, and he received this outburst of suspicion with genuine agitation. Cold and stern as his nature might be, he was deeply affected by the spectacle of his royal master's despair.

"Sire," he answered, quietly, and there was even dignity in his evident sincerity, "your gracious pleasure has made me what I am; the eminence I have gained is due to your kindness more than to my own deserts. Your gracious pleasure has enabled me to become from a poor man the possessor of wealth enough to insure me ease and comfort for my remaining years in some foreign land if I chose to forget the debt of gratitude I owe your Majesty, and to fly

from you in the hour of danger like the base thing you suspect me of being."

"Few men are ready to prove their gratitude with their lives—unless when they desire some further favour," interrupted James, moodily, but eyeing his favourite with some curiosity.

"Perhaps, sire, I am one of the few," proceeded Cochrane; "but the place you have given me has made me the mark of scorn, envy, and hate to many, and I know that my head will be the first to fall when your power fails to protect me. I might save myself; the way is still clear to me, and your Majesty has been good enough to indicate it. A week hence—a day hence—it will be too late; but at this moment the choice lies with myself. I have chosen, then; and I remain by your side, my liege, to meet the worst, and to give you what help my poor wit and arm may be able to give in your extremity."

He spoke sincerely; and whatever might be the unscrupulous nature of his dealings in pursuing his particular aims and ambition, Robert Cochrane was, at any rate, worthy of the favour he had received in the fidelity with which he served his master at various crises.

The King was visibly relieved by this display of loyalty, and more so when Rogers, Hommel, Leonard, Torphichen, and the rest hastened to assure him of their steady allegiance in good or ill. They could, indeed, do no less. Rogers did so spontaneously; but the others were not altogether satisfied that they were doing the best for their own interests in clinging to a monarch whose throne was shaken at its foundations.

James, however, perceived nothing of that doubt; the sincerity of Cochrane rendered him insensible to the suspicious protestations of the others, and he accepted them all in good faith.

He personally examined the courier who had brought the despatches, and was well rewarded for his trouble. The courier, although he spoke in a very low voice, and kept his head always bowed, so that his features were never clearly discernible, proved to be a man of superior information, and was able to supplement the contents of the despatches by various items of importance. To his Majesty this was the most satisfactory portion of all his tidings.

"I know the Borders well, sire, and although there is a strong body of stout fellows in Berwick, who will stand for Albany, your Grace's brother, there are not half a dozen of the Border leaders, beside, who will join him, coming as he does under the protection of England."

"What makes you so sure of that, sirrah?" queried James, anxiously.

"I have received assurance from the principal chiefs, sire, and they have already appointed a leader under whose general directions they will act for your Majesty."

"And who is the leader? We should know one who so promptly steps forward to our aid."

"Gordon of Lamington, so please your Majesty."

"Him!" exclaimed the King.

"Him!" echoed Cochrane, startled, and eyeing the courier suspiciously.

"The same," proceeded the man, respectfully; "he has had early tidings of the proceedings of the Duke of Albany, and has been stirring himself on your Majesty's behalf, so that he is enabled to send you this assurance by me, that when your Grace marches to the Debateable Land you will find him at the head of such an army of Borderers as has never been banded together before."

The King was pleased, although much perplexed, that a man who had appeared to be so uncompromising a traitor should so actively bestir himself in his behalf.

Cochrane was as much disturbed by this intelligence as by that of the despatches; but he made no further comment than to hope that the courier had not been deceived, and that the force under Lamington was not intended to aid rather than oppose Albany.

The suggestion had its effect on James; but he was excited by the conflicting reports of invasion, rebellion, and loyalty, and with a firmness and promptitude which he rarely displayed, he issued directions that all liege vassals of the crown who were capable of bearing arms should assemble at the Borough Moor of Edinburgh; and that an immediate council of the nobles and gentlemen of the realm should be held at the castle of the capital, whither his Majesty would at once proceed to join them.

In the midst of the numerous occupations which these commands and the events of the hour entailed on him,

there were two objects which Cochrane endeavoured to compass without delay. The first was to secure the submission of Katherine to the union with himself, in order that he might be able to claim the allegiance of the Janfaries, the Fenwicks, and the Musgraves in the forthcoming contest, and so sustain his own power, and prove his importance in the eyes of the antagonistic nobles.

The second object was to insure the removal of Lamington, who had been the great stumbling-block in the way of the achievement of one of his most eagerly pursued desires. At first he had been indifferent to the man, but now he hated him thoroughly, and was resolved to extirpate him at any hazard, for he had arisen at the last moment in the shape of a loyal leader instead of a treacherous conspirator, and had thus given the lie to all the statements and asseverations Cochrane had made to the King.

He had never before found himself so closely matched. Again and again he had seemed to triumph, and still his enemy had baffled him. But this time he should not escape. The men who accompanied the treacherous servant, Muckle Will, had strict orders not to spare their prey; and they were men who understood such commands perfectly.

So Cochrane turned to the accomplishment of his first object, feeling assured that the second was safe.

CHAPTER XL.

VANQUISHED.

“ Nae pity was there in his breast,
 For war alane he lo'ed ;
 His grey een sparkled at the sight
 Of plunder, death, and bluid.

“ ‘ What, shall our hearts of steel,’ he said,
 ‘ Bend to a woman’s sang ?
 Or can her words our honour quit,
 For sic dishonest wrang ? ’ ”

HENRY MACKENZIE.

KATHERINE attended vespers in the royal chapel, and although still cold and hopeless in regard to her own future, she prayed fervently for the safety of her brother—prayed earnestly that Heaven might avert the meeting he desired, and that no ill-fortune might render his death chargeable to Gordon. The terror of such a catastrophe thrilled her with exquisite agony, and to prevent it she would have submitted to any penance or sacrifice.

So deep and absorbing were her prayers that she remained in the chapel long after all others had quitted it. When she rose from her knees, even the priests had retired, either without observing her in the shadowed nook which she had chosen for her devotions, or not desiring to disturb her.

With slow and sorrowful steps she moved towards the doorway, lingering as if she regretted to leave the sacred place, which, with its dim lights and solemn silence, so well accorded with her melancholy mood.

She was too much occupied by her own unhappy reflections to observe a hasty movement as of some one behind her—a sound which would have startled her if she had noticed it, for the place appeared to be deserted by all save herself.

Before the sound was repeated, the door which she was approaching hurriedly opened, and Cochrane presented himself.

She displayed neither surprise nor repugnance, but acknowledged his respectful salutation with quiet courtesy.

"I have been seeking you, madam," he said, "having somewhat of import, to me, at least, to communicate. Will you permit me to conduct you to your apartments?"

She grew slightly faint at the intimation he made, but she only showed it by a sudden pallor of the cheeks changing to crimson. She maintained her composure, and answered, coldly—

"What your lordship desires to say may be said here."

"As you will, madam; but you will accord me the favour of being seated."

And he pointed to a seat in one of the niches in the wall.

"Your lordship will pardon me if I remain standing, and proceed to the matter which has procured me the honour of your attention."

"You are very cold, Katherine," he said, regarding her with a mixture of curiosity and chagrin.

"I await the communication your lordship has for me."

He seemed to thrust aside some faint sentiment of pity which her sad appearance had conjured up in his breast, and he spoke in his usual tone of cold courtesy—

"I regret, madam, that you will not permit me to be your friend, but I will try to prove myself so in spite of your resistance. You have been made aware that his Majesty has been pleased to sanction the new performance of the marriage ceremony between us?"

She inclined her head—that was all the outward sign she made; but her heart throbbed wildly with its alarm and anguish.

"I have come now to inform you that the ceremony must take place within six days," he went on, "and to beg of you to regard me with at least some slight degree less of disfavour, if you cannot yet give me any token of friendship."

"Does the hawk claim friendship with the quarry it pursues?" she asked, coldly, but her heart trembled.

"Devotion and respect are not the characteristics of a bird of prey," he rejoined.

"When they take the form of relentless persecution it is not easy to distinguish them from those qualities which make a tyrant and an enemy."

“Too earnest kindness may be mistaken for persecution when the mind is resolved to see nothing good in the profferer of it. But I have surely satisfied you of my respect since I have so long left your privacy undisturbed, when the opportunity of place and power might have enabled me to press my suit with advantage.”

“I own you have shown me the consideration which a hunter shows a caged bird; he does not kill it immediately, because he knows that he can do so whenever the humour takes him, and therefore waits to see how tame it may become.”

“That may be as you say; but even now I would not have sought to hasten the union which is still so hateful to you, were it not that events, which drive me and stronger men before them, render further delay impossible.”

“What would you have?” she asked, in that cold uninterested voice, as if the conversation concerned some other person, and not herself.

“Your free submission to the King’s command.”

“The condemned submit to their fate because it is unavoidable; they cannot be expected to submit freely.”

“But yours is not the fate of the condemned. Position and wealth are offered to you with the hand of one who will at least endeavour to insure your happiness. Are you still obstinate? Do you still refuse?”

“Have I the option of refusal?” she said, rousing from her torpor with a flash of scorn. “Oh, sir, it is a poor exertion of your strength over my helpless condition, to mock me with a hollow show of liberty. You have deprived me of every hope that could have made liberty precious; you have used all the force of the King’s authority and of your own cunning to compel my obedience to your will. Why pretend, then, to consult my inclination, when you know that I must always look upon you with abhorrence as the cause of all my wretchedness?”

Cochrane folded his hands and cast his eyes gloomily upon the floor.

“I desired to consult your pleasure, madam,” he said, reflectively, “in the faint hope that time might have softened the harshness of your judgment of me. But your repugnance appears to be now as strong as ever. Will nothing reconcile you to me?”

He eyed her from beneath his heavy brows with evident uneasiness as he waited her reply.

"The vulture and the dove may be reconciled, the wolf and the lamb may become mates, but I tell you, my lord, that my regard for you can never change."

"Think, madam, of the high place you will hold as Countess of Mar," he urged.

"That which is not desired can give no satisfaction to the possessor."

"Think, again, of the power you may command to aid your kinsfolk. Think of the wealth which will be yours to satisfy every wish or whim, to help and cheer the forlorn, or to crush your enemy."

"Why press these arguments upon me, my lord?" she rejoined, wearily. "When hope is dead, what is there the world holds that can give joy? I have no humour to help others when I am so sick of all that surrounds me. The thought that I might crush my enemy does quicken my pulse, but the only enemy I would crush is yourself."

He rested his back against the wall, folded his arms, and bowed his head, brooding darkly.

She stood before him, white and passionless as marble, indifferent, it might have seemed, as to the result of his meditations.

"I perceive," he said at length, with some chagrin, "that I have erred in prosecuting this suit. It would have been wiser to have left you to follow your own course."

"Ah, sir, it would have been well for all of us had you discovered that earlier," she ejaculated, not without a shade of pity for the potent statesman in his admission of weakness, although all his power and influence had failed to elicit any sentiment save that of scorn.

"No man is clear-eyed when his passion stirs him," he commented, moodily. "At first I admired you, and desired the allegiance of your kinsmen to help me in leaguering the Borderers together as a force to act in my behalf, and to protect me against the envious barons who desire my fall. I own it freely now—it was policy rather than affection which first attracted me to you. But your opposition and the disgrace which your flight on our bridal day seemed to cast on me, roused a passion which blinded me. The desire to win you—ay, win you for your own

sake—and the resolution to requite the insult Gordon had put upon me became stronger than all thought of policy. No woman has been sought with devotion so steady as mine.”

“And no woman could have desired it less.”

“Would that I had comprehended that months ago, as I do now. But is it too late to better the ill-fortune which has fallen to us both? Am I so deformed—so hideous in your eyes—that you must always shrink from me with loathing?”

“I have answered you, my lord.”

“It cannot be that you still hope to mate with Gordon?”

He bent forward, and the mild, almost contrite tone in which he had been speaking, gave place to his ordinary cold, harsh manner, under the suspicion which prompted his inquiry.

“Alas! no; you have deprived me of that hope and all others. My brother’s blood is on his hands, and we have parted.”

“Yet the first use you made of your release from constraint was to endeavour to communicate with him.”

She started in alarm, at once divining that her message had miscarried.

“You know that?”

He bowed with a malicious smile.

“I know all. Your messenger was arrested as he quitted you. The knave has consented to betray his master into our hands, and he is already on the way with a strong body of troopers to arrest him.”

She staggered back, horrified by the thought that in her desire to save Nicol she had been the instrument of betraying Lamington.

“But you will not be so fell a monster as to take advantage of this treachery!” she exclaimed, piteously.

“Vengeance is pleasant, madam, and you leave nothing else to satisfy me,” he answered, drily.

“Beware, my lord, beware,” she cried, with passionate emphasis, “for I too may be roused to seek a similar satisfaction.”

“That I will be prepared to meet,” he proceeded, placidly; “in the mean while, I have promised to deliver Gordon to your brother Nicol; if he fails to wreak his will

upon him, then this rebellious gallant falls to my care, and I pledge you all that I have won, he will not escape me a second time, even with your aid.

“*Mercy!*”

It was a cry of utter despair wrung from her agony. She fell upon her knees, wildly extending her hands to him—the man she loathed and scorned—pleading to him for mercy. Nicol and Gordon were to be brought together, were to be forced to combat, both were to fall, and she would be the cause. The terrible discovery that the design she had formed to save them had become the means of destroying both, appalled her. She forgot her hate, forgot that it was the subtle skill of this man which had wrought out her generous design to so dire an issue; she remembered only that he had the power to rescue the victims of her love and of his enmity.

“*Mercy, mercy!*” she cried, wildly. “For the dear Virgin’s sake, spare them—spare me the thought that I have been the cause of more bloodshed. Oh, merciful Father, look down and move this man’s cruel heart.”

“*Calm yourself, madam,*” he said, attempting to raise her.

She went on unheeding.

“It was this meeting that has haunted me—it was to avert it—to warn Gordon to avoid it for his soul’s sake and for mine, that I schemed and plotted to communicate with him, and you have turned my scheme into the engine of your vengeance. Oh, you are powerful, sir—how powerful I have never known till now; but show a little mercy to one who lies so helpless at your feet.”

He grasped her hands tightly, and bent over her with excited eyes.

“When you wrote to Gordon, was it only to bid him avoid your brother, and the encounter he seeks?”

“No more.”

“You did not wish to escape to him?”

“No.”

“Were you both free to choose now, would you accept his hand?”

“I dare not.”

“Then rise, madam, for one word from you will assure Lamington’s safety from my pursuit, and will obtain my

pledge that Nicol shall never come within bowshot of him. Nay, you have only to speak that word, and Nicol shall renounce the feud."

She lifted her affrighted face to the dark visage which hovered over her. Shuddering as with cold, she spoke—

"And that word?"

"Promise that on the day appointed by his Majesty you will, without demur or opposition, become the Countess of Mar."

She uttered a low, sharp cry of anguish, and would have sunk to the ground had he not sustained her. She was incapable of speech, so fiercely were the emotions of hate and love contending in her breast.

"Why should you hesitate?" he urged; "you have confessed that union with Lamington is impossible; his life, and belike your brother's, hang on your decision. Will you refuse to save them?"

"Will no other sacrifice content you?" she said, feebly, and still shuddering.

"None."

"You are implacable?"

"As implacable in my love as you can be in your hate. Speak; and bid them live or perish."

"Heaven help me—too many brave hearts have been already stricken down on my account."

"Say, then, that you will spare those in present danger. I am the suppliant now, and pray you for mercy."

She rose slowly to her feet, a deathly pallor on her face; the cruelty which made her the dispenser of life or death to those she loved was another source of aversion to her relentless persecutor.

"Spare them," she gasped, scarcely able to speak above her breath—"spare them. Do with me as you will."

"You consent?"

"To anything for their sakes. Heaven knows I hold my life too worthless to be balanced against their safety."

"You have saved them," he cried, exultantly; "and trust me, madam, you shall have no reason to relent this determination. Devotion can do much, and my devotion shall be so earnest, that by-and-by you shall learn to be content even with my presence."

She inclined her head mutely, unable to make any

verbal acknowledgment to a prediction at which her whole nature revolted as an impossibility.

She tottered toward the door, and he hastened after her.

"Permit me to support you," he said, attempting to draw her arm within his own.

She snatched her hand away from him, and her eyes gleamed with a resentment which for the moment revived her strength.

"No; do not touch me. On the day appointed claim the fulfilment of my promise; you will find me ready, if you have kept faith with me. But till then do not approach me, or attempt to hold speech with me. Leave me that space to try to school my hand to take yours without trembling, and to teach my eyes to look on you without horror. You have triumphed. I consent to the sacrifice; but do not you forget the terms of it."

He bowed low, as if in complete submission to her will.

"Two days hence you shall have proof of the safety of Nicol and of Lamington."

A slight and haughty inclination of the head was the only recognition of this pledge. She departed with firm and hasty steps, as if fearing that weakness would assail her before she had got beyond his sight.

Cochrane watched her disappear, smiled quietly, and not altogether contentedly. Then he thoughtfully walked from the chapel.

There was immediately afterwards a movement in a dark recess near the doorway. A man stepped cautiously forth, looking about him with a somewhat bewildered manner.

It was the courier who only a few hours earlier had delivered the secret despatches.

His hands were clenched, his lips quivered, and his eyes glistened as with some strong excitement. As if to collect his confused thoughts, he halted on the spot, which a moment before had been occupied by Katherine. He pressed his hands on his brow, gazing darkly at the door as if he saw some enemy there.

"It was for my sake," he muttered, as if striving against some impulse—"it was for my sake. Why should I blame her or attempt to thwart her, by delivering myself up to the malice of my foes? Great Heaven, how she suffered! And the wretch was pitiless! Am I also to be pitiless?"

She was helpless, and it was her love that made her yield. No, Katherine, no; my lips shall never blame, but only bless you. My hand, that may never again clasp yours, shall be lifted to save you."

He remained a few minutes to recover his self-possession, fearful lest his agitation should betray his disguise. Then he made his way into the court, where there was a general bustle of soldiers and lackeys, making preparations for the immediate departure of the King for Edinburgh.

Already a number of couriers had been despatched with summonses for the principal nobles and barons to attend the council at the castle. Others were now mounting to set forth on the same errand, and in the midst of the confusion the presence of the strange courier from England was unnoticed.

An hour later the royal *cortège* began its journey to the capital.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CAMP AT LAUDER.

"The beacon lights are blazing bright,
The slogan's on the blast;
The clansmen muster rapidly,
The fiery cross flies fast.

"Chiefs hurry from their towers of strength,
And vassals from their shiels;
For Albyn's strand's polluted by
An hundred hostile keels."

DAVID VEDDER.

THE Border bale-fires, or beacons, were kindled, and the warning flames spread their lurid glare over the country. At Hume Castle the first fire was lighted, and the blaze, broad and fierce, shot up from the beacon height like a demon that had just escaped thralldom. The single fire intimated that a raid of some sort was expected. Presently two fires were seen, and that intimated that the raid was certain; and by-and-by there were four fires alight, which betokened that the enemy was approaching in great force.

The heights of Soutra Edge and of Edgerton responded

to the warning, and carried it nearer to the capital. Then Dunbar and Haddington repeated the signal. Dalkeith immediately followed suit, and spread the tidings throughout the Lothians. The fiery summons was renewed at Edinburgh in a fiercer, higher flame than anywhere else, and speedily every eminence of lowlands and highlands were ablaze. Stalwart yeomen and trusty vassals flocked to the strongholds of their chiefs, and straightway marched to the Borough Moor, where the national standard had been raised.

The council assembled at Edinburgh had determined upon war; for however much they might be disaffected with the government of James, the barons were prepared to endure it, rather than accept a monarch from the King of England. So they mustered with all their followers at the gathering place, the Earl of Angus, with two thousand followers, being almost the first on the field. The nobles who had most openly declared their discontent during peace were the readiest to advance for the protection of their country in the hour of danger.

The chivalry and strength of the nation had promptly obeyed the summons to arms; every man carried his forty days' provisions in his wallet, and for that space was ready to follow his chief through any peril.

James had the satisfaction of reviewing as brave an army as it had ever fallen to the lot of a Scottish King to lead to battle; and his natural timidity was much comforted and strengthened by that fact.

As became him, the King himself undertook the command of the forces, urged to that course, probably, by Cochrane, as well as by his own desire to prove himself worthy of his subjects in the manner which they would most readily appreciate. It was a happy resolve. The commons saluted him with loyal enthusiasm; and there was a brief glow of martial spirit in his breast as he rode forward on the expedition with the loud plaudits of his people ringing in his ears.

The army advanced as far as Lauder, and there encamped to await some sure tidings of the movements of the enemy, or to give battle on the ground if the opportunity occurred. Here the forces were augmented by numerous detachments of the Borderers, who flocked to the Scottish

standard, bringing to it new strength and valuable intelligence.

When all were counted, the King was gratified to learn that the roll of his army numbered fifty thousand men. This, however, did not induce him to adopt any swift course of action for bringing the campaign to an issue. Although well aware of the impossibility of keeping his forces together as soon as the forty days' store of the men became exhausted, his habitual indecision caused him to linger in the pleasant dale of Lauder, uncertain whether to announce definitely that he would await the approach of the enemy on this vantage ground, or that he would march to the frontier, and check the advance of his brother and Gloucester.

Cochrane determined to take advantage of his halt to complete the arrangements for his marriage with Katherine, which had been interrupted by the pressing occupations of the preparations for the campaign. He had Nicol Janfarie with him as his squire, and kept him almost constantly in his sight. So far he had fulfilled his pledge.

He now summoned the Musgraves and the Fenwicks to attend him as their kinsman and friend; and this summons, supported by the authority of Nicol, and by the proclamation of the forthcoming marriage, obtained a willing and prompt compliance. The Borderers were not loth to acknowledge the kinship of one who had the power to serve them in so many ways.

In this way Cochrane found himself supported by nearly eight hundred Border prickers, in addition to his own especial followers, numbering three hundred. This was no inconsiderable force to have attached to his person, and with it he felt himself strong enough to endure complacently all the frowns and scoffs with which the nobles regarded him whenever he appeared in their presence at council or in the field.

The delay at Lauder he resolved to make use of for the purpose of finally binding the Borderers to his interests. So he caused Katherine to be escorted from Linlithgow to a house provided for her in the town, from which she was to be conducted, immediately after her arrival, to the church, where he proposed to have priest and friends in waiting for the performance of the ceremony.

These arrangements were disclosed only to sure friends.

His Majesty thought that the diversion of the bridal would be somewhat of a relief from the monotonous iteration of the details of war and rumours of war.

Fenwick, Musgrave, and the other kinsmen of the house of Janfarie were glad that an affair which had given them some concern should be finally disposed of as speedily as possible. Nicol was silent and disposed to be sullen, for he had been obliged, by various specious arguments, to renounce what he still considered a sacred duty; and he was eager for the actual strife to begin, that he might have the opportunity of proving that his motives for withdrawing from the feud were not unworthy of his father's son. He was indifferent to the forthcoming nuptials, except in so far as he was annoyed by the thought of the sacrifice which they had compelled him to make.

But it was sadly different with his unhappy sister. To her this bridal was no more than the completion of a dismal expiation. She did not falter, however; she was prepared to fulfil her promise to the uttermost.

She obeyed the summons to Lauder without murmur or opposition of any kind. With silent submission she made ready for the journey, and accompanied her guides without the faintest breath of discontent.

She had been too bitterly conscious of the approach of this hour to shrink from it when it came. Day after day she had been reminded of its relentless approach by the gifts of her future husband, who lavished his wealth upon her in the form of endless tokens of his regard, hoping, no doubt, to surprise her into some degree of contentment, or satisfaction even, with the marriage.

Gift after gift reached her hands; but so far from effecting the desired change in her mood, every one brought her a new pain, for it was another sign to her of the destiny to which she had committed herself irrevocably. The end of it all became less terrible in her eyes than the agonizing suspense with which she watched the advance of the inevitable doom.

Under any other circumstances she might have claimed the protection of the Queen, and she would have obtained it assuredly; but she had deliberately entered into a compact with the man; he had fulfilled his share of the bargain, and she dared not retract from her part of it.

So it was that, silent and unmurmuring, she rode forward to the camp; but cold as she appeared outwardly, there was a feverish anxiety at her heart for the completion of the ordeal—like one who has resolved on some desperate act, and who is impatient of all intervention. The overpent heart and brain are relieved when the thundercloud has burst in all its fury.

In this humour she arrived at the camp, and entered the house prepared for her reception. She arrayed herself for the ceremony in the simplest garments of her wardrobe, without making use of one of the gay presents which her bridegroom had forwarded. She looked more like a woman about to perform some melancholy rite than one about to be married. Her maidens remonstrated with her—one boldly, another timidly; but she answered both with a cold smile, in which there was no glimpse of vanity natural to her sex on such an occasion.

“We deck ourselves gaily when our hearts are light, and we go to a merrymaking,” she said, in a subdued, hopeless tone; “but the garb of sorrow best becomes us when we attend a funeral.”

The maidens were surprised and almost frightened by this gloomy response, which seemed to forebode some fatal issue to the day's proceedings. They felt that they would have been merrier had it been their bridal morn, but considerably ceased their futile attempts to persuade the lady to change her humour. Katherine seated herself and waited with apparent calmness for the appearance of Cochrane to claim the redemption of her pledge.

There was the hum of busy life around her; detachments of troopers were constantly passing beneath her window, some chanting snatches of warlike songs, others laughing boisterously at some gay jest—all buoyant and full of life, eagerly expectant of the hour when they might win glory or booty according to their especial whims. None thought of the sanguinary harvest Death was to reap before their hopes could be realized. Every one accounted himself amongst the victors, and all were jubilant in consequence.

The mirthful sounds had no effect upon the lady unless it might be to remind her still more forcibly of the wretched future to which she had resigned herself. These men were going to battle; hope was their beacon, and the turmoil of

the contest would drown all consciousness of surrounding horror; at the worst, swift death would relieve them of earthly troubles. But she had no hope to break the sombre shadow which hung over her like a pall; there was no struggle to distract her thoughts—nothing but a cheerless resignation to a sad fate was before her.

Despair rendered her calm and almost insensible to the actual miseries of her position. She did not repent the sacrifice she had resolved to make; it had saved the two lives that were more precious to her than all other things on earth, and she was so far content to accept her destiny.

It was with very different sentiments that Sir Robert Cochrane, or the Earl of Mar as he naturally preferred to be designated, prepared for the event of the day. His tent was pitched within call of the royal pavilion; and of the two habitations the former was so much the more magnificent in its decorations that it might have been easily mistaken for the quarters of the monarch, instead of those of his prime favourite. As has already appeared, Cochrane was a man of elegant tastes, and this was as remarkable on the present as on any former occasion.

The covering of his tent was of fine silk, and even the cords were of the same material, whilst the furnishing had been effected on a scale of luxury that astounded, as much as it disgusted, the barons and chiefs who had cause enough to detest him, and whose ruder tastes and training induced them to regard his refinements as unworthy of manhood.

But it was still more galling to these discontented spirits to observe his guard of three hundred picked men attired in a splendid livery of white with black facings, which made the garb of some of the gentlemen even look shady and mean. The men, too, were all brawny fellows, armed with partisans, and ready to defend their master to the last extremity.

Cochrane himself was on this day arrayed in a suit of rich velvet, trimmed in the gayest and most costly fashion that a cultivated taste and ingenious mind could direct. A massive chain of gold hung round his neck, and by his side was suspended a bugle horn, tipped and mounted with the same precious metal, and set with a beryl of unusual size and value.

A suit of finely wrought armour hung on a stand near

his couch, and on a velvet cushion lay his helmet, curiously inlaid with gold. It was apparent that, whether in the cabinet or in the field, on holidays or working days, the King's favourite attended to the adornment of his person with as much care as a vain and pretty woman.

On this day he was even more careful than usual, for it was to witness the triumph of a project which had more than once threatened to defy all his power and skill. He was gratified exceedingly by his success; gratified as much because failure in anything was unendurable to him, as because he was to win the lady for whom he certainly entertained a lively esteem now, whatever might have been the original motives of his suit. It was, therefore, in proper temper that he equipped himself to receive his bride.

"I have never failed," he reflected, smiling as he proceeded with his toilet, assisted by his page. "Fortune has yielded to my skill at every step, and now even the most obstinate of womankind has succumbed to my advances. By my sooth, I am as much elated as if the victory were of a grander kind. The overthrow of Albany and Gloucester would barely give me more content. But that shall follow, for mine is the hand of fortune, and everything prospers that it touches."

He was indeed a prosperous man, and bold as his words were he could hardly be said to speak vauntingly, for it seemed that in truth success yielded to him in everything. From an obscure origin he had been raised step by step to the highest place next to the throne of his native land. His counsel was the first sought, and the most readily followed by the King. Wealth had rolled in upon him from all quarters; position had been awarded to him by the monarch he served. If he had been assailed by many enemies, it was the common lot of great ones to be so attacked; hitherto he had thwarted their malice and kept them at bay; and there was no reason to suppose that in the future he would fail to combat their machinations as successfully as before.

He was a prosperous man, and the July sun shone brightly upon him and his prospects, exhilarating him and giving him promise of a still more brilliant morrow.

He was just completing the elaborate toilet he had made

when the silken hangings which covered the entrance of the tent were thrust aside, and his squire, Nicol Janfarie, appeared with a somewhat flushed visage.

"What now, Nicol?" he said, observing the expression of his features, although he did not pause in his occupation; "is the enemy upon us, or has your foe shown himself in the camp, that you look so hot?"

"Neither, my lord," responded Nicol, who had been schooled to give the full title to his future brother-in-law; "but my masters Leonard, Torphichen, and Hommel desire immediate speech with you, having tidings that may appear of more import than either of the events you refer to."

"Tush, man! they have been bidden to the bridal, and have come in time to attend me, that is all. Let them enter."

Nicol dropped the hangings and disappeared.

He returned presently, ushering in the friends he had named. The fat master of fence and terpsichore, Torphichen, was the first to show himself. He was perspiring a good deal, and the gallant attire which he had donned in honour of his friend's nuptials looked somewhat disarranged.

Leonard the smith, tall, strong, and fiery, came next, looking very much out of humour, and impatient with everything, even with the courtesy with which he was received by the chief favourite of his master.

Lastly entered Hommel, the tailor, whose craft might have provided fitter raiment for the occasion, although that which he wore—dull brown, and rather threadbare—accorded well enough with the melancholy cast of his countenance.

Cochrane surveyed them for an instant curiously, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"Swords and daggers, my lord!" cried Torphichen, becoming, if possible, redder than before, as he bridled up to the earl, playing with the handle of his rapier significantly; "do you laugh at us?"

Cochrane paid as little heed to the wrath of the stout little man as if he had been a bantam pecking at him.

"You will find it no laughing matter before all is done," growled Leonard, savagely.

"I doubt ye'll find it's a matter, my lord, to employ

the most serious consideration of us all," whined the tailor, in a melancholy voice, but with more real self-possession than any of the others.

"Why, what is the mighty matter, gentlemen," queried Cochrane, still mirthfully inclined, "that upsets you, just as we are about to proceed to the kirk?"

"The matter looks bad for us, and, mayhap, for our master too," said Leonard, "and it is something of your making."

"Ay, marry, all of your making," blustered Torphichen, "and affronts uncountable have been put on us as we passed through the camp, for no better reason than that you have chosen to brave the lords by flaunting your titles and favours in their teeth."

Cochrane turned quietly to Hommel.

"Will you expound to me what has so disturbed the humour of our friends? for by my word you seem the only one who can hold the rein of your passion."

"It means, my lord," answered the tailor, humbly, "that there is some villainous complot astir, and that we, the friends and servants of his Majesty, are the objects of its malice."

"That is nothing new, for we have been the object of villainous designs ever since our master showed that he valued our service."

"True, and therefore we have the more cause for alarm as to what may be the upshot of the present conspiracy, when we are surrounded by all our enemies and their forces," proceeded Hommel, deliberately enough, notwithstanding the fear under which he laboured.

"We have thrust our heads into the tiger's jaws, and he means to snap them off, if he can," muttered the smith.

"We should never have been here in the midst of their desperadoes, who will make no more ado of cutting us into mincemeat than they would of emptying a quaich of ale," grumbled Torphichen.

"His Majesty will protect us," said Cochrane.

"I' faith, it will be well if he can protect himself," muttered Leonard; "but he can do nothing for us."

"Then we can defend ourselves."

"We'll get the worst of that, with a curse upon them,"

cried the master of fence. "I am not the one to cry off from any fair field; but here is a shamble, and we are the lambs to be slaughtered. Retreat, speedy and secret, is our only chance."

"Retreat!" cried Cochrane, scornfully; "you mean desertion of our master, like base churls, who have neither courage nor gratitude. No, by my soul, fly who will, I budge not a step if the whole army rose against my single hand."

"Fine words, my master, and I could speak as fine were I so minded," rejoined Torphichen, gasping as if the atmosphere were stifling him; "but no man bares his throat willingly to the assassin's knife."

"If your lordship will listen to me, you shall know whence springs the alarm that makes us debate whether or no it be wise to remain longer in the camp," said Hommel.

"Say it, man, in the devil's name, for it is that I have been trying to discover from you," cried Cochrane, with some show of impatience.

"Then this is it: At midnight there came into the camp a troop of Borderers, two thousand strong at least."

"So much I know, and count it the better for our master's cause."

"Ay, but I scarce think you can know that these men acknowledge Gordon of Lamington as their friend and leader."

Cochrane started, glared wildly at the speaker, and then controlling himself, he said, with forced calmness—

"Proceed. How is it you know them to be his followers?"

"I did not say his followers, but men pledged to support him against you, and that is much the same. I made it my business to inquire into the affair with what cunning I could, so that no alarm or offence might be stirred by my curiosity, and I learned that Lamington had accompanied them to the camp, and only awaited an opportunity to obtain free speech with his Majesty to declare himself openly."

The Earl of Mar smiled, as if relieved.

"He will not speedily declare himself, then, if he waits for that," he said, significantly.

"Ay, but, my lord, you have not heard all. Soon thereafter a secret council of the nobles and chiefs—most of whom are known to be your foes, and take no trouble to hide it—was convened in the kirk."

"Have you learned anything of their resolutions?"

"Nothing; but the council is still sitting with Angus and Lord Gray as presidents; and as the morning advanced, every man of note in the camp has hastened to join them."

"My life upon it, I shall know the purpose of their conclave before the day is an hour older."

"Swords and daggers!" ejaculated Torphichen, "if your lordship is minded to play rashly with your life, so will not I for the best Toledo that ever was tempered."

"Remain you with his Majesty, then, or crawl to some kennel and hide yourself until the storm be over; but I shall not fail to remember how you have borne yourself to-day."

"I am no braggart and no coward either," blustered the little man, but losing much of his rubicund tint as he spoke; "but I value my neck, although I can bear myself in a fair field as well as the prettiest man among you."

Cochrane turned from him with some show of contempt, which the other did not resent, although he looked furious enough.

"Go you, Leonard, with fifty men, and let Nicol Janfarie, Musgrave, and Fenwick, with their followers, accompany you and conduct my bride to the kirk, where you will find me with the priest ready to proceed with the ceremony. You, Hommel, seek Rogers and the rest of our friends, and remain near the King, that you may be ready to give him timely warning and assistance in the event of any danger."

"Zounds! I too will stay by his Majesty," interpolated Torphichen, "that he may have a trusty hand to protect him to the last."

The directions which Cochrane issued with the decisive coolness characteristic of him in emergency, were obeyed promptly; every one seeming to be reconciled to the belief that fidelity would be the most advantageous policy in the end.

His lordship remained alone, and the shadow on his

visage intimated that his meditations produced many doubts as to the propriety of the next step he was to take. But he roused himself.

"The sooner my weakness or power is proved the better," he muttered.

He passed from the tent, and mounted a gaily caparisoned horse, which an attendant held in readiness for him. The page carried his helmet, and a squire bore the rest of his armour, as if he had been going forth to battle instead of to his bridal.

His own gallant array and that of the three hundred men who attended him in their bright liveries, and with polished arms glittering in the sunlight, presented an imposing appearance.

The camp was astir; the soldiers were actively engaged furbishing up their arms, preparing their noontide meal, or spending their leisure in games of dice and in athletic contests, which enabled them to display their prowess in friendly rivalry. There was a constant hum, as of a great city—mingled with the clank of arms, and the sound of horses galloping to and fro, their panoplies rattling like many sheepbells. Everywhere bustle and activity of one sort or other prevailed.

But as the brilliant cavalcade of the Earl of Mar passed along, every one paused in his occupation to stare at the procession, and to exchange observations of admiration or contempt. His lordship rode proudly forward, without deigning to observe the friendly or unfriendly regards which marked his progress.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE COUNCIL IN LAUDER KIRK.

"Lang hast thou harried our peacefu' haulds,
 And fattened upon our waes, I trow;
 But noo we hae gotten thee in the faulds
 O' thine ain treachery, fast enow."

Evandale.

THE kirk stood on the north side of the town, and close to the massive peel or tower called Lauder Fort, which has been since transformed into Thirlestane Castle. The place

chosen for the assembly of the disaffected barons and gentlemen was sufficiently retired from the camp to ensure their lordships against any untimely interruption, and the massive walls and doors secured them from eavesdroppers.

Their deliberations chiefly concerned the immediate prospects of the war, and the measures adopted by his Majesty for repelling the invasion. The present inactivity was unanimously condemned as fatal policy; and it was attributed to the same influence which their lordships held accountable for all the current ills of the State—the influence of Cochran and his companions on the mind of the King.

The Abbot Panther, who in disguise had made his way into the camp, and placed himself under the protection of Angus, supplied them with important tidings as to the movements and purposes of the English army; and he urged the council to adopt on the instant such measures as would finally relieve the country of the causes of misgovernment. He averred that the opportunity was offered to them now of displacing the incompetent and knavish adviser of the King, and that if it were missed they deserved to groan under the oppression which had banished so many of them from their places at the court and at the councils of the State.

The assembly was stirred by this address, and one after another of those present cited instances of the tyranny, corruption, and maladministration of justice exercised by the minions of the King. Several hours were occupied by these revelations, and during that time Sir Robert Douglas, of Loch Leven, who kept the door, admitted new-comers who desired to share in the council, until the gathering crowded the kirk.

Throughout it all there was one man who stood near the doorway, with arms folded on his breast, bonnet drawn low on his brow, and his long cloak concealing his person. He had been one of the first to enter the place; he had listened intently to all that passed; but he had not moved or attempted in any way to join in the debate.

He was one who had suffered the worst of wrongs, and the wounds they had inflicted were too deep and fresh for words to give him any relief. He waited the moment of action.

The interest which the proceedings excited in every breast prevented the lapse of time being noted; and hours after the brief darkness of the summer night had given place to sunshine the discussion continued; for although all were clear as to the evil and the necessity of removing it, they could not so readily agree as to the means by which it was to be removed.

"With your leaves, my lords," said Lord Gray, "I will read you a fable which may help to solve the difficulty in which we now find ourselves placed: There was once a discreet community of mice sorely fashed by the steady persecution of their race by a monstrous big cat. A council of the mice was held—just as it might be here—and after much debate it was agreed that a bell should be hung round the enemy's neck, in order that they might have timely warning of his approach. The measure was an admirable one, as your lordships can understand, and all were agreed upon its expediency. But, unfortunately, it failed to serve the mice, for not one of them could be found who was bold enough to put the measure in force, and tie the bell to the cat's neck. That is the fable, my lords. I leave you to apply the moral."

There was profound silence for a few seconds; and then the Earl of Angus stood up, his tall form seeming to tower above all others more than usual, and his stern visage seemed to become grim under the passion which moved him.

"I read your moral, my lord," he said in a loud, resolute tone: "and that what we purpose may not lack execution, I am he who will bell the cat."

There was a low murmur of satisfaction throughout the assembly, and from that time forth Douglas became known by the cognomen—Bell-the-Cat.

The murmur had scarcely subsided when the door was rudely shaken by the furious blows of some one impatient to obtain entrance.

"Who is there?" demanded Sir Robert Douglas.

"It is I, the Earl of Mar," was the answer; and a thrill of astonishment passed through the assembly.

"The fool runs his head into the noose right freely," exclaimed Angus, pressing forward to the entrance; "admit him."

At the same time the man who had remained so long motionless sprang to the side of Angus.

The door was opened, and Cochrane, surrounded by his followers, was seen without.

"I am given to understand that there is a council holding here," he said, haughtily; "and I have come hither to know its purport, and to give my voice to its decisions with what advantage may be for his Majesty's welfare."

"Enter," said Angus, grimly.

Cochrane boldly crossed the threshold, and the door was immediately closed on his followers.

Angus thereupon snatched the massive gold chain from the courtier's neck.

"A halter will suit you better, my lord," he said, mockingly.

Sir Robert Douglas snatched the bugle horn from the astonished favourite's side.

"You have been a hunter of mischief over long," exclaimed the assailant, "and you have ridden to your own doom at last."

"Is this jest or earnest, my lords?" cried Cochrane, starting back and regarding his opponents indignantly.

"It is sad earnest, as you shall find," retorted Angus: "you and your accomplices have too long abused the confidence of the King, corrupted his government, and betrayed his trust. But now, you and your fellows shall have the fitting reward of the service you have done the country."

"If that be your intent, my lords, you shall not find me yield tamely to your treachery," answered Cochrane, boldly. "Ho! Leonard, Janfarie, Musgrave, Fenwick, to the rescue."

Drawing his sword, he made a violent effort to reach the door in order to open it. But a dozen swords were instantly opposed to him, and he must have been beaten down at once had not help come from an unexpected quarter.

The man who had hastened to the side of Angus when it became known that Cochrane approached, now dropped his cloak, and revealed the person of Lamington.

"I claim your lordship's pledge," he cried firmly; "this wolf is my prey."

"Hold your hands, gentlemen," shouted Angus, in obedience to the demand made on him.

The command was obeyed, and before Cochrane could recover breath from the fierce exertion he had made to defend himself, Lamington grasped his arm. "Turn to me, Robert Cochrane, and if your arm does not fail you at sight of one you have so bitterly wronged, endeavour to win an honourable death at my hand."

"You here—curses upon you!" cried the incensed man, who now indeed began to feel that he had been trapped beyond help; "this is your doing. But I thank you for this one chance of satisfying my hate. On guard."

He struck at him so suddenly, and with such fury, that it was only by an exertion of extraordinary agility that Lamington avoided the stroke. His sword was ready to prevent a repetition of the movement.

Cochrane gnashed his teeth with rage; but his eye met that of his opponent with a cold, deadly glitter, that betokened perfect presence of mind.

"Stand back, gentlemen," cried Gordon, whilst he kept his eye fixed on his foe, and the weapons crossed; "mine is the first score to be settled with this knave. He has traduced me to the King; he has declared me rebel and traitor, and condemned me to the gallows; but more villainous than all beside, he has deprived me of a treasure that was of little worth to him and that was life itself to me."

As if acknowledging the superior claim of Gordon, to prove his truth upon the body of his maligner, all drew back as far as the walls would permit, leaving a clear space for the combatants.

Cochrane saw in this movement the possibility of reaching the door before he could be again surrounded; and he therefore hastened the issue of the conflict by the rapidity and fury of his attack.

All the skill he possessed in the use of his weapon—and it was considerable—was quickened by the knowledge that everything depended on his present address. With a desperate velocity his sword played round that of his antagonist, and he availed himself of every trick of fence to gain a speedy and decisive victory. He fancied that he had learned the secret of Gordon's play in the encounter at

the Dumfries hostelry, and he put that knowledge to the best advantage.

But either he had misapprehended the lesson, or Lamington, also remembering the incident, adopted new tactics; for every thrust, parry, and feint was warded with singular dexterity, and returned so swiftly that it would have been impossible to say which was the best swordsman.

The spectators looked on in silence and gradually became excited by the contest, which was sustained with equal address and equal animosity by both combatants.

The faces of the combatants were at white heat with passion; and yet there was a certain coolness on both sides which gave no advantage to either. At length Cochrane, imagining that he felt the arm of his opponent weakening, made a desperate lunge at his breast. But the weakness had been a feint: the lunge was deftly parried, and Gordon pierced the sword-wrist of his foe, so that the weapon dropped instantly from the powerless hand.

Without a pause, and without uttering a sound or changing expression to indicate the pain he endured, Cochrane with his left hand whipped his poniard from his sheath and sprung at Gordon's neck before the latter could recover his weapon in time to follow up his success.

He, however, warded the blow of the poniard with his arm, griped the assailant by the throat, and hurled him violently to the ground.

Cochrane was momentarily stunned by the fall; Gordon's foot planted on his breast rendered it impossible for him to rise, and Gordon's sword-point, resting on his throat, threatened to pierce his neck and pinion him to the floor at the slightest movement he might make to renew the conflict.

A murmur of satisfaction and sundry cries of congratulation greeted the victor. There was not one of those who had so intently watched the progress of the close-balanced combat who did not draw a breath of relief in beholding the triumph of him whose cause they had deemed just, and whose honour they now believed to be vindicated beyond doubt.

"Now, Cochrane, for your soul's sake," cried Gordon, "confess the treachery you have practised upon me—confess the wrong you have done me, and for which there is

no remedy. Confess, and win some mercy for your black soul."

"Strike, fool!" answered the fallen man, with bitter scorn—"strike, and be content with your victory, for you get no word from me but that of hate and contempt."

"It is too brave an end for such as you."

"So think we," interrupted Angus, striking up Lamington's sword. "You have proved your truth on his foul body; now let the gallows have its due."

At a sign from the earl, Sir Robert Douglas and another lifted Cochrane from the ground and held him prisoner between them.

He fixed his eyes on Angus, with the haughty glance of one who knows that he is powerless, but will not show any submission.

"This is like your lordship's bravery," he said mockingly; "you can revile the defenceless, knowing that you are secure from his vengeance. Had I been wiser you should never have fled from Linlithgow or lived to show me this disgrace."

"Fangh! you false loon; your taunts shall not move me to sully my fingers with you," said the earl, contemptuously.

"Are you all of his mind, my lords?" proceeded Cochrane, turning to the assembly; "remember, I wear an earl's spurs, and I claim from you the death of a gentleman."

"Oho! you would ride the beggar's high horse, most worshipful Earl of Mar," cried Angus; "you would play the noble, and hold your head on a level with the best gentlemen of the land? By St. Andrew, since you have mounted the horse, you shall have the beggar's ride—to the foul fiend, your master. The spurs shall be struck from your heels by the common hangman, and your head shall have the honour it merits by being exalted above your comrades on the scaffold."

The now impotent favourite saw that it was useless to strive further against the determination of his powerful enemies. He quietly took a silk handkerchief from his pocket and began to bind it round his wounded wrist.

A piece of dirty rope that seemed to have been lying in the gutter of some stable was brought to bind his hands. At sight of it he drew back.

"At least your malice, sirs, will permit me the poor favour of a silken cord," he said bitterly; "you cannot refuse to spare me the indignity of hanging in filthy hemp when you may accommodate me with one of the silken cords which you will find attached to my pavilion."

Several laughed outright at this request, and Sir Robert Douglas proceeded with new zest to fasten his hands behind him with the despised hemp.

It was Angus who answered—

"You shall have a tether of horsehair to hang in, that we may the better mark our disdain for you and your ways."

Cochrane shrugged his shoulders as he might have done in happier circumstances at the hopeless vulgarity of a boor.

"One last request permit me to make," he said with mocking courtesy. "A lady is on her way hither in expectation of wedding with me to-day. Will you so far consider her pleasure as to prevent her witnessing my disgrace?"

"The dame that could wed with you will be the merrier for the sight, if she esteem you rightly," retorted the uncompromising Angus; and then addressing the council: "Pronounce judgment now, my lords, that we may save time and finish our work speedily."

"Death to him and his accomplices at the hands of the common hangman!" was the unanimous verdict pronounced, without any further form of trial.

It was then arranged that Cochrane should be kept prisoner in the kirk until his associates were secured. In the mean while, his followers were ordered back to their quarters by the Earl of Angus; and the men, knowing nothing of what had transpired, and their master not making any sign to countermand them, retired accordingly.

Sir Robert Douglas was entrusted with the care of the prisoner, and a thousand troopers were speedily placed on guard round the kirk to frustrate any attempt at rescue. When these precautions had been taken, a number of men were despatched to erect scaffolds on the bridge of Lauder, whilst Angus, Lord Gray, and other noblemen proceeded to the King's pavilion for the purpose of arresting the other favourites.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MEETING IN THE TENT.

“Nor wealth, nor grandeur, power could have
 My faithful heart to shake;
 For thee it beat, oh much-loved boy,
 For thee it now doth break.

“Why did thy wrathful rival think
 His sword could us disjoin?
 Did he not know that Love had made
 My life but one with thine?”

The Dowy Den.

HAVING seen his vanquished foe securely bound, Gordon snatched up his cloak and quitted the kirk, accompanied by the Abbot Panther. The latter wore the expression of one who is satisfied with a victory for which he has been long struggling; but Gordon was as gloomy as if he came from defeat rather than conquest. He had been wounded in several places by his antagonist; but the wounds gave him no concern; they had nothing to do with the sorrow which oppressed him.

“You will hasten forward,” he said presently to his friend, “and give her assurance that she is saved from the wretched union which would have been forced upon her but for the fortune of to-day?”

“I will tell her that you have saved her, and she will thank me for the tidings,” rejoined Panther; “but she would thank me still more if I could present the champion to her.”

“No—that is impossible. Do not try to persuade me, Panther, for Heaven knows my own desire to touch her hand again, and to look into her eyes, makes my resolution weak enough.”

“The resolution should never have been taken.”

“It is her will that we should never meet again.” continued Lamington, mournfully, “and I cannot marvel at it. There is no mending the evil fortune that parts us: we can only suffer. Meeting only adds to our misery by the bitterer sense which presence gives of the black gulf

between us. I wish to spare her and myself so far as may be, and therefore must not meet her. Tell her this, if you find occasion; and say, too, that Nicol is safe from me."

"I cannot urge you more than I have done on this matter," said the Abbot, gravely; "I respect the motives which actuate the lady and yourself; but Churchman as I am, the fate of her brother does not seem to me to merit such penance from you."

"If *we* could only think so! But no, I dare not, must not think of it."

"Forget it, then, if you can. I will do your errand, and, in faith, it must be done speedily, for there is need that I should hasten to the King to see that he is used with the respect our friends are apt to forget in their wrath."

"You will find me in the camp when you need me."

They had by this time come up with a small troop of Borderers, who appeared to have been waiting for them. The Abbot and Gordon mounted the horses which were held in readiness, and the former rode towards the town.

Lamington, having given some brief instructions to his men, slowly followed the Abbot at a distance.

The party sent to conduct the bride to the kirk had been unexpectedly delayed. When Nicol entered the chamber in which his sister waited for him, she informed him that a little while before his arrival a missive had been received by her, intimating that she was not to quit the house on any persuasion until a second message was delivered. The missive had been forwarded by Lamington, but that she did not make known to her brother, whom, under various pretences, she detained in the room with her, fearing that a collision might take place if he should see Gordon, in spite of his reluctant promise to renounce the feud.

Leonard imagined that the instructions to tarry the coming of further intelligence had been sent by Cochrane; and being aware that there was more than probability of sundry unpleasant interruptions to the proposed ceremony, he was content to abide in the town and refresh himself at the hostelry. In this occupation Musgrave and Fenwick readily joined him.

Thus the party remained until the Abbot galloped up

the street. Leonard sallied forth to discover the purpose of the rider.

"There will be no bridal to-day, my masters," cried his lordship, dismounting: "wherefore you may hie back to the camp when you please."

"No bridal!" ejaculated Leonard. "Why, what in the name of Vulcan does that mean?"

"Ride to the kirk and learn for yourself," was the curt response of the Abbot, as he entered the house in search of Katherine.

"That will I, and right speedily," shouted the smith; "for by your looks, my master, there is an iron hot that may need a sledge-hammer to shape it."

Valiantly mounting his horse, and resolved to give his comrade, Cochrane, what help he might need, Leonard summoned his men to follow, and galloped to the kirk. There he was assailed by the troops left in charge, and despite the desperation with which he defended himself, he was captured, pinioned, and thrown down beside his associate to await execution.

When Panther appeared before Katherine she rose with a startled and somewhat bewildered expression to meet him.

"You did not count on seeing me here, daughter," he said, taking her hands kindly; "but I bring tidings that should make me welcome."

"You are so always, father," she replied, agitatedly, and marvelling what might be the nature of his tidings.

"But more than ever now; for I have come to tell you that Robert Cochrane will never claim your hand, or any woman's. He is doomed, and you are free."

"I am free?" she echoed, as if scarcely comprehending the full meaning of the words.

"Then I am free too," muttered Nicol; and he swiftly passed from the chamber unobserved.

The tent of Lamington had been pitched on the outskirts of the camp, as he had been amongst the latest arrivals. The position was, besides, favourable to his purpose of keeping his presence as secret as possible until after he had settled his affairs with Cochrane.

His vengeance was now accomplished: his task was

completed. Katherine was free to choose her own course, and he had nothing more that he cared to live for. The future was desolate to him, for every motive of energy seemed suddenly to have been withdrawn.

He felt himself as weak as he was hopeless, and he wearied for the din of war that it might rouse him from his state of enervation, if it were for no better end than to fall speedily in the vanguard of the army. The thought of his ambition to restore the credit of his father's name only produced a melancholy smile at the futility of man's purposes.

In this misanthropical humour, he repaired to his tent as soon as he had seen the Abbot enter the house occupied by Katherine, and threw himself on the pile of heather which served him as a couch, feeling utterly exhausted by the emotions and events of the day. But it was with no thought or hope of sleep that he had lain down; it was with the feeling of one who yields himself up to his despair, believing that to strive against it is useless.

The entrance of some one awakened him from the species of lethargy into which he had fallen.

He looked up and recognized Nicol Janfarie.

The countenance of the youth was flushed with excitement, and he appeared to preserve a calm bearing only by the greatest effort of his will.

Gordon rose slowly, watching Nicol's face with wistful eyes, whilst he waited for him to speak. But Nicol seemed as slow to begin the conversation as he had been eager to seek the interview.

"You know why I am here?" he said at length, excitedly, and yet with some respect.

"I cannot know until you have acquainted me," answered Lamington in a low voice that almost trembled, for he had no difficulty in divining the purpose of the visit from the tone in which the inquiry was made.

Nicol gazed at him, frowning; and then with some agitation—

"Gordon, I believe you to be an honest man, in spite of all that has been said to your discredit, and in spite of all the ill that you have done us."

Lamington inclined his head.

Nicol went on with growing warmth.

"Answer me, then, as a true man and I will be guided by your answer. If you stood face to face with the man who was the cause of your father's fall, if you stood face to face with the man whose hand had stricken your brother to the earth, what would you do?"

Lamington's head was bowed, his hands were clasped, but he did not answer.

"You will not refuse to satisfy me," cried Nicol, with increasing excitement; "say, would you permit the tears, the prayers, the agony even, of a silly woman to tether your arm? Would you permit that man to go scathless from your presence?"

A pause, and then the response was given, as if wrung from him by some irresistible power—

"No."

"You would claim from him life for life—you would compel him to yield you his heart's blood, or you would give yours in striving for it? Would you not do that?"

"I would," he replied, in the same forced manner as the first response.

"I thank you, Gordon, for this answer, and I would that I might have taken your hand as a friend's, not a foe's. Now you know why I am here."

"Nicol, this cannot be."

"And I tell you, Gordon, that this must be, according to your own showing. But more than that, the pangs of shame which I have endured—the sharp stings of remorse with which I have been whipped almost to frenzy since Robert Cochrane drew from me the promise to renounce the feud as the only means by which he could make sure of Katherine's hand, and as the only means by which he could make sure of your destruction—all these have proved to me that this must be."

"Listen to me, Janfarie," said Lamington, calmly. "I own that something of the blame of your father's fall may be due to me, but nothing of your brother's. He compelled me to defend my life, and in return I tried to save his."

"But it was by your hand he fell, nevertheless," was the dogged comment.

"My hand, unhappily, but not my will. I cannot hope to alter your view of that matter, however, and will not seek

to defend myself further. But I have something still to say concerning yourself."

"You waste words. I am resolved, and there is no power can make me falter again."

"But you must hear me all the same. I was entrusted with certain despatches to deliver to his Majesty, and in the disguise of a courier I obtained admission to the palace at Linlithgow. Desiring to see your sister, desiring perhaps to have speech with her, although that was forbidden to me, I followed her to the chapel, and there accident made me the hearer of all that passed between her and Cochrane when she gave her consent to be his wife."

"What of that?"

"Everything, for it enabled me to comprehend the cruel anguish with which she gave that consent; it enabled me to understand that she yielded herself to a fate which appeared to her worse than death, only that she might save your life and mine. I devoted myself then to rescue her from the sacrifice to which she had pledged herself, and I resolved that no taunt, no threat, should ever move me to lift a finger against you."

"You spared her the sacrifice, and by the same means you gave me liberty to pursue my vengeance. By my soul, I thank you for her sake and my own."

"Do what you will, the memory of her sorrow will keep me constant to my resolve."

"What, will you bear to have your knighthood shamed with the brand of coward?"

Gordon smiled at the threat, as he might have done at the petty fury of an indulged child.

"That will not affect me, for none who know me will doubt my courage."

"If words cannot move you, then this must," cried Nicol, and struck him on the brow with his glove.

Gordon's face crimsoned, and then grew pale, but he kept his hands tightly clasped, and made no movement to resent the indignity.

"Even that I can endure for her sake," he said composedly.

Nicol was astounded by his imperturbability; and then with furious haste, he drew his sword.

"Dog!—you will at least defend yourself."

"No. If it is your will, strike; but you will strike a defenceless man."

Nicol raised his weapon as if about to take him at his word, and immediately checked himself.

"I am no cut-throat," he said, hoarsely; "I cannot do that; but I will whip you with my belt from your own pavilion, and through the midst of our Border lads. If you submit to that degradation, then I will own you are unworthy of better treatment."

He had unfastened his belt as he spoke, and twisting it once round his hand, he advanced to strike.

But that was too much. Gordon suddenly grasped Nicol's arms and pinioned them to his side.

"If you wish to be my executioner," he said, sternly, "you have the opportunity. I give it you freely; but you shall not degrade me further. See now how helpless you are in my grasp; you can feel how easy it would be for me to return the blow that any other would have paid for with his life. But I hold you harmless. There, take your sword, and take your satisfaction if you are so minded."

He released him, and stood calmly awaiting the result.

Nicol snatched up his sword, and, blind with passion, cried fiercely—

"Then, by my father's hand, since there is no nobler course left to me, this shall atone for all."

He would have rushed on his defenceless foe, but whilst he had been speaking, Katherine had hurriedly entered the tent, and now flung herself on his breast, staying him.

At the same time a dog sprang into the place, and capered around Lamington, striving to lick his hands, and planting his fore paws on the knight's shoulders, as if desirous of embracing him, whining with delight the while. It was Stark, and at the entrance stood Stark's master, Muckle Will, who seemed to have accompanied the lady, and who now appeared to be hesitating whether or not he should advance. His expression was that of sheepish awkwardness, as if conscious that he had been guilty of some grave offence; and yet there was a twinkle of drollery in his honest eyes which did not quite accord with the gravity of the occasion.

Nicol was for an instant confused by the appearance of

his sister ; but the next instant he made fierce efforts to unclasp her arms from his neck, and to thrust her from him.

"Stand aside, Kate," he cried, hotly, "and quit the place. You are not wanted here—your presence only retards the work I have to do."

"It is evil work, and you shall not do it," she exclaimed, resolutely: "it is murder that you were about to do, and the shame of it would cling to your life for ever, turning your high intents to meanest ends."

"It is justice I am about to render to the dead," retorted the brother.

"No—not justice, but dishonour to their name, for which every true man of the Border will scorn you."

"You think to save him by this," he said, savagely, "but I know your purpose, and can esteem your words at their proper worth. Let go your hold, for by the sacred Cross you shall not baulk me. I have faltered too long for your sake already ; but from this hour I cast you from me as no kin or friend of mine. It is you who bring dishonour on our name, but I will try to retrieve its credit."

He violently disengaged her hands and flung her from him.

"Nicol!—forbear," she cried wildly, striving to seize him again.

But he held her aloof with his left arm, whilst raising his weapon he looked to Gordon.

"Now, let him defend himself, or on his own head be the issue," he said, firmly.

Lamington did not move.

Muckle Will, as if only then comprehending the position of affairs, threw down his bonnet, and making two strides, confronted the fiery youth.

"Od, man, gin ye're sae bad for some ane to fecht wi', try me?" exclaimed Will, as if with the good-natured desire to satisfy the humour of a child.

"Out of the way, fool."

"No siccan a gowk as I look like, it may be ; and gin ye would jist hearken what I hae gotten to say, and what a friend o' mine has gotten to say, ye would, maybe, change your notion about this hurly-burly," answered Will, undaunted by the dangerous proximity of the sword's point to his breast.

Nicol glared at the huge form of the man, astounded by the hardihood of his interference in such a quarrel, and astounded too by the complaisance with which it was done.

Katherine still held her brother's hand, and, glad of any interruption which might delay the strife, and give his passion time to abate, she said, eagerly—

“Let him speak, Nicol. He comes to tell you how Richard fell, and to give you his last commands.”

At the reference to his brother, Nicol glanced inquiringly at her, and at Muckle Will; then slowly lowering his weapon, he said huskily—

“If that be true I will listen to him.”

Lamington also was startled by the allusion, for it inspired the hope that in his last moments the master of Janfarie had done him justice by declaring him innocent of his death.

“How do you know aught of Richard Janfarie?” he cried, turning hastily to Will; “and how have you come here at this moment?”

“How hae I come here? To tell you the truth, sir, I hae come to betray ye into the hands o' some folk that are unco anxious to chap off your honour's head,” rejoined Will, grinning.

“Betray me? This is no time for jesting, sirrah.”

“But it's nae jest ava, saving your presence. Ye see, when I got the letter frae the lady that ye nae doubt ken aboot, Stark and me got into a deeficulty. His lordship, the Earl o' Mar, was like to thrapple me in order to get a sight o' the bit letter, but Stark chowed it a' to pieces. Syne his lordship swore he would gie me a taste o' thae iron boots and thrumbikins, that he said gart honest folk wha wanted to keep their ain council chatter like magpies, unless I showed him where ye were to be found. I didna care to try thae things he spoke aboot, sae I scarted my pow and considered. Weel, it came into my head, some gate, that the best thing to do was jist to agree wi' his lordship and betray your honour.”

“What, you play traitor to me?”

“Od, man, what else could I do? I promised to lead the earl's billies to where they might gripe ye, and they are outbye, enoo, waiting to get a haud o' ye.”

Lamington seized his hunting-horn, and was about to sound it when Will stopped him.

"But ye needna fash to blaw your horn, for there are twa or three Border chieles yonder wham I tauld the nature o' our errand to, and they hae gotten the earl's billies penned thegither like sheep, and winna let them steer a foot without your leave."

Gordon laid down his bngle, for he began to see the stratagem by which his follower had outwitted Cochrane's satellites.

"What is the meaning of this, Will?" he queried, reconciled; "and what has it to do with Richard Janfarie?"

"Weel, sir, Stark and me agreed to betray ye to save our ain skins, but we didna want to do it jist at a minute when it mightna hae been ower and aboon agreeable to ye. Sae we took a lang road about in search o' ye, and the mair the deils threatened to poniard me and quarter me, the mair I led them out o' the right road. At last we put up at the hospice St. Margaret, and the villains were gaun to thrapple me there and then for no bringing them sooner to the journey's end, though I had tauld them that it was impossible for me to say where ye was. But jist when they were on the point o' making a preen-cushion of my body wi' their swords, wha should step in but a strapping chiel o' the Borders, and commanded them to haud their hands."

"You have said nothing of my brother yet," interrupted Nicol, impatiently.

"Hoots, man, can ye no gie a body time to say his say?" replied Will, contentedly. "Weel, the dacent sowl wha came to my help was ken'd by the officer of the billies that had me in charge, and he did just whatever my friend direckit. When the swords were put up, my friend said to me that I maun take him without delay to the place where Gordon of Lamington was to be found, as he had a particular message to gie him frae Richard Janfarie."

"Where is the man?" cried Gordon.

"He's no' far awa'. But it was awhile afore I was satisfied that he had an honest purpose in wanting to see ye. Hows'ever he satisfied me at last, and I brought them a' to Lauder. In the toon I heard that her ladyship had

arrived afore us, and as my friend wanted her to be present when he met your honour, I gaed and brought her here."

"Where is the man?" repeated Gordon.

"I'll fetch him to ye in a minute."

And whilst the others stood in mute suspense, Muckle Will quitted the tent.

The excited anticipations with which they awaited the revelation about to be made, rendered the brief interval of Will's absence painful. But the suspense was not protracted, for he reappeared in a few minutes, and there was a simultaneous exclamation of surprise and joy uttered by the three.

The cause of the cry was Muckle Will's companion—a tall man and a youthful one, but so enfeebled by sickness, that he was obliged to lean heavily on his stalwart comrade's arm. His visage was so pallid and haggard, that it was like the face of a corpse, rather than that of a living man.

With sunken eyes he scanned the astounded faces which were turned towards him, and then he slowly extended his hand towards Katherine. He spoke in a hollow and agitated voice—

"Sister, I come to sue for pardon."

She started from her stupor of amazement, and sprang to his side. She flung her arms round his neck, uttering a wild cry of ecstasy.

"He lives! Oh, Father of Heaven be thanked for this miracle!"

She kissed his haggard cheeks and cried with joy, forgetting at the moment all the anguish she had endured on his account.

"Amen, amen," muttered Nicol, clasping his brother's hand fervently.

Richard Janfarie bowed his head over his weeping sister, in devout contrition for the wrong he had done her who was so ready to pardon him. The content of the three was too great for speech of any kind, and awhile they remained embracing, silent. Lamington regarded them with brightening eyes, full of satisfaction and of hope. But he was still too much astonished by this singular conclusion to his faithful follower's confession to be able to form any definite conception of the probable result.

Richard Janfarie was the first to acknowledge the

presence of Lamington; and raising his head he looked at him with an appealing expression.

"She has forgiven me," he said, speaking with some difficulty, "you will not refuse me pardon?"

"You have it, Janfarie, freely; "but I am eager to know in what spirit we are to meet—as friends or foes?"

"As friends, if you will consent."

Lamington grasped his hand.

"The past is forgotten," he said, warmly; "from this moment I am your real friend and kinsman."

"You will find me as true as I have been spiteful, Lamington. I am your grateful debtor as well as friend; and if I live, you shall not lack proof of it in the hour of your need. I owe you life: I will not pause to spend it in your service."

His strength seemed to fail him, and he sank on the seat which Muckle Will had hastily provided for him, Katherine supporting him on one side and Nicol on the other, whilst Gordon made a movement to render what assistance might be necessary.

"Thank you, Katherine, and thanks to you, Gordon," said Janfarie, as if anxious to reassure them; "this is nothing but the cursed weakness of my limbs—they have been sorely strained, yet I think I could have held myself more stoutly against your wrath than against your kindness—that conquers me."

"Ah, brother," said Katherine, tenderly, "you are more like yourself to-day with all your weakness than you have been since first you called Cochrane friend."

Janfarie's sunken eyes sparkled with rage at the name, and he spoke hastily—

"Ay, I must speak of him. You marvel at the change of my humour towards you as much, I will be sworn, as you marvel at my appearance in life."

"We are as grateful to the means which have wrought the change as we are glad to welcome you among us," said Gordon, earnestly.

"A few words will let you understand it all. When in the Glenkens I forced you to the combat, blind and mad as I was in my fury, I saw that twenty times my life was at your mercy and you spared it, despite the provocation you received. Again, when by my own fury I stumbled into

the pit and would have perished, you rescued me. I learned that from one of the fellows who were with me, and at the moment I hated you for it. I refused to let the men carry me to the place you had appointed, and we found shelter in a forester's hut. There I remained two days, hanging on the brink of death, whilst one of the lads rode to Linlithgow to acquaint Cochrane with the mishap."

"But how came it to be reported that you were dead? I saw the messenger myself, and obtained the assurance from his own lips," said Nicol. "I would have gone there to see you interred, but Cochrane shamed me from it by bidding me think of avenging your fall rather than of wasting time in a journey to look on a dead man's face."

"It was his doing," answered Janfarie, bitterly; "it was one of his men you saw—a knave who was ready to swear to aught his master required. At the end of three days I was secretly conveyed to Cochrane's tower, and there fever seized me; for days—nay, weeks—I was insensible to all that passed around me; when I regained consciousness I was so weak, that the leech and nurse who waited on me had to feed me like a babe. That was my condition for a while, and it was during this time that I first began to understand how much I had wronged you, Gordon, and what torture I had been causing Katherine to endure."

She pressed his hand pitiably, and he proceeded—

"The saints know that I desired her happiness; but I believed that it would be best assured by the high position Cochrane pledged himself to give her, and by the advancement he promised to our house. Whilst I lay prostrate and helpless I began to see how cowardly and knavishly I had been acting, and I began to feel, although slowly, that I was Gordon's debtor."

"Did you not see Cochrane?" queried Nicol.

"Ay, late one night he came to me. He told me of the report he had spread with the purpose of making Katherine herself revolt from all thought of union with Lamington. I refused to lend myself to further deception, and demanded that he would, without delay, declare the truth, that I lived, and that it was Gordon's hand which had saved me. He tried at first to dissuade me, but finding that useless he promised to do my bidding if I would only remain quiet and get well."

"He did not keep his promise," interrupted Nicol.

"No; he deceived me, as I believe now he would have done under any circumstances. He sent daily to inquire for my condition, and to assure me that all was going better than he had hoped, for Katherine was at length yielding to his suit. That did not please me as it would have done some weeks earlier; for I had become suspicious of his friendship. I still remained weak, although before his visit I had been recovering; and soon I began to fear that the leech was playing with my malady to keep me fast to the bed in order to serve his master's ends."

"What, would he have poisoned you?" ejaculated the brother, fiercely.

"No, I do not think that, for I was too useful to him; but he would have kept me prisoner there until my interference would have failed to serve any one. Tortured by my suspicions, I asked for one of my own lads to bear a message to Johnstone. I was answered that my followers had grown weary of waiting for me, and had taken their leave some days before. I have since learned that they had been persuaded to enter Cochrane's service, and that they had been removed by him, who doubtless feared that they might be employed by me to contradict the report of my death."

"Oh that I had been a man, and within arm's reach of the traitor!" exclaimed Katherine, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"When I learned that my men were gone, my suspicion of the treachery practised toward me was confirmed. Wrath quickened my enfeebled limbs. Whilst all believed me too helpless to stand alone, I rose from the bed and escaped from the place. I procured a horse from the stable: the warder had no instructions to bar my way, for the leech imagined that his art bound me to the sick chamber; and so I rode freely through the gates."

"Did they pursue?" said Nicol.

"I scarcely know. It is only three days since, and I have encountered none of them. I was resolved to find Lamington, and journeyed toward the Glenkens. Accident brought me into contact with this brave fellow, Will, at a moment when my presence was of some service to him. The officer who accompanied him recognized me as a friend

of his master, and was therefore willing to spare the man on my pledge that they should be speedily brought to Gordon's quarters. Will was soon satisfied of my intent, and he has brought me here to render you what reparation I may for the past."

"Take my hand as that of a brother," said Lamington, warmly; "and whatever ill you may have done me is more than requited."

Janfarie seized the hand eagerly, his eyes kindling with the fervour of his emotion.

"I read your meaning," he said; and then gently thrusting his sister forward, "Kate, he will make amends for all our cruelty."

The next instant she was clasped close to the breast of her lover; all the barriers which had so long parted them were trampled underfoot, and the ecstasy of that embrace repaid them for much of the suffering they had undergone.

Muckle Will had great difficulty in suppressing a shout of delight; and as the next best ventilation of his feelings he squatted on the floor, and hugged Stark with a vehemence which much surprised that sagacious animal.

"It's a' richt noo, Stark," he whispered, "and you and me did it, as I ken'd we would. We'll have a stoup o' yull on the head o't."

The intense happiness of the party was suddenly interrupted by the sounds of a furious commotion in the camp. There was a wild confusion of voices, a clang of arms, a clatter of footsteps, and trampling of horses' hoofs as if a battle had begun. Presently the listeners were able to distinguish the cry of alarm.

"Treason—treason! The King's in danger. Ho, there, to the rescue!"

Lamington instantly resigned Katherine to the care of Muckle Will and Richard Janfarie, who was too weak to join in the threatened conflict; then snatching up his sword he hurried from the tent, followed by Nicol, who was now proud to acknowledge him as his leader and brother.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FATE OF THE FAVOURITES.

“Now they hae bound this traitor strang,
 Wi’ curses and wi’ blows;
 And high in air they did him hang
 To feed the carrion crows.”

Caerlaveroc.

THE arrest of Cochrane had been effected with sufficient secrecy to enable the barons to reach his Majesty’s pavilion in advance of any rumour of the event. Angus, Lord Gray, and the Lord Chancellor, Evandale, with several others, obtained an immediate audience of the King; and whilst they occupied him in debating sundry matters of import, their followers made rapid search for their victims.

One of the least offenders, named Preston, and who was one of the only two of the favourites who could lay claim to gentlemanhood by birth, was the first to be seized. He submitted quietly, unable to believe that any serious harm was meditated towards him. The tailor, Hommel, was the next discovered, but he slipped through the fingers of his captors, and rushed forth, screaming at the pitch of his voice, “Treason!—treason! The King’s in danger!” And it was this cry which was caught up by one voice after another until it had reached the limits of the camp, spreading confusion and alarm everywhere, and calling together all those loyal gentlemen, who, like Lamington, were prepared to serve their monarch at all hazards, whatever might be his faults.

But although he had succeeded in spreading the alarm, Hommel was promptly seized, gagged, bound hand and foot, and placed beside the others under a strong guard.

The King heard that cry, which was the most terrible of all sounds to his ears, and he turned pale as he scanned the faces of the nobles who surrounded him. Rendered desperate by his circumstances, he plucked his rapier from its scabbard, and broke through the midst of the barons, who were unprepared for the movement.

“Ha, my lords,” he said angrily, “if there be treason here, we must know the cause of it.”

He rushed out to the front of the pavilion, and the spectacle he witnessed there was enough to appal him. Instead of the royal guards, the ground was occupied by the men of Angus and his fellow-conspirators.

But most ominous of all, James saw his minions bound and prisoners, appealing to him for the protection which he was unable to give. Alarmed on his own account, he turned quickly to the barons who had followed him. He spoke with dignity, although his lips trembled—

“Stand back, sirs; come none of you within reach of my weapon until this treachery is explained, else we will count him the declared foe of our royal person and use him in accordance. Speak you, my Lord Angus, who are the traitors here, and what is their purpose?”

He was obeyed; for this unexpected display of courage and dignity commanded respect. Angus responded gruffly, but respectfully—

“We are the liege subjects of your Majesty, ready to defend your person to the last extremity of our means and lives; but we are resolved that the false knaves who have so long given an evil bent to your thought and government, shall pay the penalty of their misdemeanours.”

“And by whom has this judgment been pronounced?”

“By the full council, sire, and by the voice of the people who have groaned under the tyranny of your minions.”

“The judgment is unlawful, my lord, and we refuse to sanction its execution.”

“So much we expected from your Majesty, and we are prepared to execute it without your sanction.”

“Traitors, then you forswear your allegiance?”

“No, sire,” broke in Evandale; “but we are resolved to save your Majesty from the ruin to which your infatuation is hurrying you. Look round, my liege; there is not one of those gentlemen who has not suffered at the hands of the knaves who have betrayed your confidence by turning it to their own base uses.”

James looked round, and the glance satisfied him that he was powerless to alter the decision which had been declared. The bitterness of the moment was some aton-

ment for the weakness, the misdirected kindness, and the obstinacy, which had combined to bring him into this position. Whilst he remained in silent agony, reflecting how he was to proceed, a horseman galloped up to the place where his Majesty stood, drew rein by his side, and sprang from the saddle.

"Lamington!" exclaimed several voices, surprised by this sudden appearance and perplexed to divine his purpose.

"Mount, sire," said Gordon in an undertone, "but forego any thought of resisting their lordships; the whole camp is on their side, for their movement is not against your Majesty, but against those whom all hate."

The King glanced quickly at the speaker and recognized the sincerity of his words. Accepting his proffered aid, he vaulted into the saddle. There was a movement amongst the barons as if they feared that this was some attempt to frustrate their object. The movement, however, was interrupted by a piercing shriek for mercy.

Immediately afterwards the King's page, John Ramsay, rushed from the pavilion in which he had been hiding. He was pursued hotly by a couple of troopers. The youth, searching wildly for some means of escape, observed the King, and with one desperate bound sprang on to the horse's back behind him, clasping his arms round his royal master's body, and crying piteously for mercy and protection.

The pursuers only halted within halberd length of his Majesty.

James bowed his head on his breast, humiliated by the circumstances which compelled him to become a supplicant where he should have commanded; for, to save the youth, he must supplicate.

"My liege, my liege—my dear master, save me from these men who seek to murder me," cried Ramsay, as, at a signal from Angus, the troopers were about to drag him from the horse.

The King raised his hand, and the men paused.

"My lords," said the monarch, with faltering tone, "you can spare me this one of your victims. Let his youth plead for him, if the voice of your King is too feeble to move you to pity or respect for me. What wrongs, what

spite can be gratified by the death of one whose tender years prove him unfit for any counsel or act that may have harmed you? Grant me this—I ask it as a boon.”

His voice became so husky with emotion that his concluding words were barely audible, although their purport was clearly understood.

The nobles displayed some hesitation, for they had determined on the extirpation of the whole nest of satellites; but the sorrowful spectacle of the humiliated King pleading to them for a boon had its influence in rousing the kindlier nature of the sternest; and this, aided by the advice of the Abbot Panther, who was now amongst them, prevailed.

“The boy may live, since your Majesty desires it,” said Angus; “and now we must pray you, sire, to ride forward to Edinburgh. Your Grace will be attended by a fitting escort, and we will follow as soon as we have arranged with our Southron foes in the manner which may seem most to the advantage of the State.”

James inclined his head gravely in acknowledgment of their lordships’ concession, and then said, slowly—

“Are we to regard our position as that of a prisoner?”

“No, sire, only as that of one under restraint until the difficulties of the hour are settled,” replied the earl; “and in proof of our sincerity you may select from us the chiefs of your escort.”

“When the captive must select his gaoler from amongst his captors, he has little interest in the matter,” said the King, bitterly. “Send with me whom you will.”

His Majesty was conducted from the place, and shortly afterwards he was on his way to the Castle of Edinburgh, attended by about five hundred men and half a dozen nobles. Lamington was appointed one of the royal escort, and the appointment afforded the unfortunate monarch some little satisfaction, for he had come to recognize the devotion of the man who had on a former occasion shown himself ready to surrender life in his service.

In the mean while the rest of the favourites were hastily secured; but when the roll of the victims was called there was one absent. The fat little master of fence, Torphichen, could nowhere be found, and the search for him was about to be renounced, when a large drum, which

stood near the royal pavilion, was observed to give a sudden lurch in an unaccountable manner. The drum was quickly lifted from the ground, and there the fat little man was discovered, doubled up with his head bent towards his feet. He was ghastly with fright, suffocation, and cramp.

At the first sound of alarm he had ingeniously knocked the side out of the drum and hidden himself under it. There he had remained, listening to the cries of his comrades for mercy and the stern rejection of their appeal. Terror kept him motionless for a long time; at length the pain of his position drove him to make an effort to change it; but his stout person rendered the movement impossible without shifting his covering, and so he had been discovered.

He was sufficiently exhausted by the torture he had undergone to find relief in the fresh air and the freedom of his limbs, although the next moment he was to be led to his doom. The position in which he had been discovered excited a good deal of mirth, but he was indifferent to that, for the effect of his confinement had stupefied him.

Like a drove of cattle to the slaughter, they were all marched to the bridge of Lauder, where scaffolds had been hastily prepared for them. Remonstrances and prayers were unheeded. They were allowed a few minutes in which to implore the mercy of Heaven, and that was all the clemency which their captors would grant.

Cochrane and Leonard were brought down from the kirk. The smith, whose tall, brawny frame bore many recent scars and wounds, walked with steady step, his swarthy face turned to those around him with an expression of fierce and sullen hate. But he spoke no word.

His companion in misfortune, however, walked with as jaunty a step as if he had been going to the bridal, for which his gay raiment would have been appropriate, instead of proceeding to his execution. On all sides he was mockingly saluted as the Right Noble the Earl of Mar, and hooted at as the assassin of the bonnie prince whose title he had adopted. Again he was execrated as the inventor of the base placks, and as the evil genius of the King.

But all the contumely which was heaped upon him Cochrane acknowledged with a cool smile of irony, bowing to his vehement execrators with the courtesy of one who

received the grateful plaudits of an admiring populace. With this audacity he bore himself to the last.

He thanked his executioner when he observed that the scaffold intended for him was the central one of the row, and that it was raised about a foot higher than any of the others. Even in such a ghastly transaction as the present, he declared himself gratified by the admission of his superiority.

As a further distinction of his iniquity, a rope of hair had been procured to hang him with; and at this, too, he expressed himself pleased. He did not blanch even at the last moment, when the cord was round his neck. He looked scornfully down at the animated faces of the crowd of soldiers and burghers, and in a clear voice, he said—

“I have done the people of Scotland good service, and they repay me with a gallows. But the day comes when this deed will be my honour and the shame of your country.”

The denunciation was received in silence; for his courage at this terrible moment had an imposing effect on the listeners, much as they detested him.

The executioners did their work, and in a few minutes afterwards there was a row of lifeless forms dangling in the air on Lauder bridge.

The words which Cochrane had once spoken in jesting scorn were realized. Immediately after his death, one of the first measures of those in power was to recall the “Cochrane Placks.”

The Scottish army marched to Haddington; but the contest which had been imminent was averted by the discretion of the Scottish nobles, seconded by the efforts of the person on whose account the English invasion was reputed to have been made. The Duke of Albany, with that impulsiveness which characterized his career and unfitted him for the pursuance of any steady course, became suddenly convinced that his claim to the throne would not be supported by the people. He therefore showed himself as ardently desirous of peace as he had been anxious for war.

Accompanied by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Albany attended a meeting of the council at Edinburgh to arrange

the terms of a truce. The council refused to admit the right of Gloucester to have any say in the proceedings; but their lordships declared themselves ready to hear Albany, and desired to know his wishes.

"Then, in the first place," he said, "I require the release of the King, my brother."

"That shall be done," replied the Earl of Angus, or Bell-the-Cat, as he was now universally called, "and the rather that you desire it. As for the person who is with you, we cannot admit his authority to demand anything from the council of Scotland. But in you we recognize the nearest heir to the throne, next to his Majesty's son; and the King shall be freely delivered to you, in the hope that your friendship and council will enable him in future to govern the country to the satisfaction of the people, and to the content of the nobles, so that we may never again have need to act contrary to his pleasure."

According to the arrangements entered into, the English retained Berwick, but Gloucester and his army removed to the south.

James was set at liberty, and his reconciliation with his brother was so complete, that nothing would content him but that Albany should ride on the same horse with him from the castle down the Cannongate to Holyrood; and further he insisted that they should occupy the same bed-chamber. For some time this happy state of matters continued: the King was permitted to engage himself in the refined pursuits of painting, architecture, and music, and Albany administered the affairs of Government. All went satisfactorily until the duke's impulsive ambition took possession of him again, and he was compelled to fly to England to the protection of his friend Gloucester, who had by that time become Richard III.

Whilst everything was at the height of well-being between the royal brothers, and their recent animosity seemed to be finally extinguished, there was a gallant bridal celebrated at Linlithgow. Sir Richard Janfarie, almost completely restored to health, with his brother Nicol, represented the family of the bride.

Of course the bride was Katherine, and Lamington the bridegroom. All question as to the former rites through which she had been dragged was removed by the death of

Cochrane. The Abbot Panther performed the ceremony of marriage in the presence of the King, Queen, and the Duke of Albany. The latter discharged the pledge he had given to Gordon for aiding his escape from the castle: the escheated estates of Lamington's father were restored to the son, and his Majesty, to mark his appreciation of him and the service he had done, presented him with letters patent creating him Viscount of Kenmore.

The Glenkens and the Rhinns of Galloway were ablaze with bonfires in honour of the bridal, and in welcome of the knight to his home again. The lady was the toast of the country round; and there was not a man or woman from Johnstone to Kenmore who did not rejoice in the union of the lady who had suffered so cruelly for her love, and of the knight who had proved himself faithful through all adversity.

Mysie Ross was removed from the unkindly guardianship of her uncle, and accompanied the Countess of Kenmore to her new home. Not a very long while after there was another wedding, not quite so grand, but quite as merry, and this time the happy couple were Mysie and Muckle Will, whose goodness she accounted more than enough to outweigh his awkwardness. Stark was a little disconsolate at first; but he soon came to devote himself to his mistress as faithfully as he had hitherto devoted himself to his master alone.

Richard and Nicol Janfarie maintained their place long as chiefs amongst the Border riders; and from the date of the meeting in the tent at Lauder camp, they never regretted the flight of their sister from Johnstone.

EPILOGUE.

THE readers who have pursued the events of the story to this page may be interested in the following brief memoranda regarding the principal historical personages who have been presented to them.

The assassination of the Earl of Mar, and the assumption of his title by Cochrane; the attack on the King at

Linlithgow; the escape of Albany; and the execution of the royal favourites, are historical events reproduced with little variation from the fact, save as regards the part played in them by Lamington.

James III. was, as he is represented here, a weak, kindly, and superstitious man; artistic in his tastes; unfitted for the time he lived in and for the position he occupied. His death, after the battle of Sauchieburn, forms a sad and tragic episode in history. His person, and that of Queen Margaret, are described principally from the portraits in Holyrood.

Robert Cochrane, the chief favourite, was educated at Padua, and was an architect by profession, but the nobles contemptuously dubbed him "the Mason." The character ascribed to him is that of tradition; Mr. Froude has made some attempt to show that he was a man of talent. It is scarcely necessary to say that his association with Katherine Janfarie is fictitious.

The introduction of the Abbot Panther is an anachronism. He belonged to the sixteenth century, and was busily employed in affairs of state under the Regency which preceded the reign of Queen Mary, and continued to be so employed some time during her reign. The first throes of the Reformation were beginning to be felt when he was a youth; he lived to see the Reformation effected, much to his dissatisfaction. He was gifted with a jovial spirit, and a shrewd, politic mind; full of intrigue and enterprise, faithful to his friends and not unmerciful to his foes—in brief, an admirable example of the priest-politician.

THE END.



MARIE ANTOINETTE'S LAST GRACE.



(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

"Give sorrow words: the grief that doth not speak
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."—*Shakespeare.*

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"As clouds of adversity gathered around, *Marie Antoinette* displayed a Patience and Courage in *Unparalleled Sufferings* such as few Saints and *Martyrs* have equalled. . . . The *Pure Ore* of her nature was but hidden under the cross of worldliness, and the scorching fire of suffering revealed one of the tenderest hearts, and one of the *Bravest Natures* that history records.

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What is Ten Thousand Times more Horrible than Revolution or War ?

OUTRAGED NATURE!

"O World! O men! what are we, and our best designs, that we must work by crime to punish crime, and slay, as if death had but this one gate?"—BYRON.

"What is Ten Thousand Times more Terrible than *Revolution* or War? *Outraged Nature!* She kills and kills, and is never tired of killing, till she has taught man the terrible lesson he is so slow to learn—that *Nature* is only conquered by obeying her. . . . Man has his courtesies in *Revolution* and War; he spares the *woman and child*. But *Nature* is fierce when she is offended; she spares neither *woman nor child*. She has no pity, for some awful but most good reason. She is not allowed to have any pity. Silently she strikes the sleeping child with as little remorse as she would strike the strong man with musket or the pickaxe in his hand. Oh! would to God that some man had the pictorial eloquence to put before the mothers of England the *mass of preventable suffering*, the mass of preventable agony of mind which exists in England year after year."—KINGSLEY.

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