

BOTHWELL, VOLUME II

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BOTHWELL:
OR,
THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

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"THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "MEMORIALS OF EDINBURGH CASTLE,"
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BOTHWELL;
OR,

THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

CHAPTER I. THE EARL AND THE QUEEN.

For since the time when Adam first
 Embraced his Eve in happy hour!
 And every bird of Eden burst
 In carol, every bird and flower;
 What eyes like thine have waken'd *hopes*?
 What lips like thine so sweetly join'd?
 Where on the double rosebud droops
 The fulness of the pensive mind.
Tennyson.

Bothwell stooped and entered; the arras closed behind him, and his rich attire gleamed in the full flush of the noonday sun, that streamed through a mullioned casement opposite.

He wore a coat-of-mail, the links of which were so flexible that they incommoded him less than the velvet doublet below it. His trunks were of black velvet, slashed with red, and trimmed with silver cord. He wore long boots reaching to the knee. His bonnet was of blue velvet, adorned by his crest—a silver horse's head—which sustained one tall and aspiring ostrich feather. He wore a scarf and dagger; but French Paris, his page, bore a handsome sword and embossed helmet a few paces behind.

The Earl advanced to the throne, and, uncovering his round head of thick curly hair, slightly touched the Queen's hand with his lip. Moray and Morton exchanged another of their deep glances; for the confusion with which he did so was evident to all save Darnley.

"A good-morning, my lord!" said the Queen in French, while bowing with a most enchanting smile. "You are welcome among us as flowers in spring."

"Lord Earl, a fair good-day!" said Darnley and the other lords.

"I thank your grace and lordships," replied the Earl, taking his seat, "and I crave pardon for my tardy attention to a summons that reached me only yesterday at dawn; but I have come from Glasgow on the spur."

"'Tis well, my lord," said Mary, "for never did I stand more in need of suit

and service.”

”Had I a thousand hearts, they would be at the disposal of your Majesty!” replied the Earl with enthusiasm.

”*Prenez garde, monseigneur!*” said Mary archly; ”one heart is always enough if it is true.”

The handsome noble laughed, as in duty bound; showed all his white teeth, under a jetty mustache; and his jaunty gaiety and smiling gallantry were quite a relief to Mary, they contrasted so forcibly with the austere visages that every where met her eye.

”Your bride, the Lady Jane, has come to court with you, of course?” asked the Queen.

”No, madam,” replied Bothwell, with a reddening cheek; ”the verity is—she still—the reason—your majesty will excuse, but I am bidden to bear her dutiful commendations to your grace. I left her at my house of Bothwell.”

”Ah!—in your hurry to attend our summons?”

”Exactly so—please your grace.”

”My grace is much indebted to the loyalty that could so far master love as to leave the bride of a few months. Men say she is very beautiful.”

”And women deny it,” added the flippant Darnley; ”the best proof that the men are right.”

Bothwell, who seemed wholly intent in gazing on Mary, when she did not perceive him, looked as if he cared very little about it.

”And men say, too,” added the gay King, ”that, natheless his marriage, the Lord Bothwell is not likely to become a Carthusian”——

”Any more than King Henry,” retorted the Earl, with a haughty smile. ”Oh, no!—I have still a dash of the gallant left in me.”

”And a wish to assist honest burghers in their conjugal duties”——

”Being, like your majesty, somewhat neglectful of my own,” added the Earl, in a low voice.

The king, though he delighted in ribald jesting, answered only by one of his darkest scowls; but old Lord Lindsay burst into a hoarse laugh, and whispered to Morton—

”By my faith! but I love to see two such cocks o’ the game yoked together. Bothwell’s gibe hath bitten.”

”My lords,” said the chancellor Morton, ”with the queen’s permission we will again resume the matter in debate. Surely, among the bold peers of Scotland, we cannot look long for one to lead the vassals of her crown against a cock-laird of Teviotdale—a petty border-outlaw!”

”If neither the Great Constable nor the Earl Marshal will assume their batons, then I, as Lord High Admiral of Scotland, claim the leadership!” exclaimed

Bothwell, starting up. "My kinsman, John of Bolton, will unfurl the royal banner in the field, if the Constable of Glastre, Sir James Scrimgeour of Dudhope, its hereditary bearer, like an obdurate heretic or craven knight, shrinks at his sovereign's mandate. Nay, never frown on me my Lords of Lindesay and Glencairn, for I value no man's frown or favour a sword thrust! The vassals of the house of Hailes are ever at the service of her majesty. My kinsmen, John of Bolton and Hob of Ormiston, lead each a hundred lances and a hundred arquebussiers on horseback; and I warrant their followers all stout men, and true as Rippon rowels. I will lead three thousand of my own people to the border, and, if need be, will hold a justice-aire that will long be remembered through Tweedside and Teviotdale."

"*O, je vous rend mille graces!*" exclaimed Mary, who, in her sudden bursts of enthusiasm, always preferred her darling French. "A thousand thanks, brave Hepburn! Thou shalt be my knight, and bear my favour to the south. But we need not thy brave vassals of Hailes, for we number enow of the crown in their helmets, and to-morrow our sheriff and arrayers shall show thee their various bands."

Again Bothwell knelt and kissed the hand of the queen, who glanced furtively at her husband; and in the contrast between his inertness and Bothwell's energy felt a glow of scorn within her which she struggled in vain to repress. He was still coquetting with Mariette Hubert, the same fair girl, and the Earl, whose quick eyes had followed those of Mary, said in a low voice—

"As might be expected in the consort of one so fair, his majesty is ever speaking of love."

"And, like the French, deems that in doing so he is making it."

"A biting jest, Marquis," said Bothwell to his friend d'Elboeuff, who merely shrugged his shoulders, smiled gaily, and made use of his little gold pouncet-box.

"And now, my lords, this matter, thank Heaven! is arranged," said the Queen, rising; "and gladly will I leave this desperate game of state-craft and policy for my ghittern and music, or a quiet ramble by the margin of the lake. Good morning, my Lord Glencairn!—good Lindesay, I kiss your hand! Athole, and *ma bonne soeur*, Jane of Argyle, come, we will retire; and as the king, my husband, seems so much better occupied, we will leave him to his reflections. My Lord of Bothwell, favour me with your hand!"

The queen's brother, James Stuart, Earl of Moray, on seeing Darnley's inattention, had approached and drawn off his leather glove; but on hearing Bothwell summoned thus, he drew back with a smile on his lip, and a shade on his open brow. He bore a deadly enmity to Bothwell, whom he had more than once accused of designs against his life, and one deep glance of tiger-like import was exchanged between them, as the favoured courtier took Mary's snow-white hand

in his, and led her to the hall door, where, between the marshalled ranks of a band of archers, and surrounded by the ladies of her court, with all their jewellery and embroidery glittering in the sunlight, she swept gracefully from that lofty chamber, and the heavy arras, which fair Queen Margaret had worked in the hours of her widowhood, closed like a curtain over the pageant as it passed away.

Mary, accompanied by her sister, the Countess of Argyle, Bothwell's sister-in-law, Elizabeth, Countess of Athole, and other ladies of rank, and attended by the handsome Earl, with his gay friend the Marquis d'Elboeuff, and Monsieur le Crocq, whom, as Frenchmen, he preferred to the morose and turbulent nobles of the court, promenaded among the terraces, the blooming parterres, and green hedgerows of the palace garden, through the leafy openings of which bright glimpses were obtained of the blue loch, with its shining bosom, dotted by white swans and dusky flocks of the water-ouzel.

The singing of birds filled the air with music, as the parterres did with perfume. All the flowers of summer were in their glory, and the white and purple lilac, with the golden blossoms of the laburnum, drooped over them. The sky was clear, and all of a deep cerulean blue, and in its sunshine the tints of the distant hills were mellowed to hues of the sapphire and the amethyst.

The spirits of the queen (freed from the cares of her troublesome state, and the thrall of her capricious husband) became buoyant with that delight so natural to her; and then her Parisian gaiety, the splendour of her wit, and the winning vivacity of her manner, came forth in all their power.

Her eyes alternately swam and sparkled with joy; her cheek flushed; and her merry laugh rang like music in the ear of Bothwell, who walked by her side.

A spell had fallen upon him!

With every wish to excel in her eyes, and to surpass himself in the art of conversation and gallantry, he found every attempt at either almost futile. An incubus weighed upon him; he was sad, irresolute, and anxious. Sad, because this interview with the beautiful Mary, had called up all the first hopes of his heart from the oblivion to which he had committed them; for many a year ago, when, in the first flush of her girlhood, he had dared to love the betrothed bride of Francis II. with the same deep and passionate fondness that drove Chatelard to destruction, and young Arran to madness: irresolute, because he dared not now to nourish such sentiments, yet found the impossibility of repressing them: and anxious, because the memory of his double matrimonial engagement pressed hardly and uneasily on his mind.

He strove to crush his rash thoughts and bitter regrets; but they would come—again and again.

He endeavoured to converse with the ladies of new coifs and Florence kirtles—to the French ambassador of the policy of Charles IX.—to the Marquis

d'Elboeuf of the intrigues of Catherine de Medicis and Margaret of Valois—to Huntly of Moray's wiles and Morton's villainies; but he invariably found himself where he was before—by the side of Mary, listening to her musical voice, and gazing, with his old feeling of adoration, on her bright and sunny eyes, and her braided hazel hair, that gleamed in the noonday's sunshine.

And now, incited by the lingering love of other days, the demons of a more dangerous ambition than he before had ever dared to dream of, began for the first time to pour their insidious whispers in his ear, and Bothwell found that he was—lost.

CHAPTER II. THE WEAPONSHAW.

Charmion——I found him
Encompass'd round, I think with iron statues;
So mute, so motionless his soldiers stood;
While awfully he cast his eyes about,
And every leader's hopes and fears survey'd.
All for Love.

Next day the great quadrangle of the palace of Linlithgow, and the lawn before its gates, presented a scene of unusual bustle.

Few edifices of that age, in Scotland, surpass this building in architectural beauty. Its richly-carved archway was surmounted on the inside by a cluster of gothic niches, containing statues, of which the defaced image of the Virgin now alone remains. Three tiers of mullioned windows, all of beautiful workmanship, rich with cusping and stained glass, overlooked this side of the quadrangle, the summit of which was crowned by a beautiful battlement; on the other, were the deeply-recessed and heavily-arched windows of the ancient Parliament hall. One half of this noble court was involved in cold shadow; the pointed casements and fretted stone-work of the other were shining in warm light, as the morning sun poured down its rays aslant over the varied parapets, the carved chimneys, and loftier towers, that flanked the angles of this great edifice, which, in its aspect, had much more of the cheerful summer palace than any other residence of the Scottish kings. The royal standard was waving on the highest tower; the

Archer Guard, in all their bravery, were drawn up beside the gate of James IV., where there were heralds and pursuivants in their gorgeous tabards and plumed caps, pages bearing swords and helmets, and clad in all the colours of the rainbow; swashbucklers and other retainers of the feudal nobles, variously armed, and still more variously attired, wearing in their blue bonnets or steel caps the badges of their lords—the ivy of the house of Huntly, the myrtle of Argyle, or the holly of Tullybardine. These loitered about in groups, together with peddies and horse-boys, holding the champed bridles of steeds caparisoned for war, in massive trappings of steel and brocade.

The gaiety of this scene made Linlithgow seem so merry, as its old walls and countless casements gleamed in the sunshine, that the lookers-on forgot the gloomier adjuncts of that magnificent pile, where, deep down at the base of narrow stairs, are chambers, vaulted, dark, and damp. Never a ray of light penetrated to the wretch whom fate imprisoned there, though the water fell unceasingly from the stalactites of the roof, and from the slimy walls. Yet, further down beneath all these, lay the oubliette, the only entrance to which is by a narrow orifice, through which the doomed captive was lowered, feet foremost, into that pit from which he was never to be exhumed. In the centre of one of these terrible vaults, were found some years ago, a number of human bones, and a mass of hideous unctuous matter; but of the fate of those poor beings whose last remains these were, history and tradition are alike silent, and leave the imagination to brood over episodes of visionary horror!

But to return.

The old walls shone joyously in the summer sunshine, and many a fair and many a happy face appeared at the open casements; the beautiful stone fountain in the centre (a miracle of carving) was flowing with wine and ale, and a coronal of flowers wreathed the imperial crown that surmounted it.

The gravelled court was crowded with the vassals of the crown.

The Sheriff of Linlithgow and the Earl Marischal, both completely armed, save their heads, with certain captains of the queen's bands, were arraying them under arms—*i.e.*, in modern parlance "calling the roll," and seeing that each proprietor, as summoned by his tenure, had brought his proper quota of men-at-arms on foot and horseback, all properly accoutred according to the acts of Parliament. Every lord, knight, and baron, possessing a hundred pounds of yearly rent, was clad in bright armour, "and weaponed effeirand to his honour;" each gentleman, unlanded, and yeoman, had a jack of plate with a halkrike, splints, helmet, and peshane. Their spears, "stark and long, six elnes of length," with Leith axes, halberds, crossbows, culverins, and two-handed swords, completed their equipment.

The various weapons were all flashing in the sunshine, while the standards rustled as the henchman of each baron, with a bull-dog aspect of surly defiance

and pride, unfurled to the wind his embroidered banner, which displayed armorial bearings won in many a well-fought field and desperate foray. But the most important feature in this display was made by John Chisholm, comptroller of Her Majesty's Ordnance, who had under his orders a band of cannoniers, armed with swords and daggers, and clad in salades and pesanes of steel, with plate sleeves, scarlet hose, and rough buskins. These managed two great culverins, "with their calmes, bullettes, and pellokis of lead or irone, and powder convenient thereto," and all prepared for the especial behoof of those strong and masterful thieves, the lairds of Park, Buccleuch, and Cessford.

Mounted on a beautiful roan steed, which was armed with a spiked frontlet of polished steel, and had a plume of feathers dancing on its proud head, from a tube between the ears, a jointed criniere to defend the mane, and an embossed poitronal or breastplate, Bothwell dashed into the quadrangle, at full gallop, with his visor up, and, kissing the tip of his gauntlet to the Earl Marischal, reined in beside him, checking the fire of his horse by one touch of the bridle.

His armour was a suit of Italian plate, profusely gilt in that gorgeous fashion which was then becoming common, as knights were perceiving that the ponderous armour of the middle ages was unsuited for modern warfare; and consequently they adopted light and magnificent suits, descending only to the thighs, which were defended by large trunk hose, well puffed out with buckram and bombast. He wore white funnel boots furnished with large Rippon spurs, having rowels that would pierce a shilling.

In these ages, the spurs denoted the wearer's rank; those of the knight were of gold; those of the squire were of silver; the yeoman's were of iron; and it was the fashion to make them clink and jingle when walking.

The Earl of Bothwell wore a pair of plain steel, for Rippon spurs were the most famous of all. A pair ordered for James VI., cost five pounds sterling of his coinage.

"How many tall fellows hast thou under harness, my Lord Marischal?" asked Bothwell.

"About three thousand and fourscore," replied the Earl, consulting a roll; "but none of the Lennox-men are present."

"Wherefore so?" asked the Earl, whose cheek reddened with anger.

"Tush!" replied the Marischal of Scotland; "dost thou imagine they would follow other banner than that of Earl Mathew, or the King, his son?"

"The laird of Hartshaw—a Stuart—is here, I perceive."

"With thirteen good men, well horsed, and armed with steel bonnets, swords, and pistolettes."

"And Stuart of Darnholm?"

"Nay, he hath sent only his bailie with twelve men-at-arms on foot, and

as many on horseback, all weaponed conform to the harness act. Dost think a Stuart will follow a Hepburn?"

"A Stuart may follow many worse, but few better. Dost thou gibe me, Earl Marischal?"

"Nay, Heaven forbid!" said the old noble hastily; "but in this thou seest the morbid jealousy of the house of Lennox. Darnley declines to lead his vassals to the field; but thinkest thou he will permit their being led by another? Thy friends, the knights of Ormiston and Bolton, have not as yet come in with their lances."

"Ha—my own people, sayest thou!" exclaimed Bothwell, as, shading his eyes with his hand, he gazed keenly along the glittering files, which were arrayed on the sunny side of the quadrangle. "*They* are not wont to lag when blows are expected; and, by St. Bothan! yonder they come! I see steel glittering among the copsewood."

Under two knights' pennons, a band of horsemen, with their steel caps and corselets, and the bright points of their long spears flashing in the sun, came at a hand-gallop up the ascent which led to the palace gate; appearing and disappearing as the road wound between thickets of the summer foliage.

"I know not whose the blue pennon is," said the Earl Marischal; "but the other pertaineth to Sir James of Drumlanrig. I surely discern his winged-heart and horses argent."

"Thou art mistaken!" replied the Earl; "these are my kinsmen, John of Bolton, and Ormiston of Ormiston; seest thou not his great banner argent, with three red pelicans feeding their young? Gallant Hob! the spiders will never spin their webs on thy pennon. Well met, fair sirs!" he added, as the train lowered their long lances, and passed under the low-browed archway into the palace yard. "In what case art thou this morning, Hob?"

"A steel one, as thou seest. Mass! but I am thirsty as a dry ditch with my morning ride. But, lo! yonder cometh the queen's grace and her ladies," said Ormiston, as all the lances were lowered, and there was a ruffling on the kettle drums.

Mary and the ladies of her court appeared at one of the large windows overlooking the quadrangle, where they waved their handkerchiefs, and bowed and smiled gaily, to those whom they recognised among the crowd below.

"That beautiful being!" said Bothwell, gazing on her with admiration; "shines like a sun among lesser stars."

"By cock and pie! her ladies are like a parterre of roses in the glory and sunshine of summer."

"His lordship's poetry is infectious," said young Bolton, with a laugh; "is not yonder dame in scarlet the Lady Herries of Terreagles?"

"Ah! the old Roman! she looks like a kettle-drum with a standard round it.

Dost thou not see she is counting her beads under her fardingale?"

"My lord—if Master Knox were to see her"—

"Or the old Prior of Blantyre, Hob. See, he is still wearing his cap and cassock, as if the act of 1560 had never passed. 'Tis said he carries the kiss of Judas in a box."

"Enough of this irreverence, sirs; for such discourse beseemeth neither the place nor the persons," said the old Earl Marischal gravely, with that severe aspect which he had assumed since (by the retired life he was wont to lead at his Keep of Dunnotar) the commonalty had named him William-in-the-Tower.

"His Majesty the King!" muttered a number of voices, as Darnley, sheathed completely in a suit of the richest Florentine armour, so profusely gilded and studded with nails and bosses, that little of the polished steel was visible, rode into the courtyard. He was attended by the Marquis d'Elboeuf, who was similarly accoutred; Monsieur le Crocq, the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy; and several gentlemen of the Lennox. Again there was a ruffling of kettle-drums, a lowering of lances and pennons, and then the hum died away.

The housings of his horse, which had been magnificently embroidered by the queen and her ladies, bore the royal arms of Scotland, quartered with the saltire engrailed, and the four roses of Lennox.

"Excuse me, my lord," said the Marischal, riding off; "I must confer with his Majesty."

"He means the Lord Darnley," said Bothwell, with a bitter smile. "Shame on the hour that Scottish men made yonder gilded doll their king!"

"Humph!" said Ormiston, suspiciously; "art thou jealous?"

"If it should so happen," observed the Earl, in a low voice, "that he were to die, what wouldst thou think of me as a husband for the queen?"

"Burn my beard! what—thou?"

"By the blessed Jupiter!" continued the other, half in earnest and half in jest; "she might find a worse spouse than James Hepburn of Bothwell."

"Where?" asked Ormiston, pithily.

The Earl laughed; but his eyes flashed, as he said in a low voice—

"Mark me, Hob of Ormiston! let me but crush Moray, Mar, and Morton under my heel, and I will yet govern the kingdom of Scotland even as I curb this fiery horse."

"A rare governor! thou who canst not govern thyself."

"Thou seest 'tis very likely yonder tall spectre in the gilt armour may die soon."

"Gramercy me! I knew not that he ailed."

"None are so stupid as those who are resolved not to be otherwise," said the Earl, angrily. "Men die every day about us without ailing. Dost thou not

understand me?"

"Devil take me if I do!"

"Oh, head of wood! I fear thou wilt never be lost by rashness."

Ormiston laughed in the hollow of his helmet, as he replied—

"Like thee, I may lose my heart in love a thousand times; but my poor head in politics only once, therefore am I somewhat miserly about it; yet I see what thou meanest," he whispered with sudden energy. "Say forth, and fear not. Hah! knowest thou not how I hate the Lord Darnley for the ruin of my youngest and best beloved sister; and that hatred is without a love for his wife, which I see thou darest to nourish."

With a cold and deep smile they regarded each other keenly under their barred aventayles; and Hepburn of Bolton, Bothwell's most stanch friend, who had partly overheard the conversation, said—

"Ere the month be out, I think it very likely this lordling of the Lennox may die of indigestion, as an old friend of Hob's did yestreen."

"On what did thy friend sup, Ormiston?" asked the Earl.

"This piece of cold steel!" replied the black giant, touching the iron hilt of his Scottish whinger.

"How, with a murrain! is it thus that thou servest thy friends at supper?"

"When they grow captious, capricious, or quarrelsome. We came to deadly feud about a few scores of nowte we had forayed on the borders of the debateable land from the clan of the Graemes, and so"—

"Thou thinkest the king may so sup, and so die?"

Ormiston answered by a short dry cough.

"True," continued Bothwell, "there are strange whispers abroad anent the Earl of Moray and his intrigues; but here comes the king! Place for his grace. Heaven save your majesty!"

"My Lord Earl, a fair good-morning—Ormiston and Bolton, my service to ye, sirs!" said the young king, bowing with that grace which marked all his actions; for his suit of mail, which seemed absolutely to blaze in the meridian sun, fitted his handsome form with the flexibility of silk. His eyes were dark and penetrating, but his face seemed in its wan ghastliness like the visage of one who had long been in the tomb; and Bothwell, when he scanned those noble features, so livid and wasted by sickness and dissipation, and compared his slight boyish figure with Black Ormiston's powerful frame, a sentiment of pity rose in his breast, and he shrunk from the dark hints which, partly in banter, and partly in the ruffianly spirit of the age, the knights had given him. These gentle thoughts were instantly put to flight by Darnley's insolent manner.

"I marvel," said he, with a marked sneer, "that the gay Bothwell tarries here among the men-at-arms, when so many fair faces, and the queen's in particular,

are at yonder casement.”

”I will do all in my power to make amends,” replied the Earl, with ironical suavity. ”Hob of Ormiston, follow me, if it please you! I will pay my devoirs to the queen’s grace;” and with a dark scowl at the king, and a furtive one at his true henchman, the Earl applied his sharp Rippon spurs to his roan charger, and moved away.

CHAPTER III. THE HANDKERCHIEF.

Where were then these Palace warriors,
That for thee they drew no brand?
Verily, we all do know them,
Quick of tongue, but slow of hand;
Yea, time will show, for this can ne’er be hid,
That they are women all, but I—the Cid!

Rodrigo de Bivar.

In those days, the manners, houses, and dresses of the Scottish aristocracy were modelled after those of France, and even to this day traces of the ancient alliance are to be found in Scotland. This imparted to the people a freedom of manner, a tone of gaiety, and a lightness of heart, which the influence of Calvinism was doomed in future years to crush, and almost obliterate.

”By St. Paul!” whispered the Earl, as he and Ormiston pushed their horses through the crowd; ”Mary looks like a goddess at yonder casement.”

”I will warrant her but a mere woman, after all,” rejoined the matter-of-fact baron, spurring and curbing his powerful black horse. ”By that dark look quhilk, just now, thou gavest the king, I can read that thou lovest”—

”Who?”

”The Queen!”

”And why not?” laughed the Earl, with a carelessness that was assumed; ”has not love been the business of my life?”

”I hope it hath proved a profitable occupation. But remember that yonder face, with its bright hazel eyes and fascinating smile, is like that of the Gorgon in the old romaunt—for whoever looketh thereon too freely, shall die. Bethink thee:

there was the poor archer of the Scottish guard at Les Tournelles, who died with a rope round his neck in the Place de Greve at Paris; there was Chatelard, that accomplished chevalier and poet; Sir John Gordon of Deskford, a young knight as brave as ever rode to battle, and who loved her with his whole heart, yet perished on the scaffold at Aberdeen. Did not young Arran love her even to madness, and raved as a maniac in the tower of St. Andrews? and then Signor David the secretary, who, as Master George Buchanan will swear upon the gospel"—

"Add not the scandal of that most accomplished of liars to thy croaking!" said the Earl, impatiently, as the dust of the court-yard came through his helmet. "Hob, hold in thy bridle; for thou makest a devil of a fray with that curveting horse of thine! Good-morrow to your majesty, and every noble lady!" he added, as he caprioled up to the window where the beautiful Mary, with the ladies of her court, were viewing the bustle and show of the martial weaponshaw.

"Ah, *bon jour*, Monsieur Bothwell!" she replied, with one of her delightful smiles; "how comes it that I see thee only now?"

"Because your majesty is like yonder glorious sun," replied the Earl; "thousands see and admire you, but few are noticed in return."

"Oh, what a hyperbole!" said the Queen, with a sad smile; "that compliment would suit the sunny sphere of Les Tournelles better than Linlithgow."

Memory cast a shade over the Earl's brow; but his cheek glowed with pleasure as the smiling queen continued—

"The vassals of the crown muster gaily for this Border war."

"And still more gaily muster the nobles of the court, to curvet and capriole their steeds before these fair ladies; but, verily, few will venture their gilt armour under dint of spear or whinger for their sake."

"Thinkest thou so—even when Bothwell leads?"

"Yes, adorable madam," replied the Earl, in a low thick voice; "even when Bothwell leads!"

"Had so many chevaliers of crest and coat-armour assembled at Versailles, there would have been many a spear broken in our names to-day.

'For Mary Beatoun, and Mary Seatoun,
And Mary Fleming, and *me!*'"

added the Queen, singing with all her gaiety of heart those lines from the old ballad of the *Four Maries*.

"And why not here, madam?" said the Earl with ardour; "give me but the guerdon you promised—a ribbon, a glove, a favour to flutter from my lance; and may I die the death of a faulty hound, if I do not make it ring like a mass-bell on the best coat-of-mail among us."

The head of the Earl's lance was close to the window, and the queen with her usual heedlessness, tied her laced handkerchief below its glittering point; and a sinister smile spread over the face of the English ambassador when he saw this incident, and thought how famously he would twist it up into one of those tissues of court scandal and gossip, which nightly he was wont to indite for the perusal of Elizabeth and her satellites, Cecil and Killigrew.

The Earl kissed his hand as he reined back his horse.

"Courage, brave Bothwell!" cried the gay Countess of Argyle; and all the ladies clapped their hands and cried, "A Bothwell!—a Bothwell!"

"Now, ho, for Hepburn!" exclaimed the Earl, spurring his beautiful charger. "Come on, Ormiston! and we will meet all yonder tall fellows in battle *à l'outrance*, if they will."

"I am right well content," growled the giant; "but whom shall I encounter—yonder grasshopper, d'Elboeuff?"

"I would give my best helmet full of angels to see him measure his length on the gravel, were it but to cure him of his pouncet-box and villanous perfumes," said Hepburn of Bolton; "but he is the queen's kinsman, and she may be displeased."

"Diabolus spit me!" said Ormiston, "if I care whether she is pleased or not. I will break one lance and his head together, if I can; for he styled me a Goth and a savage, last night, in his cups."

"And I will run one course with Darnley," said the Earl.

"Good! may it fere with thee, as with old; Montgomerie and Henry of France!"

"How?"

"A splinter may make his wife a widow. Cock and pie, sirs! A ring—a ring! To the bresses!—Back, sirs, back!—We would break a spear for honour and for beauty. Have at thee, Marquis!" exclaimed Ormiston, as he made the point of his long lance ring on the splendid armour of the Frenchman.

"*Bon diable!*" grinned the Marquis; "*J'en suis ravi!* I am delighted!"

"And have at your grace!" said Bothwell, slightly touching Darnley; "I have made a vow, in the queen's name, to run a course with the tallest man on the ground, and the tallest man is thee."

"By St. John! Lord Earl, thou art somewhat over-valiant," said Darnley, bestowing an unmistakeable frown upon the rash noble, who laughed like a madcap as he backed his horse among the startled men-at-arms and spectators, crying—

"A ring! a ring!—Back, caitiffs and gomerals! and then we shall see who are good knights, as King William said of old."

"Wouldst thou have me maintain the field against the beauty of my own wife?" asked the young king, with a terrible frown.

"Certes, yes! for thou seemest least sensible of it."

"Less than thee, perhaps!"

"Yes—ha! ha!"

"Then, God's death! Take up thy ground!"

The queen's archers cleared a space before the gateway, while Bothwell and Ormiston ranged themselves opposite the king and D'Elboeuff, with their visors down, their bodies bending forward to the rush, and their lances in the rest, but having wooden balls wedged on their keen steel points.

The Earl Marischal raised his baton, handkerchiefs were waved from the windows, a shout burst from the people, and, urged from a full gallop to the most rapid speed, the four heavy chargers and their glittering riders met with a fierce shock in the centre, and recoiled on their haunches, as the riders reeled in their saddles. D'Elboeuff's lance missed Ormiston, who planted the hard wooden ball that blunted the tip of his tough Scottish spear full into the pit of the Frenchman's stomach, whirling him from his saddle to the ground with a force that completely stunned him.

"Now, Marquis, lie thou there!" cried Ormiston, who was uncouth as a bear in his manner, "and pray to every saint that ever had a broken head before thee."

The lance of Bothwell smote Darnley full on the breastplate, and its splinters flew twenty feet into the air; but the king's, being by chance or design deprived of its ball, entered the bars of the Earl's embossed helmet, and wounded him on the cheek.

Deeming this an act of Darnley's usual treachery and malevolence, animated by a storm of passion, the Earl drew his sword, exclaiming—

"Ha, thou false lord and craven king! what the devil kind of demi-pommada was that?"

But the Earl Marischal, Ormiston, Bolton, and a crowd of courtiers, pushed their horses between them, and they were separated, with anger in their eyes and muttered invectives on their tongues.

"It matters not, my lords!" said Bothwell, as he wiped the wound with his white silk scarf and regained the queen's handkerchief from the point of his broken lance; "'tis a mere school-boy scratch."

"May Heaven avert the omen!—but I have known such scratches become sword-cuts," observed the Earl of Moray, with one of his cold and inexplicable smiles, for he mortally hated both the King and the Earl.

The morning was now far advanced, and the troops prepared to depart. Slowly and laboriously the little wheels of the two brass culverins, with their clumsy stocks, studded with large nails and cramped with plates of polished brass, were put in motion, by the cannoniers whipping up the six powerful horses that drew them, and the carts containing the bullets of stone and lead, the pow-

der, and other appurtenances for the field.

Surrounded by four hundred arquebussiers, who wore conical helmets, pyne-doublers, swords and knives, and were each attended by a boy to bear his gun-rest and ammunition, the artillery, commanded by Chisholm the Comptroller, departed first through the deep-mouthed archway of the ancient palace. Then followed the several bands of horsemen and pikemen, each under their various leaders—and all riding or marching very much at their ease, according to the discipline incident to the days of feudalism, when steadiness in the field was more valued than mere military show. The long Scottish spears, six ells in length, and the white harness of the knights and landed gentlemen, flashed incessantly in the sunshine; while many a square banner and swallow-tailed bannerole waved above the summer dust that marked the route of the marching column.

They soon left behind them old Linlithgow's turreted palace and gothic spire, its azure lake and straggling burgh, as they wound among the thick woodlands that bordered the road to Ecclesmachin; and, long ere the sun set, the rattle of their kettledrums, the twang of their trumpets, and clash of their cymbals, had wakened the echoes of the Bathgate hills.

The queen and her courtiers watched their departure, together with Darnley, who had joined them, and seemed in better humour from the issue of his encounter with the Earl; but being naturally proud and jealous, he found to his no small exasperation that the ladies were more than ever inclined to praise the handsome peer, and then, for the first time, the demon of jealousy began to whisper in his ear.

"Tell me, Henri, *mon ami*," said Mary, with perfect innocence, "did not the Lord Bothwell look enchanting in his plate armour?"

"God wot, I neither ken nor care, fair madam!" replied the young King sulkily, as he handed his helmet to a page.

"He looked the same as when I saw him at Versailles," said the Lady Lethington.

"Ah, Mary Fleming, *ma bonne!*" said the Queen, in one of her touching accents; "we were only fifteen years old then."

The ladies, finding Mary in a mood to praise the Earl, all chimed in, greatly to Darnley's chagrin and annoyance.

"He is a winsome man, and a gallant," lisped the Countess of Argyle over her pouncet-box.

"He has an eye that looks well below a helmet peak," added the Lady Athole, as she adjusted her long fardingale.

"O, were he single, I would marry him to-morrow!" laughed little Mariette Hubert, glancing furtively at Darnley's shining figure.

"If thou art anxious to be a rich widow, 'twere a good match, Mariette,"

replied the young King, with one of his icy smiles, as he turned away; and, whistling a hunting air, descended to the court-yard, and departed on a hawking expedition, attended by a few of his own personal retinue, who were invariably composed of his father's Catholic vassals from the district known as the Lennox.

CHAPTER IV. THE LEITH WYND PORTE.

—On they pass'd,
And reach'd the city gate at last;
Where all around a wakeful guard,
Arm'd burghers, kept their watch and ward.
Marmion.

Towards the close of a sultry day, two travellers approached one of the eastern gates of Edinburgh, when the burgher guard were about to close it for the night.

The sun of June had set behind the distant Ochils, and his last rays were fading away from the reddened summit of St. Giles's spire, and the dark grey mansions of that ancient capital, whose history is like a romance.

The mowers, who the livelong day had bent them over the grass on many a verdant rig and holm, that are now covered by the streets and squares of the new city, had quitted their rural occupations. Between green hedgerows and fields of ripening corn, the lowing herds were driven to pen and byre in many a rural grange and thatch-roofed homestead; the bonneted shepherd that washed his sheep in the city lochs, and tended them by night on the braes of Warriston and Halkerston's crofts, could little foresee the new world of stone and lime, of gas, of steam, of bustle, and business, that was to spread over these lonely and sequestered places.

Gentlemen in glittering doublets and laced mantles, with hawks on their wrists, and well-armed serving-men in attendance, rode into the city, singly or together, from hawking the gled and the heron by Corstorphine loch and Wardie muir, or from visiting the towers and mansions in the neighbourhood. Few remained without the fortifications after nightfall, for our ancestors were all a-bed betimes.

In half an hour more, the foliage darkened in the cold and steady twilight

of June; but a crimson flush yet lingered in the west to show where the sun had set.

The two wearied wayfarers approached the lower barrier of Edinburgh, which faced the steep street known as Leith Wynd, the whole eastern side of which was in ruins, having been burned by the English invaders, under the Earl of Hertford, sixteen years before.

In the fair young man, armed with a round headpiece and corselet, the reader will recognise Konrad the Norwegian, and in the boy that accompanied him, may perceive the soft features and long tresses of Anna, notwithstanding the plain grey gaberdine, the sarcenet hosen, and blue cloth bonnet, under which she had veiled her beauty and concealed her sex. She had all the appearance of a slender and sickly boy, with hollow eyes and parched lips, exhausted by fatigue and privation.

Tremblingly she clung to Konrad as they drew near the low but massive arch of the Leith Wynd Porte, where he knocked on the nail-studded wicket with the pommel of his Norwayn dagger. A small vizzying-hole was unclosed, and the keen grey eye of one of the burghers on guard was seen to survey them strictly under the peak of his morion; for, by an act of the city council, every fourth citizen capable of bearing armour, had to keep watch and ward by night, completely armed with sword and jedwood axe, arquebuss and dagger, for the prevention of surprise from without, and suppression of disturbance within the burgh.

"Now, wha may ye be, and what want ye?" asked the burgher gruffly and suspiciously.

"Who I may be matters little to such as thou," replied Konrad, haughtily; "what I seek is entrance and civility, for I like not thy bearing, sirrah."

"Then I let ye to wit, that without kenning the first, thou canst not hae the second," replied the citizen, whose Protestant prejudices began to rise against one, whom he shrewdly deemed by his foreign accent to be a Frenchman, and consequently, a "trafficking messe preist," as the term was. "I fear me we hae enow o' your kind doon the gate at Holyrood. Some mass-monger, I warrant! Hast thou ever heard Master Knox preach?"

"No—who is he?"

"Wha is he!" reiterated the citizen, opening the pannel, his eyes and his mouth wider in his breathless astonishment. "What country is yours, or wharawa is't, that ye havena heard o' him, who is wise as Soloman, upright as David, patient as Job, as stark as the deevil himsel?"

"I am come from a far and foreign land," continued Konrad, endeavouring to make himself understood by the medium of a little of the Scottish tongue he had acquired.

"Ye are a merchant, maybe? I am one mysel, and deal in a' manner o' hardware that cometh out o' Flanders by the way o' Sluice, frae brass culverins to porridge cogues and kail-pats. Are ye a merchant, fair sir?"

"Yes—at your service, I am a trader," replied Konrad, glad to conciliate the man, and to hear him withdrawing the bolts.

"And in what do ye deal?" he asked, still lingering.

"Hard blows—thou dog and caitiff—and I would fain barter with thee!" replied Konrad, giving way to rage as he felt poor Anna sinking from his arm, under the very excess of exhaustion.

"Awa wi' ye! thou art some thigger or licht-fingered loon—some frontless papist or French sorner—or maybe a' thegither, as I doubt not by the fashion o' thy dusty duds! Awa! or I sall hae ye baith branded on the cheek, and brankit at the burgh cross, or my name's no Dandy the dagger-maker!" and the vizzy-hole was closed with a bang.

Konrad turned away exasperated and sorrowful. Though by this time pretty well used to insult and opprobrium from the reformed Scots, who deemed every foreigner a Frenchman, and consequently an upholder of the ancient faith, evinced their hatred in a thousand ways; and once proceeded so far as to stone, in the streets of Edinburgh, an ambassador of the Most Christian king, who was fool-hardy enough to exhibit himself in a mantle of purple velvet, adorned with the white cross of the knights of the Holy Ghost. Konrad's exchequer was now reduced to a very low ebb, for he possessed but one gold angel and two unicorns—the former being worth only twenty-four, and the latter eighteen, shillings Scots; and though he and his companion had found no difficulty in procuring food and shelter in the rural districts, where every baron and farmer gladly afforded a seat by his hall fire, a place at his board, and a hearty welcome to every wayfarer; now, when arrived at the end of their destination, in a crowded capital, the residence of a court, a trading and grasping middle class, a fierce aristocracy, and their fiercer retainers—the case was altogether different; and he gazed about, with doubt and irresolution, to find a place wherein to pass the night.

The roofless relics of the English invasion would have afforded a sufficient shelter for one so hardy as himself; but his tender and fainting companion—

"Courage, dearest Anna!" he whispered in their native language; "we have now reached the place of our destination."

"True, Konrad," murmured Anna; "but to what end? Oh, I have no wish now but to lie down here, and die! Forgive me, Konrad, this ingratitude; but I feel that I will not now—trouble you very long."

The young man once more put an arm around her; and, with a glance that conveyed a world of grief and passion, supported her to the summit of the steep street, where, between two broad, round towers, another massive barrier, that

separated the city from the suburban burgh of the Canongate, frowned over the long vista to the east. The grimness of its aspect, its heavy battlements, and deep, round portal, were no way enlivened by the bare white skulls of two of Rizzio's murderers—Henry Yair, and Thomas Scott, sheriff-depute of Perth—on long spikes.

Lest Anna might perceive them, Konrad turned hastily away; and, looking round, hailed with satisfaction a house, having the appearance of a comfortable hostelry, furnished with a broad sign-board that creaked on a rusty iron rod; and half leading, half supporting Anna, he approached it.

CHAPTER V. THE RED LION.

A seemly man our Hosté was withall
For to have been a marshall in a hall;
A largé man he was with eyen steep,
A fairer burgess is there none in Cheap;
Bold of his speech he was, and well y taught,
And of his manhood him lackéd righté nought:
Eke thereto was he right a merry man.

Chaucer.

The Red Lion in St. Mary's Wynd was one of the most spacious and famous of the old Scottish hostellaries, and Adam Ainslie, the gudeman thereof, was as kindly a host as ever welcomed a guest beneath his roof-tree. The enormous obesity of his paunch made him resemble a turtle on its hind-legs, while his visage, by hard drinking and frequent exposure to the weather, had become as flushed and red as the lion figuring on his sign-board, that overhung the principal wynd of Edinburgh.

If the ancient Scottish inns lacked aught that was necessary for the comfort of the traveller, it was not want of legislative encouragement; for so early as the days of James I., laws were enacted, and confirmed by James V., that all hostellaries "should have honest chambers and bedding for passengers and strangers travelling through the realme, weel and honestlie accoutred; good and sufficient stables, with hack and manger, corn and haye—fleshe, fishe, breade, and oile,

with other furnishing for travellers.”

This edifice, for which the antiquary may now look in vain, was two stories in height, having a row of pediments over the upper windows, which, like the lower, were thickly grated. The doorway, to which an outside stair gave access, was surmounted by an old coat-of-arms and the pious legend—

Miserere Mei Deus.

marked it as once the habitation of a churchman of rank. A low archway gave admittance to the stables behind. These bordered the garden of the ancient Cistercian convent of St. Mary-in-the-Wynd, an edifice of which not a vestige now survives. In the middle of the court there lay a great stone tank for watering horses, and high above the inn, on the north side, towered the smoke-encrusted mansions of the Netherbow.

With numerous sleeping apartments for guests and their retinues, which in those turbulent times were invariably numerous, well-armed, and mounted, the hostell contained one large and rude hall or apartment, where all visitors, without regard to sex or rank, partook of the general meals, and were accommodated on plain but sturdy oaken benches. An arched fireplace, rude in workmanship as the bridge of a country burn, opened at one end of this hall; and within, notwithstanding that the evening was a summer one, a large fire of wood from the Burgh muir, and coal—a luxury on which Adam Ainslie prided himself not a little, as its use was then very limited—blazed in the wide chimney for cooking, and threw its red gleam on the white-washed walls, sanded floor, and the well-scoured benches and girdles; on the rude beams of dark old oak that crossed the ceiling, and from which hung dried sea-fowl, boars’ hams, baskets, and superannuated household utensils, all placed hodge-podge with those warlike weapons which every householder was bound to have at hand for the ”redding” of frays, and maintenance of peace within the burgh. Nor must we omit to mention a great barrel of ale that stood in a recess near the doorway, propped on a sturdy binn, furnished with an iron quaigh, and of which all on entering partook, if they pleased, with a hearty welcome.

On the appearance of Konrad and his almost lifeless companion, Ainslie’s better half, a comely and buxom dame, wearing a coif of Flemish lace, a scarlet kirtle and silken sash, and having her fat fingers studded with silver rings, arose from her spindle, and bidding them welcome with the motherly kindness more natural to the time than her occupation, led Anna, whom she deemed ”a pair sickly laddie,” to a well-cushioned chair, and, finding him too faint to answer any questions, she turned to Konrad, who said—

”Let us have supper, goodwife! for this day hath seen us wellnigh famished.

What hast thou at hand in the larder?"

"We have rabbits trussed and broiled, noble sir, capons roasted and boiled, stewed partridges, and the great side o' beef whilk thou seest turning before the fire; but that is for my lord the Earl of Morton, quha to-day cometh in frae his castle of Dalkeith, and the best in cellar and larder maun be keepit for him. Earls, ye ken, are folk that canna thole steering."

"Then get us a capon—a manchet"—

"And a flask of Bordeaux?"

"The best thou hast."

"But for this pair bairn, that seemeth sae sair forfoughten, sall I no make a milk posset?"

"God bless thee for the thought, goodwife! let it be brought, and speedily."

"Wilt thou not sup with me?" said a countryman in a plain gaberдинe, who was seated at a side bench, and with the aid of his hunting-knife, (for, as we have elsewhere stated, forks were still in futurity,) was dissecting a noble capon and boar's ham, the odours of which were extremely tempting to Konrad. "Thou seest," continued his inviter, "that I am but a poor dustifute like thyself; but thou and thy boy are welcome. I am drinking Rochelle at sax pennies the Scots pint-stoup. By St. Mary! I cannot afford Bordeaux, even though it does come in by the east seas."

"Thanks, fair sir, for this courtesy," replied Konrad; "and if thou permittest my boy to taste thy Rochelle"—

"Odsbody! he is welcome."

Konrad hastily placed the proffered wine-horn to Anna's thirsty lips; she tasted it, revived a little, and again sank back, saying—

"Let me sleep—let me sleep!" and, closing her eyes, mutely resisted all Konrad's winning entreaties, that she would partake of a little food.

While sharing the stranger's hospitality, the young Norwegian, whom anxiety for his young charge had rendered suspicious of every one, covertly but keenly scrutinized him.

He was a powerfully but sparely formed man, whose well-strung limbs had been reduced to mere bone and brawn by constant exercise. His face was pleasant, good-humoured, and manly; he wore a short beard, and close shorn hair; his cheekbones were somewhat prominent; but his keen and dark grey eye had an expression, that by turns was full of boldness and penetration, merriment and fun. Beneath his gaberдинe, which was of the coarsest white Galloway cloth, Konrad could perceive an excellent jack of jointed mail; a grey maud or Border plaid was thrown loosely over his broad chest and brawny shoulders; his flat worsted bonnet and a knotty oak cudgel lay on the floor, under the guardianship of a rough wiry cur. Konrad judged him to be a substantial yeoman or farmer, though at

times his language and manner unguardedly imported something better.

He, on the other hand, while eating and drinking with the appetite and thirst of a strong and healthy fellow, who since sunrise had been travelling fast and far, quite as keenly scrutinized Konrad, whose occupation and degree he found himself puzzled to determine.

"By the set of thy head, and aspect of thine eye, I would say thou hast been something of a soldier, master," said the Scot.

"I have been more of a huntsman than a soldier, perhaps; yet I have done a little in both lines."

"Good! I love thee for that; thy life hath been checkered, like mine own. Thou art not one of our ain kindly Scots, or else thou hast attained the true twang of the foreigner. Peradventure, hast been pushing thy fortune under the banner of stout Sir Walter Scott, whose Border bands are now covering themselves with immortal honour on the frontiers of Saxony?"

"Nay! my sword has never been drawn against others than the fat citizens of Lubeck and Hamburg."

"Profitable warfare I would take that to be, and pleasant withal; for these Hanseatic burghers can wade above their baldricks in rixdollars, say our Leith shippers. So, then, thou art of Flanders?"

Willing to deceive him a little, Konrad nodded.

"I guessed thou wert a Fleming," replied the yeoman, laughing, "and so my heart warmed to thee; for they are all stout men and true. Mass! my own mother, who now sleeps at St. Mary in the Lows, was a Fleming of the house of Wigton, whose forbear, Baldwin le Flemyng, came from thy country in the days of St. David, to take knight's service, as I doubt not thou meanest to do."

Konrad again assented to his garrulous companion.

"Then there will be work enow for thy sword by Lammas-tide; for the stout Earl of Bothwell is about to make a royal raid into Clydesdale."

"Saidst thou Bothwell?" ejaculated Konrad, in a thick voice, and glancing hastily at Anna, who was now buried in a profound slumber, with her face concealed in her mantle.

"Yea, Bothwell—one of our queen's prime favourites; but there will be many a lance broken, and many a steed left riderless, ere he shall traverse all the windings of the Liddle. By St. Mary! but they must keep sharp watch and ward at the gate of his castle of Hermitage; for by this time, I warrant, the troopers of John of Park have all been riding by moss and moor."

"Who is this John of Park, of whom I hear so many speak, either with hatred or applause?"

"The chief of the brave clan Elliot, and long Lord Bothwell's mortal foe."

"Then would to Heaven I could meet this John of Park!"

"Hah!" exclaimed the countryman, whose eyes sparkled; "and for what end?"

"That under his banner I might have some chance of meeting Bothwell in his armour, lance to lance, and horse to horse. O God! thou alone knowest how much I have suffered at his hands, and what I have to avenge!"

"Is it thus with thee?" said the Scot; "swear that thou dost not deceive me.

"By all that is holy, I swear!"

"Good. To-morrow I shall lead thee to John Elliot of Park, who needeth much a few such spirits as thee," replied the other, in the same low tone under which the conversation had been maintained.

Here a clatter of horses' hoofs in the adjoining wynd, together with the jingle of steel bridles and two-handed swords, announced the arrival of more important guests.

"Now here cometh the Earl of Morton and his swash-bucklers—a pest on them!" muttered the countryman, instinctively grasping his cudgel; while the bluff host and his buxom better-half bustled about in a high state of excitement, dusting the long oaken table, adjusting the fire, placing fir buffet-stools, and trimming the long candles that flared in the tin wall-sconces.

CHAPTER VI. THE EARL OF MORTON.

Dark Morton, girt with many a spear,
Murder's foul minion!

Scott.

Attended by a train of forty armed horsemen, this potent noble had arrived.

His men, as they dismounted, placed their long and unwieldy lances against the wall of the inn yard, and set about stabling their steeds with ready activity. Followed by Archibald Douglas, laird of Whittinghame, and Hume of Spott—two gentlemen of his retinue—this factious, proud, and ferocious lord, whose name is so infamous from the dark and bloody share which he took in all the deep intrigues and civil broils of that unhappy period, entered the hall of the hostelry; and certainly, from the smile that spread over his handsome features, curving his fine mouth, and lighting up his brilliant hazel eye—and from the dignity of his as-

pect, and the magnificence of his yellow damask doublet, embroidered with gold, his purple velvet trunks, which were slashed with white and edged with point d'Espagne, where they joined his hose of Naples silk—the politeness with which he removed his black beaver, with its long white feather, and on entering saluted the hostess with a kiss, and the host with a thump between the shoulders—no one, we say, who saw his general aspect and bearing, would have recognized the same savage and avaricious noble, who, as it was commonly said, "never spared man in his vengeance, nor woman in his lust"—who murdered Captain Cullen for possession of his beautiful wife—who poisoned the Regent Mar to secure the regency—who hung sixty men, as a pastime before breakfast, at Leith Loan—and who was yet foredoomed, to die on the scaffold for the greatest of all human crimes.

Adam Ainslie bowed and bowed again, and Lucky Ainslie curtsied, in concert, a dozen of times, so well as their corpulent figures would permit.

"How dost thou, stout Adam?" said the Earl, merrily, as he took his seat at the highest part of the chamber board. "Save us! but this meat smelleth savourily, and my evening ride hath given me a wolfs appetite. By the rood I mine host—(pest upon these old oaths of papistry, but how they stick to one's fancy!)—thou wearest noble hosen," continued the Earl, jocosely, as, with his walking-cane, he poked Adam's preposterously bombasted trunk-breeches. "Dost thou know that the Lord Bothwell and other gallants aver, that thy gudewife keepeth all her bed and table napery stuffed into them?"

"Your lordship is pleased to be merry," simpered Dame Ainslie, placing stools for the Earl's jackmen, who came crowding in with all their iron paraphernalia clanking, and dimmed with summer dust; and a terrible clatter they made with their long spurs, gigantic boots and gambadoes, long swords and jed-dard staves, as they took all the best places at the hearth and table, hustling into the background the countryman and his two companions.

Awakened by the uproar of their entrance, Anna clung fearfully to Konrad's arm; and he remarked that their new acquaintance kept as much as possible in the background, and wore his grey plaid high up on his weatherbeaten visage.

"Hast thou no city news, Master Adam?" said the Earl. "Thou knowest that one might as well bide at the bottom of a draw-well as in that lonely tower of Dalkeith. How stand the markets? and how like our burghers their new provost, the stout knight of Craigmillar?"

"By my troth, Lord Earl, there is a southland yeoman ben there who ought to ken mair of market stock than I. The queen's byding at Lithgow makes the toun dull and eerie; for the second spiering, I may say auld Sir Simon is liket right well, for he sheweth small mercy to mass-priest and papist; gif they be found within the Fortes, they dree a douking in the Nor' Loch for the first offence, and a clean

drowning in Bonnington Linn for the second. His riders had a lang chase nae farther gane than yesterday, frae Wardie peel to the Braid's burn, after a mass-priest, Sir James Tarbet, who had been found lamenting over his broken idols in the chapel of St. James by the sea; but I grieve that they failed to catch him."

"Beware thee, Adam!" said the knight of Whittinghame, "or thou mayest get a broken head for broaching such free opinions in an hostellary. The head of antichrist is still floating above the current of public opinion."

"Hath Monsieur de Rambouillet, the new French ambassador, arrived?" asked the laird of Spott.

"He landed yesterday at the New Haven from Monsieur de Villaignon's galley; and, preceded by the heralds and bailies of the town, was conducted to Willie Cant's hostel in the Kirkgate of Leith, close by St. Anthony's gate."

"I marvel mickle that he came not to thee, good Adam."

"I marvel mair," added the host, testily; "for there is no an hostel in a' broad Scotland, and that's a wide word, where there is better uppitting baith for man and beast than the *Red Lion*; beside, 'tis a clean insult to the gude toun his lying at a Leither's hostel; but I owe this to a leather-selling bailie in Niddry's Wind, who I outvoted in the council anent the double and single-soled shoon, that made sic a stir among the craftsmen. Ken ye, my Lord Earl, on whatna errand Maister Rambooly hath come hither?"

"Some new popish league, I warrant," said the laird of Spott, curling his grisly beard. "'Tis said that the Hugonets, jealous of such a body of Switzers being marched into the Isle of France, are resolving upon open war."

"Thou mistakest, Spott," replied the Earl, with a dark frown. "Gif the best man in France came hither on any such devil's errand, I would slit his tongue with my own dagger. He hath come from Charles IX., to bestow on King Henry the collar of St. Michael the archangel. Her majesty comes from Linlithgow in three days, and we shall have the ceremony of installation at Holyrood thereafter."

"She will be here in three days, the Queen—hearest thou, Anna?" whispered Konrad. She pressed his hand in reply, and drooped her head upon his shoulder; and the heart of Konrad sickened at the reflection, that the action was prompted only by the abandonment of despair.

"St. Michael's collar!" continued the laird of Spott; "the king should kneel on Rizzio's gravestone at this notable investment. Doth it not smell of popery and brimstone?"

"So the godly Maister Knox openly affirmit in a sermon preached this blessed day," said dame Ainslie, turning up her saucer-like eyes at the soul-stirring recollection thereof; "preached—ay, in the High Kirk, (named St. Giles by the idolaters,) and he advisit the crafts to hurl the stanes of the street upon Rambooly, as the son of anti-christ."

"Master Knox should beware, and bethink him that the persons of ambassadors are sacred," replied the Earl; "but on what other points did he touch in his notable discourse to-day?"

"Oh! he spoke in a way whilk was rapturous and soul-feeding to hear, anent the abomination of singing idolatrous carols at Yule-tide, the great sin of singing ought but psalms, and of all loud laughter and ungodly merriment, whilk becometh not poor sinners like us, in the slough of despondency. He railed at the Queen and the Lord Darnley—the one for her obstinate papistrie, and the other for his wicked life—and then he spoke o' the reiving bordermen in general, and John o' Park in particular, on whom he fulminated a' the curses that ever were crammed into a cardinal's excommunication, as being the strongest and most desperate thief in a' the south country, since puir John o' Gilnokie dree'd his dreich penance from King James."

"Said he aught of the Lord Bothwell?"

"Yea, my lord—that he had taken a hawk from an ill nest."

"Meaning his espousal of a popish woman of the house of Huntly," said Morton. "Well, said he aught of me?"

"Nay, my lord—Heaven forefend! Art thou not one of his boon and steadfast friends?"

"Right—he would not talk of me," replied the fierce noble, with one of his deep smiles; and striking his walking-cane on the floor, an involuntary custom of his, added, "Well, then, master hosteller, let us to supper, for I am ravenous as a hawk, and this noble baron of beef seemeth done to a single turn. If this strange gentleman will so far favour me as to deign"—

"Excuse me, Lord Earl, but I have already supped," replied Konrad, bowing with the distant air of one who wishes to be undisturbed and unrecognised. Morton's pride and curiosity were piqued.

"Thou art English, I think, by the fashion of thy beard, and, doubtless, hast a passport from the marshal of Berwick. I will pardon the bluntness with which thou declinest my courtesy, and will add, that thou mayest find the shadow of my banner a good protection, if the quarrels between the dainty queens of these realms end in blows; for our little dame looks sourly upon thine, deeming her little else than a false bastard and base usurper."

"Thou art mistaken, Lord Earl. I am not an Englishman."

"Then what manner of man art thou, fair sir? thou seest I have a restless curiosity. A stranger?"

"At thy service, noble lord. I understand thou art the great Earl of Morton—the foe of my foe."

"At the Scottish court each man is foe to every one else. I am, in fact, a little Earl compared with such a tall fellow as Bothwell. But I may easily be the foe of

thy foe, seeing that the half of broad Scotland would readily drench my doublet in Douglas blood, gif they could; but," he added with hauteur, "who is thy foe?"

"James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell!" replied Konrad in the same manner, for he was displeased by the peculiar accentuation.

"Hah! is it so? Thou art a bold fellow to mention that name otherwise than in a whisper, for it findeth an echo every where now. Knowest thou not," he added, with a glance of ferocious scorn, "that the white horse of Hepburn is now bidding fair to swallow the crowned heart of Douglas? I ask not the cause of thine enmity to this man, but if thou wishest an opportunity of seeing him in his helmet, follow my banner for one month or so; for I tell thee that the heather is smouldering on our Scottish hills, and ere long 'twill burst into a red and furious flame."

"Excuse me, potent Earl," replied Konrad, for at that moment the countryman plucked him anxiously by the sleeve; "excuse me, for I am in some sort pledged to another."

"Please thyself, a-God's name! and now let us to supper."

CHAPTER VII. MORTON TURNS PHILANTHROPIST.

"Blessed be the Lord for all his gifts;
Defied the deil and all his shifts;
God send us mair siller—*amen!*"

Such was the grace, which, with half mockery and half gravity, the Earl of Morton, who acted the rigid presbyter and stern reformer merely when it suited his own fancy or peculiar ends, commenced the repast which Adam Ainslie's pantryman had arranged upon the long oak chamber-board, as a table was then named.

The upper end was covered by a cloth of damask, flowered with red silk; the lower was bare; the guests of rank were furnished with knives and spoons of silver, with glasses of Venetian crystal, delft platters, and pewter trenchers. The lower had only wooden caups and luggies—quaighs and spoons of horn—the great saltseller forming the grand point of demarcation between the two classes of society who were to partake of the same meal, at the same board, in the kindly fashion of other years. The Earl and his gentlemen sat above; their

rough-visaged troopers, unhelmeted, but still wearing their corselets and gorgets, swords and gambadoes, sat below it, closely, side by side, on buffet stools and wooden benches.

They were accommodated with porridge and luggies of sour-milk; a handful of prunes thrown into each platter, with cheese and cakes of mashlum, (flower made of ground peas and barley,) and horns of ale, formed their evening fare; but the savoury baron of beef, a pasty of powts, (or muirfowl,) a pudding of plumbs and spices, with flasks of choice Canary, Rochelle, and Bordeaux, at only sixpence or ninepence Scots the pint, garnished the upper end; and to this early supper, for which our late dinners are now a substitute, this jovial company sat down, just as the four old bells of St. Giles rang the hour of nine.

"'Tis savoury meat this, Mistress Ainslie," said the Earl; "and it well deserved a better blessing."

"Whence hadst thou it, lucky?" asked the Knight of Whittinghame, a grim and bearded man; "for here is what I would call the prick of a lance."

"A true Border mark, by Mahoud!" added Hume of Spott.

"Ye say true, sirs; it may be a gore-mark," replied Dame Ainslie, curtsying; "for ken ye, the beast was the best of a drove of four hundred, lifted in Nichol forest by John of Park, whose riders sauld it to my gudeman in the fleshmercat."

"English fed, by the rood!" said the bearded knight, cutting down another slice. "Here is another goad-mark! I warrant me, John's prickers had been sorely pressed by the English captain of Bewcastle, or the lances of the Wardenrie."

"These wild powts are right tasty, host of mine," said the Earl; "whence come they?"

"From the muirlands about the toun, my lord. They are thick as locusts on the braes of the Nor' Loch and Wardie muir. One crossbow shot brings down two at once in the feeding time."

From a nook, in which she had hitherto sat unseen, Anna had surveyed, with a terror which she could scarcely repress, the number of armed men who crowded the apartment. There was a reckless, daredevil aspect about them all; their armour was rusty, and their other attire well worn; in grisly profusion, their beards and whiskers fringed their weatherbeaten faces, which were all more or less stamped with ruffianism; for Morton, notwithstanding the placid suavity of his manner, was as oily a ruffian as ever drew a dagger—and, instead of his rural vassals, he generally preferred to be attended by a band of paid "wageours," as those military desperadoes were named, who swarmed throughout Scotland after the wars between the Congregation and Mary of Lorraine had ceased.

"Konrad," said she, tremblingly, as she clung to his arm; "let us leave this place"—

"For whence?—the wayside?—to be exposed to the midnight dew, and wild

animals, perhaps?"

"Surely any place is preferable to this. The faces of these men terrify me!"

Ere Konrad could reply, the Earl of Morton, who had acute ears for such matters, on hearing the soft voice of a woman, bent his keen dark eyes towards where Anna was shrinking into the shadow, formed by a projection of the wall. He divined her sex in an instant; but with his usual cunning concealed this discovery.

"'Tis a pretty lad, this, sir stranger!" said he to Konrad, kindly. "Is he thy page, or thy brother; for he cannot be thy son?"

Konrad hesitated a moment, and then replied—

"My brother, noble lord! as thou perhaps mayest see by our resemblance. We have the same fair hair, and the same light eyes."

"Thou art come hither, thou saidst, to bear a lance in some knight's train. Dost design thy sickly brother for such rough work?"

"Not at present, my lord. He has been over-tenderly nurtured for saddling horses and scouring armour. I would rather leave him to bear the fardingale of some noble lady, could I meet with such, while I push my fortune in the camp."

"So far I may have it in my power to befriend thee," rejoined the cunning Earl, with a sly wink at his two companions. "Come hither, my boy, and let me see thee?"

Thus commanded by this terrible peer, Anna felt herself impelled to obey; and she approached the Earl, whose long beard appalled, while his keen dark eyes seemed to penetrate, the most secret thoughts of her palpitating heart. He took her by the hand; and one glance at its fair soft fingers and beautiful form, together with the pallor of her changing cheek, and the timidity of her downcast face, convinced him that a very bewitching woman was concealed under that boy's plain doublet and mantle.

"That will do, boy—seat thyself," said he, lest his companions, the dissolute lairds of Spott and Whittinghame, might make the same discovery. Morton formed his plan in a moment, and resolved by open force, if not by secret fraud—a course he usually preferred—to obtain possession of this fair foreigner. He again addressed Konrad.

"Thou knowest me, fair sir—I believe?"

"Yes, noble sir, to be the most powerful of the Scottish peers."

"After the great Earl of Bothwell," said Morton, with mock humility. "I will place thy brother in the service of a noble lady connected with the court, where he will be daily in the presence of her Majesty the Queen, if thou wilt trust me so far."

"Lord Earl, I cannot find words to thank thee!" replied Konrad, touched to the soul by this sudden kindness.

"Pest!" said Spott, "his fortune will be made. Thou knowest our queen's partiality for strangers and outlandish people."

"Earl Morton, were I not pledged to another, (and I never break my work even to the most humble,) thy standard alone would I follow, to requite with my sword"—

"And to whose pennon art thou pledged?"

Here the peasant plucked Konrad by the mantle, and whispered,— "Say John of Park, and they will hang thee from that rooftree!" but Konrad was relieved from the dilemma by Douglas of Whittinghame exclaiming with a hoarse laugh—

"Ha! ha! here is James of Morton, the lord of the lion's den, turning philanthropist! ha! ha! ha!"

"Can thy brother not speak for himself?" said the Earl.

"The boy is timid and bashful."

"The women will soon teach him impudence."

"Excuse him, noble sir"—

"Say I am thankful," whispered Anna in a broken voice, while her tears fell fast; "for though grieved to the heart at parting from thee, dear Konrad, the protection of one of my own sex is so necessary, that—and then to be near the queen, that she may hear my mournful story! O! what will I not risk? Yes—yes! to this great lord say that I thank him from my inmost soul, and will accept his generous offer."

"And what, may I ask, is the name of the noble lady who is to receive this boy as a gift?" asked Konrad, after he had complied with Anna's desire.

"The Dame Alison Craig," replied the Earl. "She dwells close bye here, a few doors up the wynd, in a house that was once a convent, but is now adapted to more useful purposes. It hath been reformed—ha! ha! She is a lady of fair repute, and keepeth open house for the rich. By my beard! I know not what would become of Messieurs the ambassadors of France, Spain, and Savoy, and all the gay chevaliers and signiors of their suites, in this gloomy city of psalms and sermonizing, but for Dame Alison's suppers and balls."

Though Konrad did not understand this speech, he partly detected the sly expression of eye with which it was accompanied; but, in his Scandinavian simplicity and honesty of heart, he never imagined it was an infamous courtesan the treacherous Earl was praising; and, pleased with the hope that Anna would so easily obtain access to the queen's presence, he once more thanked him, briefly and sincerely, and, after the grace-cup had been handed round by the hostess, the guests prepared for repose.

The Earl and his gentlemen were conducted to chambers in the upper regions of the lofty hostel, the host marshalling the way with a flambeau; but their jackmen lay on the hearth, on the benches, and under the hall tables, with their

steel caps for pillows, and their swords and axes beside them.

Touched with the melancholy that was impressed on Konrad's handsome face, and with the singular beauty of the seeming boy who accompanied him, the hostess offered the brothers, as she deemed them, "a snug box-bed in the guest row, bein and cosy, gif they would accept of it—nae difference to be made in the lawing."

Though Anna understood little of the Scottish woman's language, with quick perception she divined, by Konrad's confused expression, the nature of the invitation, and a blush burned on her face. He hastened to remove it, by hurriedly declining; and, wrapped up in their mantles, they took their repose on the wooden benches as well as their sad thoughts would permit them; while coiled up in his grey maul, with a hand on his poniard and his bonnet drawn over his face, their first acquaintance, the countryman, lay snoring melodiously beside them, with his red-eyed terrier keeping watch and ward by his side.

CHAPTER VIII. JOHN OF PARK.

"He blythely blew his silver call,
And, ere the echoes slept,
One hundred archers, stout and tall,
Appealed on right and left.
These are my body guard, fair sir:
Should fortune prove unkind,
Or foes our haunts invade, there are
Full fifty more behind."

Ballad.

Grey morning was breaking, and its light struggled through the barred windows of the hostellary, edging with cold lustre and bringing into bold relief the harsh and fierce features, the muscular figures, and uncouth accoutrements of Morton's bearded troopers. They were still sleeping on the hard oak planks when the peasant stirred Konrad, and whispered—

"Fair sir, I am about to depart. If thou art still in the mood to follow John of Park to battle and foray against Bothwell—arise, and come forth!"

"I am ready," replied Konrad, feeling for the purse that hung at his girdle.

"Nay, nay, heed not the lawing! I will settle with our host's yeoman of the pantry, and thou canst do me service another time. Come softly forth; for I wish not to disturb these bloodhounds of the house of Morton."

Rising gently, the young man clasped on his steel cap, and gave a glance full of sorrow and anguish at Anna's fair and sleeping face, over which he drew the skirt of her mantle; and, praying that Heaven might take her under its peculiar care, hurried away.

"'Tis better—oh yes!—'tis better," thought he. "She is now under more powerful protection than I could afford her; and, in the whirl of war and strife, I may (for a time at least) forget that hopeless passion which her presence is turning into madness."

While his new friend, and one of the drowsy servitors, whom he had roused from his snug nest among the hay in the loft above the stables, were removing the ponderous wooden bar of the pend or archway, Konrad felt a hand laid lightly on his arm; he turned, and met Anna's tearful eyes fixed sorrowfully and pleadingly on his.

"Wouldst thou really go without bidding me one kind adieu?" she said tenderly, in the language of their native land.

"I deemed it better, Anna. Partings are ever painful, and I hoped to see thee soon again."

"My heart is oppressed by fears and misgivings"—

"Let them cease, I pray thee; but oh! above all things, carefully preserve thy disguise. Remain with this noble; he is great and powerful, and in his train, three days hence will doubtless find thee in the presence of the Scottish Queen. Once there, thou art safe. Throw thyself at her feet, and there pour out thy tears and thy sorrows together. Mary of Scotland, say the people of every land save her own, is good and gentle, pious, compassionate, and kind. Thou art sure to triumph. Farewell, Anna! may our blessed Lady, whose intercession is never sought in vain, protect and bless thee!"

"Thou wilt come and see me sometimes, Konrad—at court, I mean; for surely I must remain there after my story is heard!"

"And forget old Norway?" said Konrad, with a sad smile.

"*Gamle Norge!*" reiterated Anna; "ah, never! but I would wish that some great lady, fair, beautiful, and rich, should see thee, and love thee, and, and"—

"What?"

"Make amends for the worthless heart thou hast lost."

"Never, Anna!" responded the young man in a troubled voice, while he regarded her with a gaze of love as deep as in the days of yore. "That can never be—Konrad's die is cast;" and, kissing her hands, he sprang through the archway,

and, with his mind in a tumult of confusion, hurried after his guide.

A sense of sadness, desolation, and doubt, were ever uppermost in his thoughts, and absorbed all his faculties.

There were none stirring in the city at that early hour; the streets were silent and deserted; and grimly in the grey morning the grated windows of its lofty mansions, tall, and strong, and spectral, with their turnpike towers, crow-stepped gables and Flemish roofs, frowned over the narrow way.

"What time of the morning is it, thinkest thou, for I never could afford me a pocket-dial?" said the peasant, as they descended St. Mary's Wynd.

"About two hours of matin-prime yet."

"Matin-prime hath not rung for these ten years and more from the steeples of Edinburgh," replied the other, with a dark look; "but please God a day shall come, when all the services of our blessed church, the *sexte and *none*, the *vesper* and *nocturnal*, shall toll from every steeple in broad Scotland."

"Shall we meet John of Park in the city?"

"Marry, come up! thinkest thou he values his poor head so lightly that he trusts it there? Though of a sooth to say, 'tis worth more than I thought it; for there, on yonder gate, we will find that the lords of the land offer a hundred unicorns of gold for it. I never could read a line myself; but I heard a certain notary's servitor, a dainty youth in black buckram and a white ruff, read it to the gaping rabble yesternight. A hundred golden unicorns! ha! ha! John of Park, my poor knave! look well to thy harnpan, lest some day thou findest it grinning on yonder spikes!"

With a boisterous laugh, his guide directed Konrad's attention to a huge placard posted on the Porte of St. Mary. This barrier, which extended from east to west across the Pleasance, and gave access to the Wynd and Canongate, was removed in the seventeenth century.

The paper, which was surmounted by the rude engraving of a thistle and crown, with the initials M.R., purported to be the offer of one hundred unicorns for the "notour rebelle, traitor, and murtherour, at ye Queen's majesties home, John Elliot, umquhile designate of Parke." Imprinted by Thomas Bassandyne, one of the earliest Edinburgh printers, whose establishment was near the Netherbow.

As they left the city behind, pursuing the path that skirted the royal park, and (by the same narrow way that the good St. Margaret had rode on many a day to her gifted well) led towards the old collegiate church of Restalrig, with the ruined dwellings of its banished prebendaries nestling among the old orchards of the monkish days—the sun came up in splendour from his burnished bed in the German sea, and the summits of the city, and of the dark-green hills that overhung it, were reddened by the joyous light. Up, and farther up, soared the god of day in his glory; and Gulane Hill, St. Baldred's isle of rock, and the volcanic

cone of Berwick Law, were mellowed in the morning haze.

Leaving the bridle path that led to the dwelling of the factious and turbulent Lord of Restalrig, they entered upon the dreary waste named the Figgate Whins, where, from time immemorial, the monks of Holyrood had grazed their flocks of sheep and cattle. Bordered by a low and sandy shore, and uncheered by a single habitation, this wide and lonely waste extended from the western ramparts of Leith to the chapel of Magdalene—a little oratory by the seaside, nearly four miles distant. The fragment of an ancient Roman way traversed the moorland, which was still as death, save where a few cattle browsed on the patches of grass; and each of them had a sprig of ash-tree tied with red tape to their horns, as a charm against disease and witchcraft. The gurgle of the Figgate burn flowing into the ocean, whose crested waves rolled in light on the yellow sand—and the cawing of the rooks, that were wheeling aloft from their nests in the ruined oratory—were the only sounds that broke the stillness; for Konrad, oppressed by his own sad thoughts, did not converse much—and his companion had also become somewhat taciturn and reserved.

This muir was studded by great thickets of dark-green whin, and mossy knolls, marking the roots of gigantic oaks, the remnants of that great forest whose shady dingles had once spread from the hills of Braid to the ocean, and which many a time and oft had echoed to the trumpets and timbrels of the Emperor Severus and Julius Agricola. There were deep hollows, mosshags, and sandpits, by the wayside; and, altogether, the place, as they progressed, seemed to become so fitted for outrage, murder, and robbery, that Konrad began to view with suspicion the tall and brawny fellow who had led him thus far, and who marched on a pace or two before, with his grey plaid waving in the wind, his bonnet drawn over his face, while with his knotty staff he hewed in a swordsman-like fashion at the broom-bells and thistle-heads that bordered the Roman causeway.

"Is it in this place we are to meet the knight whose pennon I am to follow?" asked Konrad.

"Yes!"

"And how saidest thou he was named?"

"The Laird of Park! a name at which men cock their lugs in Liddesdale."

"And where is he now?"

"Before thee!" said the other, drawing himself up, and raising his bonnet from his broad and manly brow. "I am Sir John Elliot of Park!"

"Thou!" exclaimed the young Norwegian, stepping back a pace, with a frown of anger and surprise, that his helmet partly concealed. "Peasant churl! how canst thou be that brave knight whom all men characterise as the foe of the great Earl of Bothwell, though thou mayest well be the strong thief he is said to be!"

"A salmon from the pool, a wand from the wood, a deer from the hill, or a drove of nolt from our English foemen, are thefts that no man hath need to blush for."

"By St. Olaf! I will rather forego my chance of meeting Bothwell in battle than follow such as thee. Nay, nay; fallen as he is, Konrad of Saltzberg hath not yet come so low as to seek suit or service from a low-born peasant!"

Long and loudly laughed the borderer at this remark, till his sunburnt face grew purple.

"Dost thou think, when I ventured into Edinburgh to learn how matters were likely to go with us in Liddesdale, I would enter with my pennon borne before me, and sound a trumpet at its gates? By St. Mary! no—and I care not mickle whether I don a blue bonnet, or Naples beaver, or a steel basinet, provided it keeps my head on my shoulders for the time. But tarry a moment, gentle sir; and, peradventure, thou wilt acknowledge there may be worse leaders than Jock Elliot of Park."

On approaching the chapel and bridge of Mary Magdalene, he placed to his mouth a small bugle of ivory, exquisitely carved and mounted with silver, and blew one clear low blast, that rang along the sandy shore, and immediately a knight's pennon and the glittering heads of sixty bright lances appeared above the broom, as they were uplifted in the sunshine, and there rode down the opposite bank a band of moss-troopers, armed, after the Scottish border fashion, in jacks of leather covered with little iron plates, steel gloves, gorgets, and basinets, and having two-handed swords slung from their shoulder-belts. As they approached the bridge-end, their strong, fleet, and active horses, though covered with dew and dust, seemed still fresh and active.

"Behold my pennon, fair sir!" said the Knight of Park, pointing to the scarlet bannerole, which bore on a golden bend a *flute*, the pastoral cognizance of the Elliot clan. "And these are a few of my Liddesdale lads; so, if thou art ashamed to follow the one in the ranks of the other, here we part, and in all friendship I say—God keep thee!"

"Nay—I crave pardon! I pledged my word to serve, and will keep the pledge."

"Then be it so. Ho there, Edie o' Earlshope!—Lauchey wi' the lang spear!—my horse and armour!" cried the knight, throwing down his bonnet and plaid; and immediately a strong and beautiful horse, stoutly, but plainly, bitted and caparisoned, bearing on its saddle a bundle of armour, was led forward by the laird's henchman, the said Edie, a muscular but spare sample of the thoroughbred moss-trooper.

His eyes and hair were of the deepest black, his face was long and lean, and by constant exposure had been tanned to the colour of mahogany. The bristly

mustaches that overhung the clasps of his battered morion, were like iron wire. His powerful form seemed a model of muscular strength and activity, but his legs were considerably curved by constant riding; his armour was well worn, and by frequent use, rather than care, the grasp and pommel of his long and ponderous sword, that hung from a chain over his shoulder, was polished as brightly as if by a cutler's hand. Though Edie was merely the chartered portioner or crofter of Earlshope from the laird, there was much more of the outlaw than the farmer, and still more of the ruffian than the soldier, in his aspect.

"Park, thou art right welcome among us!" said he, with the respectful familiarity of a Scottish vassal to his lord in those days, when the interests of the people and their superiors were *one*. "What may be the tidings in yonder city?"

"Such as will cause sharp swords and sure watches to be kept in every tower that looks down on the Liddle, good gossip."

"Wow, laird!—and what be they?"

"The Lord Warden of the three marches, with four thousand lances in his train, is about to lead a raid among us, and meaneth to pay me such a visit as King James did John of Gilnokie."

"Weel—I carena a brass bodle!" growled the moss-trooper, as with a ready hand he buckled on his leader's coat-of-mail, and assisted him to mount. "I havena had a straw growing on Earlshope-rigs since Lammas-tide was 1560; nor a cow in the byre, save what I won in fair foray;—sae, gif we take to hill and moss again, we canna be mickle the waur."

"By the blood of Broomholm!" swore his chief; "gif I take to moss and moor, let the Lord Warden look to it, for I may chance one day to whet my lance on the groundstone of his own castle of Bothwell! Hast thou a horse for my friend?"

"By my faith have we—for ten friends!" replied the henchman, pointing to a troop of led horses, whose halters were fastened to troopers' bridles.

"And where got ye these nags?"

"Ou! just in the onsteadings owre the hill yonder, where I took a turn wi' Dandy Dumpie and Langspear, between the night and morning, to keep us frae wearying when waiting on ye. But as the crofters may be missing their cattle about this time, and set the countryside astir, 'twere wise to make use of rowel and rein till the Lammermuir is between us and the sea."

"Our Lady!—yes; for ere noonday this bridge will be echoing to the tramp of Bothwell's bands, who bring with them the Comptroller's cannon, to batter down every obnoxious peelhouse in the wardenrie, and my poor little tower of Park in particular. Mount, friend Konrad, and let us begone; for we have to ride fast and far ere we breakfast yet!"

Konrad sprang into the saddle of the charger proffered him—(a strong and active bay)—and rode forward by the side of his new friend, to whom he was

completely reconciled, on beholding that his pennon was borne by a gentleman—and that his armour, though plain and unornamented, was of the finest steel, and every way such as became a knight. He rode with a jed-wood axe resting on his thigh; and his visor, which was lighted by two horizontal slits, clasped down.

Passing the turreted house of Crichton of Brunstan, who had taken such a leading part in the recent Reformation, they struck into a narrow horseway, that, crossing the Esk by a ford, led to the hill of Carberry—and, as they ascended, the districts of Newton and Inveresk lay spread at their feet like a beautiful map. The waves were rolling in silver and blue around the Inch and the May—St. Adrian's gifted isle—while the point of Elie, the peak of Kincaig, and all the shore of Fife, was mellowed by distance into faint and shadowy tints; but when John of Park and his troop of lances diverged along the heights that are crowned by the old tower of Falside, whose ruined turrets still overtop their grove of firs, the broad and beautiful bay of Preston opened out before them, dotted by the dark lug-sails of northern fisher-boats, and shining in golden light—yellow almost as the long expanse of sand that edged its ample margin.

Accustomed to the savage landscapes of his native Norway, there was a soft charm in that varied and magnificent panorama which for a time won Konrad from his melancholy thoughts.

An amphitheatre of fertile hills, and rich copsewood of the darkest green, rose gently upwards from the encircling shore, till their long blue undulating line stood defined distinctly and clearly against the pale and azure horizon. From the strongholds of the Lords of Winton and Dolphinton, and many a baronial dwelling, whose lofty turrets and crested gateway have long since crumbled into dust—from many a thatched cottage and many a snug home-farm—the smoke was rising amid the summer woods, to mingle with the morning mist, and melt in thin air.

Afar off, like a speck at the edge of the distant sea, a sail was visible, marking the faint line where sky and ocean blended into one; and Konrad gazed at it long and wistfully. It might be bound for his northern home; and for a time his eyes, his heart, and his wishes, followed it. But he soon lost sight of the sea and the distant capital, on entering the moorlands that lay to the southward of Falside and Carberry; for the experienced border knight and his moss-troopers, to avoid the Earl of Bothwell's line of route, had resolved, by taking a circuitous

and solitary way, to gain, unseen, their native wilds of Liddesdale.

CHAPTER IX. THE CONFLICT IN HERMITAGE GLEN.

And it's hame, and it's hame, my bonny brown steed,
And it's riderless hame ye maun gang;
For the warden has me fast, this night is my last,
The morn he swears I maun hang.
Old Ballad.

Anxious to forget both Anna and his Countess, Bothwell hastened to plunge into the ardour and excitement of that wild and predatory warfare which was then maintained on the frontiers of the two countries. The memory of the wrong he had done his wife, stung him more than those endured by Anna; for he deemed his marriage with her a jest, a nullity, while his espousal of Lady Jane had been as solemn as the church could make it.

He salved his conscience, too, with the recollection of Anna's facility and faithlessness to her former lover, and made it an excuse for endeavouring utterly to obliterate from his mind all memory of his intrigue with her—for he deemed it nothing more. And now, when finding himself rising into eminence and power at court, he only viewed with fear her probable escape from Noltland, and the custody of Sir Gilbert Balfour; and that fear engendered a sentiment very much akin to hatred—for to such a bitter feeling will the most passionate love turn at times.

The complaints of the Earl of Bedford, lieutenant of the English marches, concerning the incessant forays of the border clans, caused the queen and her ministers to resolve on holding an assize, or court of justice, at Jedburgh, upon the 27th of August, and the nobles, barons, and freeholders of the adjacent shires were summoned by writ to meet their majesties, Henry and Mary, on the 23d, at Peebles; while the magistrates of the former place made preparations to accommodate such a vast retinue of men and horses.

While Bothwell continued warring on the borders, the approach of harvest caused a postponement of the royal visit till the 8th of October, when the queen joined him at Melrose, not alone, or nearly so, (as we are falsely informed by

Buchanan,) but attended by her whole court and council, her archer guard, the officers of justice, and a strong armed force, as her father, James V., had come there thirty years before. King Henry, either from cowardice, caprice, or whim, chose to absent himself, and go no one knew whither, but as the queen shrewdly guessed, to visit one of his innumerable inamoratos.

After capturing many of those moss-troopers who were known to be lawless and predatory, who harried the beeves of their countrymen as well as those of the English, and delivering them to all the brief severities of Jeddart justice, especially our late acquaintances, Edie of Earlshope and Lauchey-with-the-lang-spear; after storming and dismantling many of their dwellings—those strong but solitary peelhouses which are either situated on rocks almost inaccessible, in the depths of forests, or among the pathless wilds of the border morasses—the impetuous Earl turned the whole tide of war and justice against the great master-reiver of that district, John of Park and the clan Elliot, who had hitherto successfully eluded his desultory operations.

Careless of his future fate, and glorying in the dangers of the wandering and Bedouin-like life of the Scottish moss-troopers—now garrisoning some solitary peel that overlooked many a silvan strath and silver stream; now biding in some unfathomed cavern; now stabling their steeds among the hags of some deep moss, from whence they issued all in their armour, with uplifted lances, on the terrified troops of the wardenrie—the young Norwegian engaged with ardour in every desperate foray and attack on which John of Park dispatched him; and his daring, his activity, and indomitable hardihood, made him the byword and the idol of the wild spirits among whom his fortune had cast him; but they knew not that, in every action, in every deed of arms and essay of danger, one thought—one hope—was ever uppermost in his mind, to come within a lance length of the Earl of Bothwell.

On the other hand, that gallant noble having heard of this new desperado, with whose wild chivalry all the borders were ringing, and also of Anna's flight from Noltland, became doubly anxious for his capture, if not for his destruction.

Now many a time the reflection came home to his mind, how bitter were the dregs of the cup of deceit—and now he found how one false step required a hundred to repair it.

These foes had their long wished-for interview sooner than they anticipated.

On hearing of the queen's arrival at Jedburgh, Bothwell had ridden from his stately castle of Hermitage to visit her, and was returning, accompanied only by his gossip and boon companion, Hob of Ormiston. They were both lightly, but well armed, and splendidly mounted; for, by the ancient way, the castle of Hermitage is nearly twenty-five miles distant from Jedburgh.

The latter, a populous town, then twice the size of Berwick (as a letter of the English protector Somerset informs us), with its lofty abbey tower, its embattled ramparts, and six great bastel-houses, had been left behind; and the sun was setting when the Earl and his friend penetrated into the bleak and mountainous district of Liddesdale.

The vale of the winding Hermitage, with its fertile borders of fine holmland and rich copsewood, was then growing dark, and the sun's last rays were fading on the summits of Tudhope-hill and Millenwood-fell, whose steep and silent outlines stood in bold relief against the cold blue sky of October. This region was then almost without roads, and destitute of other inhabitants than the fox and the fuimart, the deer and the eagle. The country was swarming with exasperated outlaws and broken men of every description; and thus the Earl and the Knight rode fast without exchanging a word, for they knew that they ran considerable risk of being roughly interrupted, ere they reached the gates of Hermitage.

"By cock and pie!" grumbled Ormiston, under his barred aventayle, as he breathed his horse a little; "'twas a rash deed and a perilous, to come on this hellicate errand alone, like two knights of the Round Table, when we might so easily have had a hundred good lances at our cruppers."

"Heed it not, good Ormiston!" laughed the Earl, who was in excellent humour with himself and every thing else; for Mary had received him so affably, and thanked his good service so graciously. "Heed it not, I pray thee! If thou reachest the gate of Hermitage with a whole skin, thou canst stuff it well with wine and baked beef; but if thou gettest a Lockerby lick between this and its gates—why"—

"Thou must pay the masses for my soul, as I have not had a plack in my pouch since Michaelmas, and I doubt mickle if Mass John of the Priestthaugh will credit me."

"'Tis said that John of Park wears a corselet of Milan inlaid with gold, and worth a hundred angels. 'Twould be a rare prize for thee, did we meet him here by the Birkwoodshaws."

"By the mass! I hope not; for I have no wish to lose that which will not make the laird of Park one jot the richer—my poor life—which he will have lances enow to send to the devil in a twinkling!"

"If we *are* to be intercepted," rejoined the Earl, "by broken knaves, I wish they would show face while our horses are fresh, and we could run a course on the level sward here with some pith and spirit."

A pause ensued, during which nothing was heard but the dull tramp of the steeds on the grassy waste, its echo from the mountains, the hard breathing of the riders, half suppressed in the hollow of their helmets, and the clinking of their mail. Suddenly the Earl drew up; for an abrupt turn of the path traversing

that beautiful valley, which is ten miles in length, brought them close to a band of some twenty moss-troopers, riding leisurely down the hill side in full harness, with their steel caps and lofty lances glinting above the hazel bushes that tufted the mountains. They were trotting in a circle, and goading on a herd of fifty or sixty fat oxen, which they had harried from the holme of Canonbie Priory, which had been ruined and destroyed by the English, on their retreat from Solway Moss, twenty-four years before.

"Cock and pie!" exclaimed Ormiston.

"Devil take thine oath of cock and pie!" exclaimed the Earl, testily. "It cometh in on all occasions—grave as well as gay. Seest thou not that yonder is a band of Liddesdale lances, and we have now a chance of being overborne, slam, and thrown into the Hermitage, with a stone at our necks, to make amends for our late hard justice at Jedburgh."

"The knaves will scarcely dare to slay thee, who art the queen's lieutenant, and warden of the three marshes; but I doubt mickle if their scruples will extend to Hob Ormiston."

"Think not they will spare either of us, gossip of mine; and thou biddest fair to feed the crows, as the pelicans in thy banner do their young."

"I will be right well content to die in my helmet, if I cannot redeem my life with that of the best knave among them!"

"Then come on, a-God's name!" cried the Earl; and, brandishing his sword, he rode straight towards two of the moss-troopers who had advanced to reconnoitre; while the remainder, spurring at full gallop, and goading on the plunging and maddened herd of cattle with their sharp lances, pursued their path at full speed towards the wildest district of the mountains.

Leaping their horses across the mossy and reedy margin of a mountain runnel, the Earl and his companion rode leisurely to within twenty paces of the other horsemen, and then, for a minute, they all steadily surveyed each other by the fading twilight of the valley.

"These are tall fellows, and their bright armour would seem to announce them gentlemen of name," said the Earl. "Mass! is not that John of Park in the fluted steel?"

"And our Norwegian!"

"Now, by Heaven!" exclaimed the Earl, grasping his long sharp sword, and adjusting his iron gloves; "our bout will be a tough and a bloody one—man to man! 'Tis good chivalry this for a moss-trooping knave. Have at thee, Sir John of Park! I am James, Earl of Bothwell."

"Come on, lord warden, and welcome to a Liddesdale lick!" exclaimed the moss-trooper, putting spurs to his steed. "Thy head or mine, for a hundred unicorns! ha! ha!"—and rushing on, they encountered hand to hand.

Konrad, who had been most anxious to meet Bothwell in a solemn and vengeful single combat, finding himself thus anticipated, turned the whole tide of his wrath upon the gigantic Ormiston, whom he engaged with greater determination than fury.

The Knight of Park wielded his light Jedwood axe with such skill and dexterity, that the fourth blow broke Bothwell's tempered blade like a crystal wand, and left him defenceless.

The powerful borderer pressed on, and, with his axe upraised, was about to hew the Earl down, through head and helmet, to the neck, when the latter suddenly reined back his horse, blew the match of a poitronal (so named from its having a square butt, and being discharged from the breast) and fired! The large bullet passed through the neck of Park, piercing like silk his jointed gorget; he fell forward supinely on his horse's mane, and rolled upon the turf with the blood gushing through the bars of his aventayle.

Leaping from his horse, Bothwell bent for a moment over the wounded man, whose broad bosom heaved convulsively under its steel case; but for a moment only, till, inspired with new strength by the agonies of death and despair, he made one sudden and serpent-like bound, and, swinging his Jedwood axe by both hands, dealt the Earl a furious blow on the helmet, and again sunk prostrate on the turf. The tempered headpiece partly saved the warden, who reeled a pace or two, half blinded by his own blood, for the blade had penetrated and slightly wounded him.

"Base ronion!" he exclaimed, compressing the throat of the dying moss-trooper with his armed heel, "dost thou surrender now?"

"Yes—my soul to God! but *never* my sword to thee," he muttered, and expired.

Faint and giddy, the Earl leant against the saddle of his horse, while the combat was waged fiercely between Konrad and Ormiston, whose horses were alternately beaten down on their haunches by the fury of the conflict; but the skill of the former was completely overborne by that of the latter, when united to his vast muscular power. Often they paused and panted, and surveyed each other with tiger-like ferocity, while their warded weapons were pressed together, and then again they engaged with all the fury of two mad bulls.

Bothwell watched the fray with interest, for he had a firm friend to lose on one hand, and a dangerous foe on the other; thus he was doubly anxious for the success of Ormiston, who, after a long pause, suddenly, by one tremendous back-stroke, that fell like a thunderbolt on the helmet of his younger and more slender adversary, unhorsed and stretched him motionless on the turf, where the strong and ruthless victor sprang upon him like a demon, with his vengeful blade withdrawn for the death-thrust.

"Nay, nay!" said the Earl, staying the hand and weapon. "To Hermitage! to Hermitage!—its gates are strong, and its vaults are deep enow to hold a wilder thief than this. To-morrow I will hold a court in the hall, and consign him to the dule-tree for foraging in the wardenrie. I would rather he should perish thus, by the hand of justice, than by thine or mine; and now let us hence, ho! lest yonder band of knaves leave their quarry under escort on the muir, and return to the rescue."

"And John of Park's dainty suit of mail, and his corselet, worth—how much didst thou say?"

"A pest upon thee, man! I did but jest; yet thou speakest like a rascally Lombard Jew. Is this a time to think of such things? There, hide the carrion under yonder bush, and I will send John of Bolton down the glen, with a few lances, to bring thee the suit of mail, and me the wearer's head. But assist me to bind this knave on horseback, and then, away!"

The Earl was immediately obeyed, and the half senseless captive was lifted on his horse, bound to it by the scarfs of the victors, who took each his horse by the bridle, and following the windings of the glen and stream, whose clear surface was now shining in the starlight, set off on the spur for the famous old border stronghold of Hermitage, which had been built in the thirteenth century by Walter Comyn, Earl of Menteith.

Blind and faint by loss of blood, the Earl almost sank from his horse on reining up at the castle gate, where he was received into the arms of Hepburn of Bolton, and other faithful retainers, who bore him to his apartments.

Alarmed on beholding his dark hair clotted and his features disfigured with blood, when his helmet was removed his attendants conducted him to bed, and despatched a horseman to the village of Castleton for the leech of the district, Mass John of the Priestthaugh, a friar of the suppressed Priory of Canobieholm; while an express, announcing the severe wound of the Earl, and the death of John of Park, was immediately despatched to the queen at Jedburgh, where she was then residing, and occupying a small house that still remains in a sequestered street of that venerable burgh. This edifice is styled (no one knows why, says the Magister Absalom) the House of the Lord Compositor, and some of the tapestry with which it was adorned for her occupation is still preserved.

The moss-trooper who bore the message, Pate of the Prickinghaugh, tarried at every peel-house and cottage in the vale of the Hermitage, to have his thirst quenched and announce the fall of John of Park, the "prettiest man" in all the wide borders; but Pate drained so many horns of whisky and ale, that, by the time he reached Jedburgh, he reversed the order of matters, and created a tremendous sensation among the courtiers by announcing that John of Park had

been victorious, and the great Earl of Bothwell slain.

CHAPTER X. THE PIT OF HERMITAGE.

— — —The dusky vale
Of Hermitage in Liddesdale,
Its dungeons and its towers,
Where Bothwell's turrets brave the air—
Marmion.

In the middle and darker ages, the first chambers of every Scottish castle were a range of vaults, arched with stone, rising from walls usually ten or sixteen feet in thickness. In these the winter stores were kept; but there was *one*, generally the lowest, the darkest, and most damp, which was emphatically named the PIT; where the lord of the barony kept the most refractory of his vassals, and the most hated of his feudal enemies; for every Scottish peer and lesser baron had the right of pit and gallows attached to his fortified dwelling.

In a hundred castles we could name, the pit is immediately below the hall—in Hermitage it was lower still; and though, perhaps, it was no worse than many others in Scotland, to poor Konrad, who, on the day (or night, for both were alike there) succeeding the combat in the valley, found himself a captive therein, never, as he imagined, did human cruelty devise a den more horrible. But he knew not of the *oubliettes* of Linlithgow and St. Andrews.

He found himself buried, entombed, and lost in pitchy darkness.

The atmosphere was close, and damp, and still—so very still, that he heard the regular and monotonous plash of a drop of fetid water, that fell at intervals from one of the long stalactites that hung pendant from the low slimy arch of the vault.

He was cold as death, and miserable, and broken in spirit.

The memory of Park's fall, and his own capture, seemed like a dream; all was chaos and confusion in his mind. Altogether, he had but an indistinct sense of existence; and after a time became without one idea of where he was. A torpor was stealing over him, conduced by the monotonous plash, plash, plashing of the before-mentioned drop into the little pool below it; at times, it seemed to echo

through the vault like the fall of a goblet of water, for to this only sound his sharpened sense had become painfully acute.

Still the benumbing torpor continued gradually to steal over him, and at length he slept on the damp, moist floor of that frightful vault, which yet survives, and is recorded in the Scottish annals as being the scene of a terrible event.

He slumbered; but even then his mind was active and sleepless. His last waking thoughts were of Anna; his first dream was of his home—and old Norway, in all its stern beauty of wood, and rock, and mountain, rose before him. He saw his native hills, with their blue and hoary summits of thunder-riven rock, towering far into the azure sky in shadowy masses; and he could trace the rough paths where he had often pursued the bear and the roebuck, diminished to threads in the distance, as they wound up precipices overhung by the gloomy pine. He saw grey Bergen on its chasmed cliff, and Christiana's rock-bound bay. Old and familiar faces were before him; loved voices were in his ear; and, with a sob of astonishment and joy, he awoke.

A lambent and flickering light was burning near him; like a great glow-worm, it glimmered in the fetid atmosphere. He thought some spirit of the darkness was visible: to this day the Norse are full of such superstitions; but though his eyes (after being nearly twelve hours in such intense darkness) ached on beholding the lamp, he soon perceived the dun outline of a human countenance peering into the gloom, with its eyes shaded by a hand.

It was the saucy face of French Paris, Bothwell's favourite and most trusted page, to whom he had given particular charge of Konrad, that none other should approach him, or become acquainted with the important secret he possessed.

"Where the devil art thou?" he asked; "for I cannot see the length of my own nose in this accursed pit. O ho! good-morrow—I see thee now. So thou art the rider who was with John of Park when he so sorely wounded my lord, who now lieth in deadly peril."

"If thy lord is the Earl of Bothwell, I would thank God for the tidings, if I dared to thank him for aught so unchristian. How dares he to confine me in such a place as this?"

"Lest thou shouldst slip through his fingers like a Teviot eel," replied the page with a grin. "Thou art not a Scot, by thine accent; how camest thou to be involved with my lord, the Earl, in *that* affair—thou wottest of what I mean? I am somewhat curious about it. 'Twas I who conducted thee to his countess, and then to the postern door at Bothwell castle."

"True—I remember thee now."

"Why art thou here?"

"By a combination of circumstances over which I had no immediate control; because I knew not the merits, and saw not the issue, of this border war, in which

I had taken service; by destiny—or the guidance of an evil spirit—which you will.”

”Holy Paul!” said the page, retreating a pace or two, but immediately advancing again, for he was burning with curiosity to learn the Earl’s secret. ”If thou talkest thus, I must have thee burned for sorcery!”

”Thou! And who art thou?” asked Konrad, with more surprise than scorn.

”One whose favour may set thee free, but whose anger may leave thee here to rot,” replied the pert page, assuming an aspect of dignity. ”Dost thou not know that thy life is in my hands, and that, instead of leaving thee the choice food and good wine sent thee by the Captain of Hermitage, I may keep them and leave thee to perish, even as the Knight of Dalhousie perished here two hundred years ago. Ha! dost thou see these relics?” continued the young ruffian, raising his light and revealing a few human bones, and part of a jaw, lying amid the little pool before mentioned, and amid which the monotonous splash of the drop constantly made concentric circles to glitter and expand.

”What terrible history is concealed here!” exclaimed Konrad, with a lowering brow.

”A history well known alike in Lothian and Liddesdale,” replied the page, drawing nearer him with a horror that he could not repress; ”and a foul shame it is to Christian men, that these poor bones have lain here so long unburied. But verily the place hath few tenants.”

”Whose are they?” asked Konrad, with deep interest.

”As Heaven hears me, the spirit that once tenanted these poor remains was that of as brave a knight as ever rode to battle!” rejoined the page, with a sudden earnestness; for the aspect of the mouldering bones, lying amid that green and slimy pool, and the gloom of the black dungeon, were not without producing a strong effect on his feelings and fancy. ”Listen! It was in the year of our Redemption 1341, when David II. sat upon the Scottish throne. In those days, when the southern Edwards, with all the chivalry of England, the tribes of Wales, the kerne of Ireland, the knights of Normandy, Guienne, and Aquitaine, and all the lanzknechts of Flanders and Alinayne, strove for many a year on many a bloody field to win broad Scotland to their crown, this stronghold of Hermitage belonged to one of the bravest of the Scottish patriots, Sir William Douglas, the Lord of Liddesdale, whose feats of arms had won him the title of Flower of Chivalry. His dearest friend and most loved companion in arms was Sir Alexander Ramsay, Lord of Dalhousie, on the wooded Esk, one of those brave knights whose mailed bosoms had formed in all these wicked wars the best bulwarks of Scottish liberty. In every field, Douglas and Dalhousie were side by side in rivalry and love; at the rescue of Black Agnes, the Lady of Dunbar, and at that brave battle on the Muir of Edinburgh, where the banner of Guy Count of Namur was beaten to the earth, and his Flemish bands destroyed.

"It chanced in these wars, that Ramsay, having won by storm the strong castle of Roxburgh, King David bestowed on him the sheriffdom of that district, an office which, by ancient usage, had ever appertained to the lords of Hermitage and Liddesdale.

"From that hour a deadly and a mortal hatred possessed the heart of Douglas; and on his knees before the altar of St. Bryde, in Douglas-dale, he made a deep and impious vow of vengeance. Hearing that the new sheriff was administering justice in the kirk of the blessed Mary at Hawick, he entered the town at the head of his vassals; and the Knight of Dalhousie, having no suspicion of injury from his old friend and comrade in arms, was easily taken at vantage, wounded, and overpowered.

"Stripped of his armour, and loaded with chains, he was dragged through many a wild moss and moorland to this strong fortress, and *here* into this deep vault his captor thrust him down, manacled and bleeding with all his rankling wounds, and here the doomed man was left to die!

"It is a dark story, and I see thou startest. Here the wounded knight was left to struggle with hunger and with thirst, with cold and with agony. Above the place of his confinement there lay a heap of corn, and through a joint in the arch the grains fell one by one, yet few and far between—even as the water now drops from the same place—and with these he prolonged life for seventeen days, despite the agony of his festering wounds. On the seventeenth he died!

"And here his bones still lie, for the dampness of the vault has preserved them."[*]

[*] Some of these remains were found by Sir W. Scott, and by him presented to the Earl of Dalhousie. He was taken on the 20th June, sayeth the "Black Book of Scone."—*Mag. Absalom*.

"Rest him, God!" ejaculated Konrad, with a shudder which he could not repress.

"Such will be thy fate if thou art left here!"

"Whatever Heaven hath in store for me is welcome. I am tired of life."

"Thou snufflest like a Reformer. What! tired of life, and thou so young?"

"'Tis the verity!" responded the prisoner with a sigh; "but what thinkest thou, page, will be my fate?"

"Why, if my lord dieth of his wound, thou shalt assuredly hang over Hermitage gate; if he recovers, thou shalt hang, too, as a disturber of the borders, and be gibbeted somewhere to feed the crows, and frighten thy comrades. So, it is hang any way!" added the page, with one of his malicious grins.

A deep sigh, inspired as much perhaps by anger as by grief, heaved Kon-

rad's breast; but he made no reply.

"How now!" exclaimed the page, as through the open door of the dungeon the report of a falconet on the tower-head came faintly down the windings of the narrow stair that led to the vault; "that will be a raid of the Elliots or Armstrongs! They will all be riding to revenge thy comrade, John of Park; if so, thou wilt soon have company here. But lo, now—eat and drink while thou mayest; and omit not to bless Sir John Hepburn of Bolton, who sent thee this good fare in lieu of oatcakes and cold water."

Another and another falconet rang on the bartisan of the great tower of Hermitage, and, double-locking the door of the pit, French Paris hurried away.

CHAPTER XI. BOTHWELL REVIVES AN EARLY DREAM.

Fiorello.—Gramercy for the boon!
Seek, sir, henceforth, the love of those you trust,
And never more seek mine. Sir, fare you well!
Excuse the blunder which beguiled me hither;
And hie you, if conveniently you can,
To some more distant spot than whence you came.
The Virgin Widow.

Let us change the scene.

Clad in a rich gown of damask furred with miniver, a white satin doublet, and hose of russet velvet, the Earl was reclining on a well-cushioned settle, or what would now be named a sofa. A velvet cap was drawn well over his brow, to conceal the bandaging that retained certain cooling and healing herbs upon the scar which the moss-trooper's axe had inflicted, and which Mass John of the Priesthaugh had carefully dressed about an hour before.

The great noble was in a dreamy mood; for he too had his visions, like poor Konrad, who occupied the terrible pit where Dalhousie died, some eighty feet below. The boom of the brass falconets was barely discernible in the remote apartment of the Earl, so massive were its walls, so close its wainscoting, and so thick the tapestry that lined it; and he slept on undisturbed by the warlike sound.

He dreamt of Anna; her upbraiding eyes were fixed on his, and he heard her voice like a confused murmur in his ear; every expression of her face was before him as of old, by turns tender and love-like, haughty and sad. Then her features changed, and rapidly as thought became those of his unhappy and almost forgotten Countess, in all her pallid beauty, her infantile smiles and black beseeching eyes. Anon they changed again, and, fading or altering into others, grew more and more like those of Mary the Queen, with her pure broad open brow, and deep dark thoughtful eye; her aquiline nose and haughty nostrils; her smiling mouth and dimpled chin. A sound awoke him.

He started, and arose to find the very face of which he dreamt before him; the same eyes and laughing little mouth, so full of archness and drollery.

It was, indeed, Mary the Queen, in her little lace coif, her velvet hood and ruff, her long diamond stomacher and longer fardingale, just as we see her in the old paintings at Holyrood. She was leaning on the arm of her sister, the stately Countess of Argyle; the Earl of Moray, Hob Ormiston, and French Paris, were grouped, with several ladies, a pace or two behind, and all were attentively regarding Bothwell, whose strong figure, cased in his close-fitting vest and velvet hose, seemed a model of manly symmetry and grace, as his features, dark, regular, and classic, did of that kind of beauty which we find in the pictures of the old Italians—the white and martial forehead, with its short black curly hair, the straight nose and jetty eyebrows, the curved mouth, and well-defined chin.

"Madame—Madame! is this a dream?" exclaimed Bothwell, starting from his couch, and, though giddy with debility, kneeling before her with a reverence almost unknown in the Scottish court since her father's days. "To what is my house of Hermitage indebted for the unmerited honour of this sudden visit? Have the Liddesdale thieves been at Jedburgh gates?"

"Oh, Jesu Maria!—no," said the Queen. "I hope that if all the Elliots came, and the Armstrongs too, that with Erskine's archer guard and the burgesses, we could have maintained yonder town, with its tall bastel-houses, till the lord warden sent his lances to our rescue."

"Then hath the English marshal of Berwick or his prickers dared"—began the Earl again, as with a kindling eye he looked round for his sword.

"Nay, nay, my dear Earl—thou thinkest ever but of blows and battle. Thou hast none other than thy dull-witted messenger to thank for a visit from all this good company."

"Pate of Prickinghaugh!"

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* the same," replied Mary, laughing at the name. "Well, this Maitre Preekinhaw brought us tidings that thou wert either dead or dying. So, setting out with a small train from Jedburgh, with my noble brother, the Earl, (here Bothwell, with an eye that was full of irony, exchanged a profound bow

with Moray,) I rode hither, intent on learning in person the truth or falsity of this sad news; and that I might, if they were so, avenge on the whole surname of Elliot, the loss of the only Scottish peer that would draw his sword at the command of his sovereign. So you see, Monseigneur Bothwell, that whatever the Protestants say of poor Mary Stuart, she is not ungrateful for service promptly rendered."

"Oh, Madame!" said the Earl, in a thick voice, as he clasped his hands, and bent his eyes on the ground; "you overpower me! I never deemed thee otherwise than something angelic, and such I find thee now."

"Ah!" replied the Queen merrily, as she seated herself; "every pretty woman is so in the eyes of a brave gallant!"

The Earl bowed profoundly; but how little did the gay and thoughtless queen divine the secret sentiment that made his voice to tremble, and his eye, that was ever so clear, and calm, and dark, to flash and sparkle.

While French Paris and little Calder served round confections, refreshments, and wine, in slender Venetian glasses, fruit on silver salvers, and milk-possets in crystal jugs; and while the grave Earl of Moray, the burly Hob of Ormiston, and the courtly young Lieutenant of the Archers, chatted with the ladies at the further end of that long and stately chamber, the lofty and painted casements of which overlooked the steep bank on which the double donjon of the castle rose, and from its height commanded a view of the far-stretching Hermitage, winding like an azure snake through the green and pastoral valley—the queen, with all that vivacity and French gaiety of manner which were so natural to her, was detailing the particulars of that celebrated ride to Hermitage, which was to bear so prominent a place in all the histories of her actions, and which has always been adduced by her enemies as a proof of what had never entered her mind—a passion for Bothwell, to whom she had never evinced any other sentiment than gratitude.

On hearing the alarming tidings of his death, as brought by Pate of Prickinghaugh, she had immediately set out from Jedburgh; and, accompanied by her brother Moray and a slender retinue, penetrated into the wild and mountainous district between Liddesdale and Teviotdale—a journey twenty-five miles in length—obstructed by every local difficulty; steep rocks and deep morasses, foaming waters, peat hags, and slippery scaurs—to her a terra incognita—where the solitary peels of moss-troopers and savage outlaws, perched like eagles' nests on the hill-summits, overlooked the pastoral glens below. In an almost impassable morass her horse sank to the saddle-girths; and she was only rescued from her perilous condition with the utmost difficulty. The place is still named *The Queen's Mire*.

Of all these past dangers she spoke with a raillery that made yet more charming her great beauty, which the exercise of so long a ride in the pure morn-

ing air had greatly enhanced; and the Earl, as he gazed upon her, thought in his secret heart that never was there a being more beautiful and glorious.

Anna and his Countess were alike forgotten!

Mary, the dream of his boyhood at the gay Tournelles—Mary, the bright, the beautiful, and joyous girl of seventeen—rose on his memory as he had seen her, when bestowed in marriage on the sickly Dauphin. Now that being, so long and so hopelessly his idol, was before him, expanded into one of those magnificent women that are believed to exist only in the most enthusiastic visions of the poet and the painter; she was with him, seated by his side, in his own stronghold of Hermitage, amid the wilderness of Liddesdale.

They were looking into each other's dark eyes, and Bothwell felt his heart tremble; for thoughts both wild and strange were floating through his mind. But they faded away when again he gazed on the pure serene brow and clear full gaze of Mary, who in her heedlessness and conscious rectitude, never dreamt of the view the Earl was taking, and the censorious world would yet take, of that unfortunate visit to his castle of Hermitage.

"And so it was the falsity of this drunken jackman, Pate of the Pricking-haugh, that led your grace into this deadly peril," said Bothwell. "Sir John of Bolton," he added to his friend, who stood near, and who, at a silver chain, wore an embossed key of the same metal, indicative of his office as Captain of Hermitage; "thou wilt look well to this, and see if a month or two in the pit will cure him of exceeding in his cups for the future."

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the Queen, turning pale, "God and Saint Mary forbid! If I forgive him, surely thou well mayest."

"Your Majesty will excuse me—I am sufficiently rebuked by that glance of displeasure. But this man is only a rascally border prickler."

"True, my lord," said Hepburn; "but one over whom thou hast no control."

"How! doth he not follow my banner?"

"Yes—but merely as an excuse to plunder the Elliots on the one hand and the Armstrongs on the other. He brings twenty tall troopers, all well-lanced and horsed; his kinsman, Watt of the Puddingburn, brings as many more from his tower on the Liddle; and these would each and all be notable disturbers of the wardenrie, did it not suit Pate's humour at present to follow your banner."

"Droll personages!" said the Queen; "but, Lord Bothwell, thou shouldest feel nought but gratitude to this moss-trooper, when it is to his mistake alone thou art indebted for this visit from me."

"I was upon the point of saying so," rejoined the Earl, who felt, he knew not why, a confused sense of awkwardness and timidity, hitherto unknown to him; and this caused pauses in the conversation which served to increase his confusion; for the more he taxed his mind for gay topics, the more seriously he

became embarrassed.

"Fidélé," said the Queen, in her softest tone to a favourite Italian greyhound, which, with a silver bell jangling at its neck, leaped gracefully upon her brocaded dress. "Fair Fidélé, of all the world thou alone lovest thy mistress best; and in good sooth I may well love thee better than the world, for thou lovest me for myself alone. Ah! Monsieur Bothwell, thou knowest not how dearly I love all little dogs, and parrots, and pigeons, and every little animal. I have quite a large family to feed every morning at Holyrood. Monsieur my uncle, the Cardinal de Guise, has sent me a beautiful cage full of red-legged partridges; and my kinsman, the Marquis d'Elboeuff, has brought me from Madame my aunt, the good Prioress of Rheims, a vase full of the most beautiful little fishes, which I mean to put into Lochmaben. I fear thou wilt think all this very childish in me, who am a queen—and queen of such an austere people;" and, while shaking a bunch of grapes at the leaping hound, she began to sing—

"Bon jour, mon coeur,
 Bon jour, ma douce vie!
 Bon jour, mon oeil,
 Bon jour, ma chere amie!"

She ceased suddenly; the hound looked up wistfully in her face, her eyes filled with tears, and Bothwell seemed disturbed.

"Your Majesty is thinking of France?" said he in a low tone.

"Nay, I am thinking of poor David Rizzio," replied the Queen sadly. "'Twas a song of his. But I have heard it elsewhere."

"You loved much to hear this old man sing."

"Oh yes! for the long forgotten memories, the buried hopes, and all the tenderness of his soft French, and softer Italian airs, called up within me—drew me ever away from the bitter present to brood upon the happy past, or to muse upon the dubious future. Oh, thou canst not know how dearly I love music! Music and sunshine—I wish I was a bird! Poor old Rizzio!" she continued, with sparkling eyes. "Though indifferent in person, he was the best in the suite of the Count de Mezezzo, the Savoyard ambassador; and was a gentleman of such attainments as few in Scotland save thyself can boast. How my heart fires within me, when I think of the dark and savage noblesse who destroyed him! So illiterate and unlettered; and yet these base barons, not one of whom could sign his own barbarous name, were the men who broke my gallant father's heart, who debarred my mother the rights of sepulchre, and who have dared to become the spiritual judges of my people, levelling in the dust the church that was founded on a rock,

and against which not even the gates of hell were to prevail!"

"For Heaven's sake, madame, hush!—walls have ears."

"*Les murielles ont des orielles*; it was a saying of *ma bon mere*, Catharine de Medicis," said the Queen ironically.

"Nothing that is said in Hermitage shall go beyond its walls," replied the Earl, who was pleased to find that the courtiers at the lower end of the room were intently viewing the landscape, or observing a game at Troy between the Lady Argyle and the flippant page, French Paris, who was a great proficient. The whole group was partly concealed by a loose festoon of arras that divided the chamber. "But," continued the Earl, who despised Rizzio as an upstart favourite, and, like all the nobility, regretted his death but little; "the destruction of a royal favourite is nothing new in Scotland. There was the Raid of Lauder brig, where Angus and the nobles hanged half King James's court over the parapet in horse-halters—but I beseech your majesty to think of these things no more."

"True! Few can recall the past with pleasure, and Mary Stuart least of all," replied the Queen, whose melancholy eyes filled again with tears; and then Bothwell knew that she was thinking of the weak and profligate debauchee, on whom, in the first flush of youth and love, she had thrown away her hand and heart, and crown; "so pray, my good lord, let us talk of whatever is most pleasing to yourself."

"Then I must talk of—thee."

"Ah!" rejoined the Queen, with one of those artless and engaging smiles which a pretty woman always assumes on receiving a compliment; "and do you really think often of me?"

"Madame," replied the Earl in a low voice, while his colour came and went, and he could hear his heart beating; "I have thought more than I have ever dared to tell."

"Jesu Maria!" laughed the Queen, clapping her white hands; "have you lost your tongue?"

"Nay, madame—my heart!"

"That is very serious—but search for another, Monseigneur Bothwell."

The voice of the Earl trembled as he replied, "I want no other but—*thine!*"

At this daring avowal, a blush crossed the queen's cheek; but, supposing that the Earl was merely pursuing a jocular strain of gallantry, she replied—

"Oh fie! remember, Lord Earl, that at Versailles, the old hunting-lodge of Francis I. (all that is long—oh! very long—ago), thou didst taunt me with being without a heart."

"I did, as I now remember me," said Bothwell, over whose brow a shadow passed. "That was ere your grace became Dauphiness—yet it seems as if 'twere yesterday. But you have a heart, madame—one that is warm, affectionate, and

well worth the winning.”

”Well!” replied Mary, rising with a cold and haughty smile, as she thought of Darnley; ”it is already lost and won.”

”By one who appreciates its value?”

The queen gave him a glance full of reproach, for she felt all the taunt contained in the quiet query.

”I hope so!” she said.

”Dear madame,” replied the Earl, in the same low, earnest voice; ”you can neither deceive yourself nor me by these replies. The Lord Darnley is my foe; but you are aware that I speak more in a sentiment of dutiful love towards your majesty, than enmity to him who stirred up John of Park, and the whole clan Elliot, to slay me. On him thou hast sacrificed a love the bravest of our Scottish peers, and the proudest princes of Europe—Charles of France, Carlos of Spain, and the Archduke of Austria—have sued for in vain. Oh, madame!” continued the Earl, with pathos in his voice, while his cheek flushed and his eye kindled as he recalled the boyish love of his early day, when he had first seen Mary at the court of France. ”I know that the human heart can love truly, fondly, and sincerely, but once—and once only. Let that love be blighted or crushed, and all future impressions are but fancies, to be begun with a smile and relinquished without a sigh. Oh, yes! there is an amount of love, of ardour, of agony, despair, that we feel but once, and then we become deadened and callous. Oh! who in a second love ever felt the same freshness, the same depth of anxiety, the same fear and hope and joy, that alternately filled his heart in the dawn of that first passion, that grew like a flower in Eden, and fills the whole creation with happiness, rendering us blind and oblivious of all save the object we love?”

”And since when has your volatile lordship known all this?” asked Mary, with her usual raillery.

”Madame, since I first beheld—thee!” replied the Earl; and, borne away by the gush of his old and long-cherished love, he sank on his knee, and pressed to his lips the hand of Mary, over whose fair brow and beautiful face a deep and crimson blush of anger passed, as the shadow of a summer cloud flits over a corn-field.

”Rise, my lord!” she said with a hauteur that froze her admirer. ”Lord Bothwell, thou art in a dream!”

”It was, indeed, a dream,” replied the Earl sadly, as he thought of the double vows that separated them for ever. ”St. Bothan help me! a dream of other days, that can return no more! Oh, madame, I pray you, pardon me”—

”I do pardon thee,” replied the Queen, with one of her calm smiles; but added, significantly, ”I think ’tis time we were riding from Hermitage.”

”So soon! after your escape—your fatigue—and when a storm is gathering?”

See, the peaks of Millenwood-fell and Tudhope-head are veiled in mist."

"This instant!" replied Mary, with one of those gestures which there was no disputing. "Jane, Lady Argyle, we are about to depart. Sir John Hepburn, summon our train."

"Permit me, madame, to accompany you. Ho!—French Paris—my armour!"—

"Lord Bothwell—in thy wounded state! I command thee, nay!"

"True—true; I thank your majesty," stammered the Earl, whose head swam between the effect of his wound and this interview. "But Hob Ormiston, with his train of lances, will see you to the gates of Jedburgh."

In five minutes more Mary was gone, after being only two hours in Hermitage, as the Lord Scrope saith quaintly, "to Bothwell's great pleasure and contentment." There was a clatter of horses in the court, a discharge of brass cannon from the keep, and all again was as still in the great and solitary castle of Hermitage as in the pit below it.

From a window the wounded Earl watched the train of the queen and her ladies, the tall and mail-clad figures of Ormiston and his men, with their long spears glinting in the glow of the western sun, as they followed the windings of the mountain stream, and traversed the long and desolate dell that led to Jedburgh.

They disappeared in the distance; and then, overcome by excitement and loss of blood, the Earl threw himself upon a couch, from which he did not rise for many days.

On Mary's return to Jedburgh, a severe cold, caught during this visit to Hermitage, ended in a fever, that was aggravated by a pain or constitutional weakness in her side, of which she had long complained; and notwithstanding that she lay on a couch of sickness so deadly, that Monsieur Picauet, her physician, despaired of her life, the conduct of Darnley was singularly cruel and ungrateful. A letter of the French ambassador shews, that he treated with contempt the tidings sent to him of the queen's illness, and that he remained spending his time in idleness and dissipation at Glasgow. It is probable that though his absence wounded her pride, it caused her no great grief, as she had almost ceased to love him.

The Earl of Bothwell, though not without a strong dash of that profligacy which tainted the Scottish nobles in the age succeeding the Reformation, was immensely inferior as a *roué* to Darnley; whose coldness, insolence, and brutality, formed a vivid contrast to the artfully preferred addresses, readily performed services, and gallant demeanour, of the handsome Earl.

A month passed away.

Bothwell remained at Hermitage under the care of Mass John; the queen at

Jedburgh under the more able hands of M. Picauet, and slowly recovering from her illness. Hob Ormiston, and other barons, guarded her with a thousand lances, while Darnley remained at his father's house of Limmerfield, near Glasgow, willing away the days in hunting and hawking by Kelvin grove and Campsie fells; and spending the nights in dicing, drinking, and "wantonnesse" in the bordels and hostellaries of the Tron and Drygate.

Meanwhile, Konrad continued to be a close prisoner at Hermitage; for the Earl, though urged on one hand by Ormiston to dispatch him by brief border law, was advised on the other, by the gentle Hepburn of Bolton, to transmit him to the Justice Court.

Thus he wavered; for a sentiment of pity, while it withheld the execution of either of these measures, struggled with a sense of the danger that might spring from the secret his prisoner possessed; and then at times there came a demon's whisper that urged the proud Earl to destroy!

Konrad neither sued for mercy or liberty; but feeling happy in the nourished hope that Anna was now under the sure protection of the queen, he awaited with patience whatever fate had in store for him.

Thus day after day rolled on, and he never saw other face than that of French Paris; who, as the most trusted of all Bothwell's numerous retinue, was alone permitted to approach him.

CHAPTER XII.

ALISON CRAIG.

And death and life she hated equally,
 And nothing saw, for her despair,
 But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
 No comfort anywhere;
 Remaining utterly confused with fears,
 And ever worse with growing time,
 And ever unrelieved by dismal tears,
 And all alone in crime.

Tennyson.

Poor Anna! All that she had made Konrad endure by her desertion, was now

endured by her in turn, with the additional bitterness, that the retribution was merited; and the memory of the last glance of Konrad's melancholy eyes, when he parted with her at the gate of the hostellary, was indelibly engraven on her mind.

The Earl of Morton, the most treacherous, cruel, and debauched man of that profligate age, had her now completely in his power, and could, when he chose, make her his victim either by secret flattery or open force; he could keep her in some quiet dwelling of the city, or send her to his strong castle of Dalkeith, where she would never have been heard of again; but this godly upholder of the new faith preferred the former and more gentle course.

In St. Mary's Wynd, not many yards from the famous Red Lion, and on the west side thereof, stood a small edifice, having three rows of gothic windows, the upper being more than half on the roof, all grated by half circular baskets of iron, and having a low-ribbed doorway, bearing on its lintel a pious legend in old contracted Latin.

In Catholic days this had been a convent for Cistertian nuns, and an hospital founded and dedicated in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary, by some pious citizen, whose name and era local history has failed to record. This hospital was so poor, that its inmates were supported by the voluntary contributions of the good and charitable; its revenues were so small, that the salary of the chaplain in 1499 was only sixteen shillings and eight-pence yearly.

The change of manners and religion had wrought their wonders here as elsewhere; for the little gothic oratory, where the fair Cisterians in their white tunics, scapularies, and hoods, had offered up their prayers to God, and to his mother their patron; the little hospital, where the sisters of mercy had attended to the sick and infirm; the kitchen, where they fed the poor; and the gloomy dormitories, where they slept on their hard pallets between the nocturnal and the matin prayers—had all been wofully perverted from such purposes; for, favoured by the Earl of Arran and other gay courtiers, on the universal plunder of the temporalities, this edifice had been gifted to Alison Craig, a celebrated courtesan, who, though living under protection of the "godly Erl of Arrane," as Knox tells us, in language which we choose not to repeat, yet contrived to be on very friendly terms with many other nobles, some of whom were his deadly enemies.

Though deeming her a lady of high birth, the appearance of Alison Craig did not prepossess the timid Anna much in her favour, when, on the noon of the day after parting with Konrad, she was introduced by Morton with much mock formality. The dame was seated before a little mirror of thick plate-glass inserted in a ponderous oak frame, that nearly filled up the recess of a little window, overlooking what had once been the convent garden, but was now a piece of waste ground, extending to the back of a neighbouring close. The windows at the

other end overlooked the wynd, which was then a central and great thoroughfare, being the only entrance to the city from the southern roads.

The apartment was in confusion; a broken sword and a velvet mantle were lying on the floor, attesting that a brawl had taken place there overnight; the candles had all burned down in their sockets, and the girandoles were covered with grease; a close smell of wine and perfume made the atmosphere of the paneled chamber oppressive.

Alison Craig was tall and corpulent, and about thirty-five years of age. Her features, which were not without beauty, were somewhat coarse, and undisguisedly bold and wanton in expression. She wore no other head-dress than her own luxuriant hair extravagantly frizzled, and having a bob-jewel dropping on her forehead, which was as white as daffodil water could make it. She wore a huge double ruff, a long peaked stomacher of damask brocade, a petticoat of prodigious circumference, and sleeves barrellled and hooped; while, contrary to the modest fashion of the time, she displayed very much of a fair neck and full bosom, which the Earl of Morton immediately kissed on his entrance, to the no small astonishment of Anna, who began to think it was the fashion of the country.

A slovenly damsel was rouging the pallid cheeks of the fair Cyprian, whose plump fingers were toying with a rare jewel, that Morton recognised as one he had frequently seen at the neck of King Henry, whom he knew to be one of Alison's patrons, though a mortal foe to Arran, Chatelherault, and all the clan of Hamilton.

"Sweetheart, good-morrow," said the Earl, running his fingers through the perfumed tresses of Alison. "I have brought thee a pretty page, of whom, as thou valuest the friendship of Morton, particular care must be taken."

"What is the friendship of Morton to me?" she asked with an air of pretty disdain. "Thou seest this bauble?"

"'Twas once that blockhead, Darnley's. Woman, thou holdest that which has been worn by the most beautiful queen in Europe!"

"And may be worn by a queen again, gif this giglet Mary were dead or set aside."

"How?" said Morton, knitting his brow, for the woman's insolence irritated him, "at what dost thou dare to hint?"

"What Darnley has dared to promise—here, ay—here in this very chamber!"

"Go to, woman! thou art stark mad, and he had been drunk, like a fool as he is. But let us not quarrel, pretty sweetheart; for seest thou"—and here the Earl whispered something in the ear of the woman, whose eyes were lighted with a malicious smile as she surveyed Anna. "Thou wilt see to this? I know thee of old, sweet dulcibelle—eh?"

"My lord, when thou art good to me, I will obey thy pleasure in all things."

"And now tell me what news are abroad in the city, for I have not been within its gates yet?"

"Nought but Bothwell's expedition to the borders, and the queen's wrath at the luke-warm loyalty and cautious valour of such as thee, and thy boon-fellow the Earl of Moray."

Morton smiled, as he patted her painted cheek, and said—

"Thou art sarcastic, and out of humour, sweet mistress; what lackest thou?"

"A runlet of right Rhenish to bathe me in. Thou knowest, Lord Earl, that all the great ladies of our court bathe so; for its powers, say physicians, are miraculous on the skin."

"Thou shalt have the Rhenish, only excuse me, I pray, ever drinking any of that wine with thee thereafter. Any thing more?"

"Perfume: I lack some, and must have it from Monsieur Picauet."

"How! will no other than the queen's physician and perfumer serve thee? Thou shalt have the essences, too, and"—

"A hundred angels of silver, too—eh?"

"A hundred yelling devils!" replied the Earl.

"I will not require thy page with so many attendants."

"Thou art a cunning gipsy," said Morton, grinning under his long beard, and taking a purse from his girdle, where (as pockets were not then invented) it hung beside his dagger. "Here are eighty for thee; and not one devilish tester more can I give, even were it to purchase my own salvation—so, now let us kiss and be friends."

Alison was now in excellent humour; she sang a few snatches of "Gilquiskar," and "Troly loly Lemendow," two merry old ditties, while she played with Morton's preposterous beard, and acted the coquette, and he affected the gallant—each in secret despising the other. But after a time, relinquishing the frizzling of her locks and adjustment of her Elizabethan pearl bobs, Alison turned her attention to the crowd of jostling passengers, that now, as the morning had advanced, and the Porte of St. Mary was open, streamed through the wynd.

Meanwhile that Anna, timid, confused, and broken-spirited, in her character of page, had retired a little into the background, Alison Craig was amusing the Earl by quizzing the appearance and gait of every person who passed—handling them with all due severity.

"Marry, come up! look, Lord Earl! yonder goeth Master George Buchanan, in his conical beaver and threadbare cloak, with a great book under his arm. Tantony! but he looketh very rusty to be Director of the Chancery—but, lo!" she exclaimed, as a burly country gentleman, in a whalebone ruff, and barrelled doublet of green broad cloth, with a great broadsword belted about him, and his lady riding lovingly on a pillion behind him, ambled up the street; "'Tis the old

laird of Braid, and Dame Marjory Fairly, his gudewife.”

”They are just married, sweetheart—else why ride they so lovingly?”

”Nay! they have been wedded these thirty years, and had two tall sons shot at the siege of Leith, by Monsieur Brissac,” replied the lady, with an explosion of laughter. ”But the laird is a gomerall, and his dame in her great tub-fardingale—O Jesu! see yonder gay galliard, with a feather in his hat and a falcon on his thumb!”

”’Tis Master Sebastian, who playeth the viol at Holyrood.”

”Ah! the Savoyard. And, lo you! there goeth the Knight of Spott, without a cloak to hide his threadbare doublet. Well! were I thee, Sir Knight, I would buy me worse garments, or avoid the city. But I warrant he hath spent his last bodle on a can of Flemish beer at the Red Lion.”

”He is a gentleman of my following,” said the Earl with a frown. ”His gudesire spent his all in the wars of King James, and fell at Flodden like a true Scottish knight, with his pennon before and his kindred behind him; his son, else, had been a richer man to-day.”

”Gramercy me! here cometh Mistress Cullen, too, in her top-knots and flaunters, walking daintily, as if she trod on egg-shells, with a lace ruff under her saucy chin, and her nose in the air. St. Mary! she wears three bob-jewels while I have only one.”

A very pretty woman, whose face was shewn to the utmost advantage by her little white coif, and whose uplifted train displayed her handsome ankles cased in stockings of red silk, stepped mincingly up the wynd; and as this was a lady with whom Morton had an intrigue, and whose husband he ultimately put to death in furtherance thereof, he assumed his beaver-hat and walking-sword, hurriedly kissed Alison, and patted the cheek of the page, saying significantly—

”When next we meet again, little one, I hope to see thee in more fitting attire.”

But as he bowed himself out, by the bright glance of his cunning eyes Anna knew with terror that the secret of her sex had been discovered.

And she was left alone with this dangerous woman, of whose character she was wholly ignorant, though her surprise and suspicion were naturally excited by the too evident lightness of her demeanour. As the worthy Dame Craig knew neither French nor Norwegian, and Anna had no Scottish, the latter was wholly at a loss to make her story known; and resolved to await in patience an opportunity of ending all her tribulation, by throwing herself at the feet of Mary, which she doubted not to have soon an opportunity of doing, when in the train of a lady who was on such terms of intimacy with the most powerful nobles of the court.

On waking next morning, she found on a chair by her couch, in lieu of the well-worn doublet with which poor Konrad had disguised her, a double ruff of Brussels lace, a peaked stomacher of blue Genoese velvet, sewn with seed pearls,

and a skirt of blue Florence silk, covered with the richest needlework: there was a suite of beautiful jewels for her hair; bracelets, and a carcanet of rubies for her neck, all of one set. These, and the entrance of one of Dame Alison's flippant and tawdry damsels, announced to Anna that now all disguise was at an end.

The jewels had been sent by the Earl, who, by force or fraud (but seldom by purchase), had always an immense assortment of such things at his castle of Dalkeith, in the vaults of which he is said by tradition to have buried twelve casks filled with plate, precious stones, and bullion, the plunder of desecrated churches, demolished abbeys, and stormed fortalices.

At ten in the morning he paid her a visit, fresh from St. Giles' church, where, to please the public, he had been compelled to attend one of Mr. John Knox's furious ebullitions against "antichrist and the belly-gods of Rome," and against that queen and court who were introducing into the land "muffs and masks, fans and toupets, whilk better became the harlots of Italie than the modest and discreet women of Scotland."

The gallant Earl was intoxicated by the air of innocence and purity that pervaded the beauty and saddened manner of his intended victim; and the sentiments she inspired lent a charm to his manner that increased the natural grace of his very handsome person, which was arrayed in a suit of the finest black velvet, slashed with pink satin.

We must make this a brief chapter, says the Magister Absalom quaintly in his MSS., as the scene hath long lost the odour of sanctity.

Confused, silent, and with her eyes full of tears, the helpless and lonely Anna heard all his addresses in the broken French he had acquired among Mary's courtiers, without knowing what they imported, till suddenly the whole danger of her situation flashed like lightning on her mind, and, rising from her chair, she drew back, and with a crimsoned cheek, a dilated eye that filled with fire, exclaimed—

"Forbear, Lord Earl! I am Anna, Countess of Bothwell!"

Impressed by her air, and thunderstruck by the announcement, Morton stood for a minute silent and irresolute; but so accomplished a gentleman and courtier was not to be easily rebuffed; and approaching with an air in which the deepest respect was curiously mingled with impudence and surprise, he led her to a chair—entreated her to forgive him, to be calm, and to tell by what chance he had the happiness—the unmerited honour—of being introduced to the wife of his dearest *friend*, in a manner so very odd.

Won by the frank air and oily address of this polished noble, the too facile Anna, with all the usual accompaniments of tears and hesitation, related her story; and Morton heard it in attentive silence, but with a secret glow of pleasure and triumph that he could not conceal, for it sparkled in his dark hazel eyes,

and glowed in his olive cheek. But, to Anna, these seemed indicative of his generous indignation at Bothwell's faithlessness and cruelty; whereas, the factious Earl felt only joy at the prospect of having it now in his power to stop the successful career of the rising favourite—to set him at feud with the powerful house of Huntly—to bring upon him the wrath of a most immaculate and irascible kirk, and the scorn of a virtuous queen.

"By the devil's teeth, but this is glorious!" thought he; "I must hie me to Lord Moray."

Begging that Anna would compose herself—would be patient—would trust the management of her affairs implicitly to him, and all would yet be well, he left her, courteously saluting her hand, and whispering terrible denunciations of vengeance against Alison Craig if she permitted any one to have access to her—allowed her to escape—or failed to treat her with the utmost respect and kindness.

He then mounted his horse, and accompanied by Hume of Spott, and Douglas of Whittinghame, with sixty armed horsemen, set off on the spur for the mansion of the Lord Moray, the massive tower of Donibristle, situated on a beautifully wooded promontory of the Fifeshire coast, and washed by the waters of the Forth. But it so happened that the intriguing Earl was elsewhere; and, as there were neither post-offices nor electric telegraphs in those days, several weeks elapsed ere those noble peers, and comrades in many a feudal broil and desperate scheme of power, could meet and mature their plans, which, however deep, were ultimately frustrated by the Earl of Bothwell himself, as will be shown in the two following chapters.

CHAPTER XIII. FOUR CHOICE SPIRITS.

Belyve as the boom o' the mid mirk hour
 Bang out wi' clang and mane;
 Clang after clang, frae St. Giles's tower,
 Where the fretted ribs, like a boortree bower,
 Make a royal crown o' stane.
Mems. of Edinburgh.

A month, we have said, had passed away.

Konrad of Saltzberg still remained a captive in the hands of Bothwell, who was constantly urged by the savage and unscrupulous Baron of Ormiston to put him to death, as the best and surest means of stifling for ever the secret he possessed. But a sentiment of pity for the wrong he knew the captive had suffered at his hands, warmed his generosity, prevented him stooping to so deliberate an act of baseness and cruelty, and saved Konrad for a time.

He dreaded setting him at liberty, and therefore took a middle course; and, resolving to trust the ultimatum to fate, transmitted his captive to Edinburgh, escorted by French Paris and ten moss-troopers, who consigned him to the care of Crichton of Elliock, the queen's advocate, as a border outlaw. While awaiting his examination before the council, he was placed under the sure surveillance of Hepburn of Bolton and the Royal Archers, in the old tower of Holyrood, which had been built by John, Duke of Albany.

By this time the queen had recovered from her illness; and, guarded by her archers and a thousand border lances on horseback, arrived at Edinburgh on the 24th of November, and resided alternately at the Palace and at Craigmillar, a castle three miles south of the city. Though his wounds were barely healed, Bothwell, with a small retinue, immediately left Hermitage, and followed her to the capital, while Moray and Morton were plotting and laying their schemes in Fifeshire.

Thus were all the parties of our drama situated on the 24th of November, 1566, when this chapter opens.

The night was cloudy and dull; a cold wind swept in gusts through the narrow streets, and not a star was visible, for one of those dense mists, named a *harr* by the Edinburghers, had risen from the German Sea, and settled over the city. The High Street had long been deserted by all save four belated revellers, who were muffled in their mantles, and wandering about without any apparent object.

At midnight, the aspect of the greatest thoroughfare of Edinburgh was then peculiarly desolate and gloomy. It was destitute of lamps, though paved with huge square stones, as an old writer informs us, and bordered by edifices "so stately in appearance, that single houses may be compared to palaces." Many of these mansions rose from stately arcades of carved stone. One great arch at the head of Merlyn's Wynd was profusely decorated; and before it lay six stones, marking the grave of the great city paviour, John Merlyn, who was so vain of his having been the first to causeway the High Street, that he requested to be buried beneath it. Another magnificent edifice, built in 1430, adorned by gothic niches, containing the effigies of saints and warriors, reared up its imposing façade near Peebles' Wynd, and Hugo Arnot, in whose time it was extant, avers that no mod-

ern building in the city could be compared with it.

Dark and shadowy, looming like ranks of giant Titans through the flying mist, the striking outlines of these fantastic mansions overshadowed the way; and under the gloomier shade of their groined arcades, our four friends, muffled and masked, wandered to and fro without having any decided object in view.

They were no other than the Earl of Bothwell, the Marquis d'Elboeuff, and their friends, Hob of Ormiston, and John Maitland, lord of Coldinghame, brother of the famous Lethington, who, though a gay roué, held the offices of Lord Privy Seal and Prior of Coldinghame—the Priory he held *in commendam*. They had all been drinking joyously overnight at Adam Ainslie's, and had now sallied forth bent on brawl and mischief, despite the burgh acts, which were very stringent regarding "night walkers;" for the bailies had enacted that each night at the hour of ten, after forty strokes had been given by the great bell of the High Kirk, (the old name of *St. Giles* had been voted idolatrous,) any person found walking in the streets should be summarily imprisoned during the pleasure of the provost; while, for the better maintenance of a nightly watch, the city was divided into thirty districts, over each of which were two captains, a merchant and craftsman, empowered to keep the peace of the burgh by dint of jeddard axe and Scottish spear.

But our four gallants had sallied forth prepared for every emergency. Bothwell was completely mailed in the fashion of the time, all save the head, on which he wore a blue bonnet, and his legs, which were defended by his bombasted trunks and quilted hosen. The Marquis d'Elboeuff was similarly accoutred, but wore one of those strong and plain salades, which had only one horizontal slit for the eyes, and he bore on his left arm a light French rondelle or buckler; but Ormiston and Coldinghame wore only pyne doublets, or undercoats of defence quilted with wire, and so called from having been first worn by *pions*, or foot-soldiers. They were all disguised by black velvet masks and dark mantles, under which they carried their swords and daggers.

"How goeth the night, Marquis?" asked Bothwell, as they stumbled along the dark street, breaking their shins against the outside stairs that then in hundreds encumbered the way.

"By St. Denis!" lisped the French noble in his broken dialect; "I know not, for I never was rich enough to buy me a horologue."

"How! is thine appanage of Elboeuff in the Rumois so poor?"

"'Tis past midnight," said Coldinghame; "I heard St. Giles toll twelve."

"A bonny hour and a merry for thee to be abroad, Lord Prior, when thou oughtest be saving thy nocturnal," said Bothwell.

"True; but belonging, as I do, to the Reformed kirk, I own no monastic law; no! by the most immaculate Jupiter!" bawled the lay prior as he swaggered along;

"'Tis very long since I abjured the follies of the Church of Rome."

"She lost much by thy defection," said Bothwell, scornfully; "but devil take me, Prior, if thou art not very drunk."

"By the body o' Bacchus, thou art no better than a horned owl to say so! But keep your rapiers ready, sirs; for yonder is a tall fellow who seems disposed to bar the way."

"Where? *ventre bleu!*" exclaimed d'Elboeuff, drawing his sword.

"Where?—where?" asked the others.

"Why, right on the crown of the causeway; and, fore Heaven! he *doth* seem a marvellously tall fellow."

"By cock and pie! 'tis the city cross, thou blind bat!"

"Right, Ormiston!" replied Bothwell; "but his reverence is so drunk that he knows not a cross from a cow. Past midnight? soh! a famous hour for such regular men as we to be strolling along the streets, like knights of the post; and thou, bully Hob, art without thine armour."

"I have a pyne doublet that would turn the bolt of an arblast—double quilted."

"The streets are dull, and I am very sleepy," stammered Coldinghame.

"Speak not of sleep, my Lord Privy Seal," said the Earl; "for we have a notable brawl to make yet. We must show these rascally bailies that their night-watch and captains of the thirty wards had no reference to us, who are lords and barons of Parliament."

"Thou hast ever some wicked thought in thy gomerai's costard. A brawl! with whom, pray?"

"With *thee*, Lord Prior, if thou talkest thus!" rejoined Bothwell, adjusting his mantle, angrily.

"*Vrai Dieu!* chevaliers," said the Frenchman; "after so happy a night, don't quarrel, I pray you."

"I would give a score of bright bonnet-pieces to meet a few of Moray's or Morton's swashbucklers coming down the street just now! I am in the right mood for a fray," said Black Hob. "Suppose we ring the Tron bell, and shout fire, sack, and the English!"

"Or break into the house of some rascally bourgeoisie, and carry off his pretty wife," said the Marquis d'Elboeuff. "Oh, *ventre bleu!* de Brissac, de Vendome, and I, have played that prank many a night among the Hugonets in the Rue de Marmousets, and the dear rogues in the Rue de Glatigy"—

"At Paris, thou meanest," said Bothwell; "but our wooden-headed burghers set a value upon their conjugal ware different from your countrymen. The price French, is by francs and livres; the price Scottish, blows and steel blades. One might as well venture into a wasps' nest."

"*Nom d'un Pape!* Bothwell is growing tame," retorted the Marquis. "I knew that being once regularly wedded would spoil him."

"*Once!*" laughed Ormiston. "I warrant him"—

"Peace, gomeral!" thundered the Earl, placing his gauntleted hand on Hob's mouth. "What wert thou about to say, i' the devil's name?"

"Only that I would wish to show some of these fanatical Protestants that, being doubly damned, they have no right to keep their wives and daughters, or handmaidens, all to themselves."

"*Tete Dieu!*" cried d'Elboeuff, brandishing his rapier; "ah, the selfish Hugonets!—we must teach them the new law. Who will follow me? for Bothwell seemeth white-livered."

"Dost thou gibe me, Marquis? God wot! I should like to see thee ettle at aught that I will not surpass."

"Then here is a house. Draw, chevaliers!—*vive la joie!* let us beat up the door, knock down the bourgeoisie, and carry off the first pretty woman to my hotel in the Cowgate!"

Lord Coldinghame grasped his cloak, saying—

"Beelzebub! Marquis, art thou mad? 'Tis the house of Master John Knox."

"A million of thunders!" grumbled the Frenchman, falling back abashed on hearing that formidable name; "we should have the whole city about our ears. But come—*allons!* I will show ye a place better suited for such merry rogues as we than the house of that arch-heretic. There is Madame Alisong Cragg—a notable lady of joy!"

"Bravo, Marquis! thou art right!" exclaimed Bothwell; "my rascal, French Paris, tells me there is a famous foreign beauty concealed there—brought, 'tis said, by Morton or Arran. And dost thou know that the ambassador of Duke Philibert of Savoy—what is his name?"

"The Count di Mezezzo."

"Ah! the same—saw her yesterday as he rode past, and hath raved about her ever since."

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur has the eyes of Argus for a pretty woman; so *allons, messieurs!*" said the gay Frenchman, and they all staggered arm-in-arm down the wynd.

"Hark! listen!" said Bothwell.

They halted under the windows of Dame Craig's dwelling; some of these were partly open, and emitted into the misty street the odour of a close room and a luxurious supper—the fumes of wine and a night debauch. Through the thick gratings that defended them, flakes of light streamed into the dark and gloomy wynd, while a clear and manly voice was heard to sing one of those blasphemous ballads which were so obnoxious to Queen Mary—

”Ane cursed *fox* hath lain in the rocks,
 Hidden this many a day,
 Devouring sheep; but a *hunter* shall scare
 This cursed fox away.

”The hunter is Christ, that spurs in haste,
 His hounds are St. Peter and Paul;
 The Pope is the fox, and *Rome* is the rocks,
 That rub us to the gall.

”Poor Pope! had to sell the Tantony bell,
 And pardons for ilka thing;
 Remission of sins in old sheep skins,
 Our souls from hell to bring.

”With bulls of lead, white wax and red,
 And other whiles of green;
 This cursed fox, enclosed in a box,
 Such devilry never was seen.”

On hearing this doggerel ballad,[*] Bothwell and his friends drew their swords

in deliberate anger, intent, less on a brawl, than on punishing the singer; for this ditty was one of those which, by the efforts of the more zealous clergy, had been set to the ancient music of the Catholic church, and were usually sung by the lowest rabble, ”to ferment that wild spirit of fanaticism, which in the following age involved the nation in blood, and overturned the state of three kingdoms.”

[*] For which see Andre Hart’s *Godly Ballade Buik*.—NOTE by the Magister Absalom.

Neither Bothwell nor d’Elboeuff were very rigid Catholics, yet they burned to punish this irreligious ribaldry, coming as it did from a place which, in their younger days, had been appropriated to purposes so very different. Black Ormiston and John of Coldinghame cared not a bodle about the matter; but, nevertheless, they muffled their mantles about their left arms, adjusted their masks, and

assailed the house with drawn swords.

CHAPTER XIV. THE GLEEWOMEN.

Fiorello.—Hallo! house here! Hey, good people!

Hallo! house here! Faith, you sleep ill!

Bartolo.—Who can this be? Ugly fellow!

Drunken rascal! thus to bellow!

The Barber of Seville.

Furiously they knocked, and immediately the lights were extinguished, the singing ceased, and the windows were closed. Again and again they thundered on the planking of the nail-studded door, till the solid walls of the house were shaken, but there was no attention paid.

"Ho, within there!" cried Bothwell; "Alison, devil take thee, art thou deaf or drunk?"

"*Ventre St. Gris!*" grumbled the Marquis, skipping aside, as a stoup of water was poured from the upper story upon his laced mantle. "I will spit them all like larks. *Tonnere!* but I will."

"Hallo! 'ware your costards, sirs!" exclaimed Ormiston, as a large billet of wood came down next. "Cock and pie! the garrison shew mettle."

"Who are without there?" asked a man, through one of those reconnoitring holes with which all the doors in the city were then provided; but they could perceive the voice to be a feigned one. "What ribald cullions are ye?"

"The godly Earl of Arran, and his friend Master John Knox!" replied Bothwell, in a snuffing voice, amid a shout of laughter.

"Lewd varlet, thou liest! for the Lord Arran is here a-bed."

"Oho! then, tell him there are four tall fellows here, each of whom is better than he; so bid him take sword and cloak and come forth, lest we burn the house and Dame Alison to boot, for we have vowed a vow to make entrance."

"Help! help! Axes and staves! Armour! armour! Fie!" screamed the shrill voices of Alison Craig and several of her gleewomen and companions from the upper windows. "Thieves! stouthrief! and hamesucken! Help! help!"

"*Sacré bleu!* what a devil of a noise thou makest, Madame Alisong!" cried

d'Elboeuff. "*Ma belle coquette—ma chère madame.*"

While Bothwell and Coldinghame were endeavouring to burst open the door (using as much energy as if the whole salvation of men depended upon their success), it was suddenly opened; a strong glare of light flashed into the gloomy wynd, and a tall cavalier, masked and muffled in a mantle of scarlet velvet, and wealing a very broad beaver flapped down over his eyes, appeared in the passage, armed with a long glittering sword and bowl-hilted dagger for parrying. He burst out, and commenced hewing right and left; but, finding his escape barred in every direction, he fell on desperately, bending all his energies to slay Bothwell, who encountered him hand to hand.

Daringly they fought for some twenty passes, the fire flashing from their swords, when the stranger suddenly broke away and escaped, leaving behind his rich mantle, of which the Earl immediately possessed himself.

"Scarlet taffeta—lined with white satin—laeed with gold, too! Now, whose ware may this be?"

"The King's!" said Ormiston and others.

"Darnley's—now, by Heaven!—"

"Send it to her Majesty," said Hob, "with Madame Craig's leal service."

"Nay, by St. Bothan! I will wear it under King Henry's nose at Court to-morrow," replied the madcap noble, as they all burst into the house with their drawn swords, and made a tremendous uproar by rushing from room to room, up the narrow wooden stairs, and through the pannelled corridors, pursuing the shrieking glee-girls with oaths and boisterous laughter. In one apartment they found the remains of the feast, and several flasks of good wine, which they immediately confiscated for their own use, and then made more noise than ever.

Alison Craig was dragged from her hiding-place in an oak almrie by the reformed Prior of Coldinghame, who placed his rapier at her throat, and threatened instant death if she did not produce the fair Ribaude, whom the Lord Morton had committed to her charge.

"Aroint thee, dame!" said Bothwell. "We will have thee ducked on the cuck-stule as a scold, and pilloried for dancing round the summer-pole, which thou knowest to be alike contrary to the Bible and John Knox."

Pouring forth alternate threats of vengeance and entreaties to desist, Alison, whose well-rouged cheeks and painted brow were by turns blanched with terror and crimsoned with rage, led them reluctantly towards an apartment which, in former days, had been a little private oratory for the Lady Superior, or Reverend Mother. The pointed door was of oak, carved with the emblems of religion—the crown of thorns, and the hands and feet pierced by nails; the sacred heart and the cross were still there, but they ornamented what the change of manners had made the abode of a gleewoman.

Bothwell, whose whole spirit was now bent on mischief and frolic, with one kick of his heavy buff boot split the old door in two, and, as the falling fragments unfolded, to his consternation he beheld—Anna Rosenkrantz!

Pale, terrified, and motionless as a statue, she was standing about six paces from him, and near a little table, on which lay her crucifix and missal, in evidence that she had been praying devoutly. Her cheeks were blanched, her eyes were dilated, and her lip curled slightly with anger at the insults she anticipated; but with a serene brow, and aspect of modesty and dignity, she drew herself up to her full height, and with her stately train sweeping behind, and her high ruff bristling with starch and pride, confronted these violent intruders, the two principals of whom she failed to recognise under the black velvet masks—an article of wearing apparel which the residence of so many French, Spanish, and Italian ambassadors, had now made common among the Scottish noblesse.

"Death and confusion!" muttered the Earl, falling back a pace.

"Cock and pie!" said Ormiston, under his bushy mustaches; "we have started the wrong game."

"Aha, my *belle coquette!*" said d'Elboeuff, advancing with his blandest smile, and kissing his hands as he bowed to the rosettes at his knees; "*ma jolie damoiselle—comment vous en va?*"

"Hold, Marquis! we are in error," said the Earl, in a deep and fierce whisper, as he grasped the arm of the French noble, and drew him back.

Though Anna did not hear the words, there was something in their accent and in the air of Bothwell that struck a chord in her memory; her colour heightened, and her eyes lit up. He saw in a moment that he would be recognised; and, pushing his friends before him by main strength down the narrow stair, he drove them into the street—an unexpected proceeding—which filled them with so much rage, that their swords would infallibly have been turned against him had other work not been prepared for them.

Now the blaze of torches filled the narrow wynd, glinting on its fantastic architecture, its grated windows, and carved outshots, on the steel caps, green doublets, and arrow-heads of a band of Mary's Archer Guard, which hurried to the scene of the uproar, led by their captain on horseback, in a handsome suit of light armour, to assist the two civic commanders of that district—a baxter and a dagger-maker—who, with twenty citizens in steel bonnets and jacks, and armed with partisan and whinger, had also sallied forth to maintain the peace of the burgh.

Dreading that, if taken, he would be unmasked, discovered, and brought before Mary, and, by being involved in an adventure so dishonourable, lose perhaps her favour for ever, Bothwell fought desperately up the street, and wounded several of the archers, shouting all the while, "A Hamilton! a Hamilton!" to mis-

lead the assailants as to his identity, and make them suppose him to be the young Earl of Arran, who was known to be slightly deranged by his love for the queen.

On hearing the war-cry of his house, the clang of the swords and axes, and all the uproar excited by such a brawl, (where the parties engaged were well protected by defensive armour), Gavin Hamilton, abbot of Kilwinning, a younger son of the Duke of Chatelherault, with a few of his retinue, sallied forth in armour to aid the Earl and his three friends, who had gradually changed the scene of their conflict to the broad central street of the city, up which they were pressing with great vigour.

The arrival of the gallant abbot, caused a continuance of the brawl with renewed energy and fury, and the dense masses pressing to the centre, shouted on one side, "A Hamilton!" on the other, "A Darnley! a Darnley!" and swayed too and fro, from the turreted platform of the city cross to the Tron beam, where the merchandise was weighed; while the clangour of bells, and the clamour of the arming citizens, uniting with the fury of the fray, drowned the cries of the wounded, and the twanging of the bows, as the royal archers shot at random into the mist and gloom.

The deacons of the crafts were crying "Armour! armour! Axes and staves!" Craigmillar, the provost, was buckling on his harness in his strong dwelling at Peebles Wynd, and the council were mustering in their usual place of meeting, the Holy Blood Aisle in St. Giles' Church; but the arrival of the Earls of Huntly and Moray with a fresh band of archers, compelled the Abbot of Kilwinning to make a hasty retreat. Black Hob escaped with him, and reached in safety his own dwelling in the Netherbow, above Bassyndine the printer's establishment; but Bothwell and his two remaining friends were made prisoners, disarmed, deprived of their masks, and rather unceremoniously conducted to Holyrood.

"I thought, good-brother of mine, thou hadst got rid of thy follies, and become a very Carthusian," said the young Earl of Huntly, with some little scorn, to Bothwell, as he returned him his magnificent rapier.

"Ah—indeed!" said the other with a polite smile.

"My sister—Jane—thy countess," continued Huntly gravely; "from being quiet, silent, and dejected, since thou leftest Bothwell castle, hath become delirious—yea, frantic; and canst thou tell me aught of this Anna, of whom she raves incessantly?"

"By the holy Paul!" replied Bothwell, with admirable coolness, "I know no more than thou. 'Tis some phantom of her brain, and this horrible calamity hath so oppressed me, that"—

"Thou plungest into every mad extravagance and folly. Thou spendest thy days among dicemen and drinkers, thy nights among wantons and gleewomen, with such blockheads as Ormiston and d'Elboeuff, to bury all memory of my

sister—ha! is it?"

"Exactly; 'tis the wisest mode and the merriest, by the mass! So a fair good-morning, my Lord—well-a-day, fair, noble Moray!" said the Earl, bowing to the nobles of his escort as he raised his plumed bonnet, and entered the little doorway of the Duke of Albany's tower. A dark frown knit the broad brow of the young Highland noble, as he watched the Earl's retreating figure, and he muttered in Gaelic between his teeth—

"Had not my sister vowed before the altar of God to love, obey, and cherish thee, by all that is sacred on earth and blessed in heaven, false Lord of Bothwell, this dagger had rung on thy breast-bone!"

Elboeuff and the Prior of Coldinghame were also conducted to separate chambers, where, just as daylight began to glint on the city vanes, and to lighten the gloomy courts and cloisters of the ancient palace, they were securely locked up, and left to their own confused reflections, and the occupation of nursing their bruises.

CHAPTER XV. A MOMENT LONG WISHED FOR.

Bright queen! illustrious nymph, whose gentle sway
Fair Caledonia's hardy sons obey;
Whose sacred hand the royal sceptre bears—
The ancient sceptre of two thousand years.
Oh, great descendant of a noble line!
Thy rank superior, but thy worth divine;
Beyond thy sex with every virtue bless'd;
Beyond thy birth of dignity possess'd!

Buchanan to Mary Stuart, 1659.

The red October sun was gleaming on the casements of Holyrood, and filling the north and western sides of its courts (the palace then had five) with light and warmth, while the southern remained in shadow. The royal standard waved on the tower of James V., then the northern and most lofty part of this palace, which was burned by the fanatics of Cromwell, and was much more irregular in architectural design, and very different in aspect from the present stately edifice,

which the skill of Sir William Bruce engrafted on the old remains.

The queen's archers were bustling about the gothic porch and outer gates, with their bows strung and belts bristling with arrows; the tramp of hoofs, the clatter of harness, the voices of pages, grooms, and yeomen, rang in the royal stables, and all the usual stir and business of the day were commencing, though somewhat earlier—for on that morning the Privy Council were to meet, and already the Lord Chancellor, Morton, Stewart the High Treasurer, the Secretary of the Kingdom, Macgill of Rankeillor, the Lord Clerk Register, and many other nobles and officers of state, were arriving, attended by their usual retinues of armed horsemen, and quarrelsome swashbucklers on foot, clad in half armour, with swords, targets, and pistolettes, and having the badges of their feudal lords fixed to their basinets.

Elbowing his way through the mass of pages, valets, and men-at-arms, that filled the outer court, and whistling merrily as he went, the handsome young lieutenant of the royal archers, Sir John Hepburn of Bolton, was seen clad in his gayest attire—a green velvet doublet trimmed with scarlet, and laced with gold, a purple mantle, and blue bonnet garnished with a white feather. He ascended the narrow and winding staircase of the Albany tower, where Konrad was confined, and into which he was admitted by an archer of his own band, who was posted as sentinel in the corridor.

By Bothwell's directions, Konrad had been treated like a knight or gentleman rather than an outlawed moss-trooper, or broken borderman, under which name he was charged with an attempt to slay the queen's lieutenant.

Calm and collected, but sad and thoughtful, he was leaning against the grated window, and watching the October sunrise, the warm light of which was rendering yet more red the faded foliage of the copsewood that lay to the eastward of the palace, and the old red walls of the Abbey church, where at that moment the queen was kneeling on St. David's grave, and praying at the same altar before which her sires had prayed four hundred years before.

Konrad's garments were now rather nondescript, and considerably worn; his beard and mustaches had been long untrimmed; his eyes were hollow, and his cheeks were becoming ghastly and wan.

"What manner of man art thou?" asked Bolton, who now saw Konrad for the first time, and remarked, with surprise, the contrast of his address and attire. "Thou lookest somewhat like a follower of the lord of little Egypt—perchance thou art the great Johnnie Faa himself? Mass! man, but thou art an odd specimen of the tatterdemalion!"

"Sir," replied Konrad, mildly, "I am a foreigner, and must be excused if I cannot discern the politeness of your queries."

"Foreigner—eh!" rejoined the young laird of Bolton, who, though far from

being ill-natured, had a blunt manner; "a fiddler, I warrant! as if we had not enow and to spare, before David Rizzio was dirked in the next room. Mass! we have Jehan d'Amiot, the French conjurer, who foretold Davy's death; we have Sebastian, the violer; Francisco Rizzio; French Paris; and the devil knoweth how many more about us. Dost thou play the guitar, or the viol-de-gambo?"

"I play neither," replied Konrad, haughtily.

"Then in what dost thou excel? for all these foreign knaves excel us poor Scottish barbarians in some slight of hand."

"I can handle the bow, the arblast, the backsword and dagger, the morglay and ghisarma, with all of which, Sir Archer, I am very much at your service."

"Now, God be with thee!" replied Bolton, frankly clapping him on the shoulder; "thou art a right cock o' the game. I love thy mood; and, if I can see thee well through this ugly business—by St. Bothan of Hepburn I will! But thou hast a powerful foe in the Earl of Bothwell, with whom thou art about to be confronted, though he (madcap that he is!) has fallen into a small escapado with a certain gay damsel of the city, whom I have sent twelve of my archers to bring before the council, by Lord Morton's order; but come with me, sir, for the queen requires your presence."

"The queen!" reiterated Konrad, but thinking only of Anna. "Oh, the long-wished moment must be come at last! 'Tis well—I hasten to implore her clemency, and to trust to her justice."

The apartment in which the council met was in that part of the monastery of Holyrood which had been decorated by the late king, James V.; it was wainscoted, and had been painted with various devices by Sir Thomas Galbraith, the royal limner; but part was hung with that ancient tapestry which is still preserved in the newer palace, and represents the battles of Constantine. The ceiling was blue, studded with *fleur-de-lys*, in compliment to the late queen mother, Mary of Lorraine; but the floor had been fashioned by the early monks of the Holy Rood, in the old Scottish manner, before the invention of saw-mills, and when trees were simply split by wedges, and the boards roughly dressed by the adze or axe, and then secured with nails having heads of polished iron as broad as penny pieces.

This primitive style is still to be seen at Castle Grant, in Strathspey.

The deep-mouthed fireplace was a gothic arch, rich with cabbage leaves and sculptured roses; it contained one of those massive old grates, surmounted by an enormous thistle, which we may still see in James V.'s tower; and above it hung a portrait of the late Cardinal Beatoun, with his grave dark eyes and red baretta.

The table was covered with green cloth; the *Regiam Majestatem*, *Quoniam Attachamenta*, and other ancient tomes; the silver mace and seal of Council lay

upon it, together with a mass of parchments and papers, before which sat he of the keen eye and thoughtful brow, Secretary Lethington, with two servitors or clerks beside him. Morton, with his high ruff and long beard; Moray, with his smart mustache and close shorn hair; Glencairn, stern of eye, ferocious in aspect, and sheathed in steel; Lindesay, his aged compeer, armed in the fashion of a by-gone age, having the globular corselet, the angled tuilles, and long sollerets of James III., with other peers—took their places at the board, but remained standing and uncovered; for the door by which the queen was to approach the throne was now thrown open, and the scarlet liveries and gilt partisans of the yeoman of the guard were visible below the festooned arras of the entrance.

A party of the archer guard occupied the lower end of this long chamber, which was lighted by a range of well-barred windows that faced the lofty crags of Salisbury. In one of these lounged Hepburn of Bolton, leaning on his long sword, and with his soldierlike frankness conversing freely with Konrad, notwithstanding that the latter was there that day to answer for stouthrief and border felony—two charges which poor Konrad (the victim of circumstances) would find it very difficult to answer. But now a thrill shot through his heart; for, amid much bustle and some noise, the Earl of Bothwell, the Marquis d'Elboeuff, and John of Coldinghame, were ushered in, and, bowing to the lords, retired a little; for they were there rather as culprits than privy councillors, and looked about them with haughty and supercilious smiles.

"Dost thou know, Marquis," whispered the irritated Earl, loudly enough to be heard by all; "that to me there seemeth something intensely despicable in such a baron as I, who can muster five thousand horse, being arraigned before a *woman*, like a rascally page or a chamber wench?"

"*Certainement*—and I before my little niece! *Milles tonneres!*" replied the Marquis, pulling up his ruff, which was all bristling with whalebone.

"I feel at this moment a profound veneration for thy musty old Salique law, which"—

"*Peste!* here comes her majesty the Queen!" interrupted the Frenchman, bowing till the point of the long toledo tilted up his mantle at an angle of forty-five degrees.

Dressed in plain black velvet, slashed at the bosom and shoulders with white satin, having her long train borne by the ladies Mary Fleming and Mary Beatoun, with a long lace veil floating from her stately head, a little close ruff under her chin, and the order of the Thistle sparkling on her neck, Mary entered, and with a graceful inclination of her head and a bright smile to all—looking more like the queen of some fair clime of love and song than of fierce and fanatical Scotland—swept up to the throne and took her seat under its purple canopy, while her ladies and their pages retired a little behind it.

Then only in her twenty-fourth year, Mary seemed fresh and blooming as the *Venus Celestis* of the ancients; for she had just come from her morning bathing, in the little turreted bath that still remains at the western corner of the royal garden; and where tradition asserts that she bathed in white wine; but a pure and limpid spring yet wells up beneath the floor, to contradict the legend.

She was accompanied by Darnley, whose magnificent doublet of cloth of gold was gleaming with jewels and seed pearls; but his face was pale, and his eyes were languid, bloodshot, and restless: his scarf was torn; his plumes were broken; something very like a female coif was hanging from a slash in his trunk breeches; and it was evident that he had been rambling with other debauchees the livelong night. Several gentlemen of the Lennox accompanied him, and as they entered somewhat unceremoniously, brushed past Bothwell and d'Elboeuff; but the former grasped one by the mantle, saying—

"Mahoud! fellow, dost thou take us for Lennox lairds? Back, sir! we hold our fiefs by knights' service, not by pimp tenure."

Between the hostile and intriguing spirits who crowded that gloomy chamber, many a deep, dark scowl was furtively exchanged.

Darnley, who was perfumed to excess, and carried a pouncet-box, bestowed all his attention, as usual, on Mariette Hubert, a maid of honour, and darkly and fixedly the lieutenant of the archers watched his insidious attentions. Darnley bent malignant eyes on Bothwell, who, in bravado, wore the well-known scarlet mantle; and Bothwell and Konrad were scowling at each other in turns; for the former felt no small dread of a *dénouement*, by which he might lose for ever that which was only dawning upon him, and under the sunshine of which he had begun to cherish, in secret, such daring and alluring hopes—the favour of the queen.

"Well-a-day, fair, my Lords of Bothwell and d'Elboeuff," said the petulant young King; "you made a notable brawl in our good burgh last night. Beat off the watch, and wounded six of the royal archers, and yet to be made captives—Ha! ha! came it of lack of skill, or lack of will?"

"Of neither!" replied the Earl, with a smiling lip; "as I believe your majesty very well knoweth—Ha! ha! I picked up this mantle in the fray. I hope you know the owner, and admire its fashion?"

"Is it dagger-proof?" asked the King, with affected ease.

"No, but my doublet is," replied the Earl, with the same quiet air, and a volume of courtly hatred and duplicity was exchanged with these significant remarks; but Darnley resumed his cold smile, and once more turned to the pretty Mariette, the sister of French Paris.

Konrad, whose handsome figure and pale features, with untrimmed beard and short curly hair, Mary had been regarding from time to time with true femi-

nine interest, was now led forward by Maitland of Lethington, who charged him with "treason, in rising in effeir of war against the royal authority, fire-raising, stouthrief, and felony in Liddesdale, under the umquhile John of Park, and for assailing openly in arms, with that deceased traitor, the Lord Warden of the Three Marches, her grace's lieutenant, James Earl of Bothwell, within the bounds of his own barony of Hermitage, where he was wounded deadly in peril of his life by the blow of a jeddard staff."

"*Ma foi!*" said Mary, to her sister Argyle, "is he not a fair young man, and a winsome, to die the death of an outlaw? Approach, sir, and reply to this terrible charge."

"Madame," said Konrad, kneeling on one knee, and again drawing himself up to his full height, with an air that was not lost on the bright eyes that regarded him with melancholy interest; "may it please your majesty to hear my story? it is a short, but a sad one."

"Say forth!" replied the Queen, and Bothwell felt himself growing pale; for he almost deplored his clemency, that had spared Konrad in Liddesdale.

"Sweet madam! I am a stranger here in the land of the Scots; I know not their laws nor their fashions; I barely know enough of their language to make myself understood; and if, in the tale I am about to tell, I seem to become confused, or to forget myself, I pray your gentleness to remember the great presence in which I stand, and excuse me. A strange combination of untoward circumstances, have brought me into the position in which I this day find myself before you; but think not, gracious madam, that I mean to draw upon your gentle pity, for life hath long lost every charm to me; and, if it were spared, I have but one thought now, and that is, after having accomplished the mission on which I sought these shores, to return to my native Norway, and die a monk in the cloisters of St Olaf at Upslo."

Konrad paused; his eyes moistened, and he sighed deeply. The queen and her ladies became intensely interested by this sad exordium; but the Lords Lindsay and Glencairn, who were anxious to have Bothwell's affair brought under notice, could not repress signs of disgust and disdain, at all this preamble and delay about hanging a pitiful border outlaw.

"Madam! I am the last of the old house of Saltzberg, in the province of Aggerhuis. I was born where"—

"Thou art not likely to die!" interrupted Glencairn, striking the table with his gauntleted hand. "God's murrain! no. Under favour of the queen's grace, I would submit to your lordships, if we are to sit here listening to the tale of a cunning romaunt teller, when there are more important matters anent quhilk we are this day convened in council. Besides, I would remind your grace and lordships that this caitiff, in defiance of our laws anent the abomination of the mass and the vile idols of paganrie, hath avowit to our beards his intention of

becoming ane masse-priest, quhilk is a fact so bold, so sinful, and so malapert, that I marvel sorely at your patience in hearing it silently; and further, as I think the affirmit word of the Lord Bothwell and the Laird of Ormiston, that the panel was taken in armour, in ane attempt to slay that noble lord on the marches of his own barony of Hermitage, quhilk includeth forcible hamesucken as well as homicide and outlawrie, are all, I deem, more than enow to deserve sentence of death. Let him be beheaded and quartered!"

Mary was about to speak, when the Lord Lindesay bluntly interrupted her.

"The Lord Earl of Glencairn hath (as he always doth) spoken well; and I move that, incontinent, this knave be removit furth from this chamber, and straight conveyit to the place of doom, as ane daredevil moss-trooper, ane false and idolatrous mass-monger, and as a sign of judgment to his compeers in all time coming. What sayest thou, my Lord of Morton?"

"With thee. Better hang now than die a mass-priest, and be damned incontinently!"

With a crimsoned cheek and a heaving breast, Mary turned from peer to peer on hearing those successive insults levelled at her religion; but she read the most stolid and iron bigotry in every face, save her brother's, who contrived to veil every emotion under a bland serenity of visage that no eye could fathom.

"My lords, hold!" she exclaimed. "Am I the daughter of James V.?—am I your sovereign or your slave? Will you dare to condemn or forgive in my presence, without consulting me? I say, this man *shall not die!* even though he had bent a spear against my own breast, as well as that of my lieutenant, who, I know, can be as generous and forgiving as he is brave and noble. And well may he be forgiving, if I, the administrator of the laws (St. Mary help me!) can afford to be so."

"Your majesty is right," said the Earl of Bothwell, who was anxious for Konrad's removal on any terms. "I crave that he may be re-delivered to me, to be treated as he deserves; and I hope your majesty knows me well enough to believe that his usage will be generous."

"Then be it so. Sir John Hepburn, deliver this prisoner to your lord the Earl, who must bring him to me again, for I am dying with curiosity to learn his story."

"Away with him, Bolton!" said the Earl, in a hasty whisper; "and see a' God's name thou keepest him close, permitting none to hold converse with him, till I have him despatched to sure ward, at Bothwell or Hermitage."

And thus, the object of the long wished-for interview was frustrated, and Konrad was hurried away by the archers; but at the moment he retired, Bothwell turned about, and beheld what made him change colour so perceptibly, that Darnley and others, whose eyes were seldom turned from him, perceived it immediately.

The Earl of Morton, with an assumed air of the deepest respect, led in Anna Rosenkrantz, who had just been conducted to the palace by a party of Sir Arthur Erskine's archers.

CHAPTER XVI. ANNA AND THE QUEEN.

Ruggiero.—Say what you please, and unsay what you will,
Silisco loved your daughter; she loved him
And pledged her faith—Oh, sad chance!
Disastrous error! was it this destroyed
The maiden's faith! Why then shall pity plead
Against all anger.

The Virgin Widow.

"Under favour of your majesty, and these noble lords," said the Earl of Morton, with a most studiedly stolid aspect, "I have the pleasure to present a lady of Norway, a subject of our warlike ally, Frederick of Denmark, who claims the great honour of being *first* Countess of Bothwell."

It is impossible to describe the astonishment these words and the appearance of Anna occasioned in all present. Every eye was bent inquiringly upon her, and the charge against Bothwell, d'Elboeuff, and Coldinghame, was forgotten in this new aspect of affairs.

Shame and rage, but from very different motives, filled the breasts of Bothwell and of Huntly. The former was pale, though his dark eyes were full of fire; but the brow of the latter was crimsoned by the generous wrath of a fierce brother, jealous of his sister's honour. They both started to their feet and grasped their swords, while their more immediate friends began to draw near them with darkening faces.

"*Sacre nom de!*—Belzebub!"—muttered the perplexed d'Elboeuff, twirling his mustaches; while Darnley's face, and the faces of Bothwell's enemies, beamed with delight; and his mortal foe, the Earl of Moray, though almost trembling with exultation, betrayed it not by one glance or alteration of his grave and handsome face. The queen seemed also disturbed, and, under the stern and indignant flash of her keen dark eyes, even Bothwell quailed, as calm, and cold, and statue-like

she drew herself up to her full height, and gazed upon the sinking and trembling Anna, who, advancing to within one pace of the dais, sunk upon her knees, and, clasping her hands, raised her bright eyes to Mary's gentle face, and, as she did so, all her glittering tresses rolled in a volume over her neck and shoulders. Remembering the undisguised admiration which the Earl had ever professed for herself, Mary felt something of a woman's pique at this new and beautiful claimant on his heart, and, for a moment, she almost gazed coldly upon her.

"Yea, madam," repeated Morton, striking his cane on the floor, "a lady who accuseth James Earl of Bothwell of wedding, and ignobly deserting her."

"'Tis false, Lord Earl!" exclaimed Bothwell, choking with passion, and endeavouring to pull off his glove. "By the joys of heaven, and the pains of hell—'tis false! I swear, 'tis false!"

"False!" reiterated Anna, in a piercing voice. "Oh, Bothwell, Bothwell! darest thou to say so—thou who didst lure me from my home, my happy home! and a heart that loved me well? Oh, do me justice, madam, ere I die! I am indeed his wife—his wife whom he swore, before the blessed sign of our redemption, to love, to cherish, and to protect!"

"I vow, madam, she raves!" said the Earl, quietly, collecting all his thoughts in secret desperation; for he found himself standing on the edge of a precipice.

"Oh, madam! hear my mournful story; and condemn me not unheard."

"Do not listen to a word of it, madam," said the Earl; "I beg you will not. 'Tis all some rascally plot of my enemies to ruin me for ever in the favour of your majesty, and my very good lord and kinsman, the Earl of Huntly."

A smile, both dubious and scornful, lit the face of the Highland Earl, who played ominously with his long dagger, while Bothwell reflected bitterly on—

"What a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to *deceive*."

"I conjure your majesty not to hear her!" he urged; "and yet, why should I fear?"

The honour of the house of Hepburn has been sustained untarnished since old Adam of Hailes and Traprairie first unfurled his pennon by the side of Bruce! and assuredly it cannot suffer now by the artful story of a despicable gleewoman—Ha! ha!—a minion of the gallant Lord of Morton."

"Let her speak for herself," said Mary; "I will not be cheated of this story. Rise, woman! and fearlessly and truly afford us proof of the grave charge thou preferrest against this great and potent lord."

Thus encouraged, Anna, in moving accents, which her broken language made yet more touching and simple, related her early love for Konrad, and Kon-

rad's single-hearted devotion; and how the artful Earl had weaned all her affections to himself; how he had so solemnly espoused her before the altar of the Hermit of Bergen; had borne her far away from her home to that strong castle in the solitary isle of Westeray, and had there abandoned her for the arms of another.

"Jesu Maria!" said the Queen, with sadness and astonishment; "thy story is like a chapter of the Hundred Tales. 'Tis a melancholy one, in sooth! But, *ma bonne*, what proof canst thou afford us of all this?"

"My word, madam!" sobbed Anna; "my word only!—I am the daughter of a belted knight, who died in battle."

"But this great lord will also give us his word that thou art false, and can back his assertion by five thousand lances. Now, in this bad world, where every body is so false, who am I to believe?"

The Earl, who, during Anna's pathetic address (every word of which stung him to the soul), had been intently polishing his waist-buckle with his leathern glove, now replied boldly—

"I trust that your majesty will believe me—whose word no man now living hath ever dared to doubt—and believe me, when I declare the whole of this fabrication to be the invention of some unknown enemy, to deprive me of the little favour with which you have honoured me, as a return for my dutiful devoir and loyal service in our raid into Liddesdale. And I think when *the place* wherein this wretched woman was found, is taken into consideration, that I need not trouble myself much in denying the whole accusation."

"*Mon Dieu!* my lord, thou sayest true!" replied Mary, struck with the remark. "I own that it throws suspicion on the whole; and I have lived long enow among you to see the lengths courtiers will resort to, for undermining each other."

"And this woman," continued the Earl, whose indignation increased with his success; "this accursed harridan—this Alison Craig—why comes she not to back the charge of her gleewoman? I well know that the Lord Arran will vouch for her truth and honesty—yea, and greater men than he!"

Arran grasped his Parmese dagger; but Darnley, to whom all this had given intense delight, stayed his hand, and they exchanged glances expressive of the sentiments that animated them; for both were vindictive and malignant, and both had great command of feature and of temper.

Poor Anna knew not until now the truth of what she had long ago suspected—the vile nature of the dwelling to which Morton had so infamously consigned her. Now it all burst on her like a flash of lightning, and she alternately became crimson with shame and anger, or pale as death with a mortal sickness of heart; for she saw in the sudden change of Mary's demeanour, and the half quizzical, half pitying eyes of the nobles, and the disdain of the maids of honour,

how lightly her story was valued.

A perfect paralysis seemed to possess her; near the steps of the throne she sank upon her knees, with her hands clasped, her hair falling in clusters over her face, and her heart full of agony, as she thought of her father's pride, her mother's worth—of Konrad's slighted love, and old Sir Erick's kindness.

Bothwell, anxious for her immediate removal, animated alike by pity and anger, now approached the throne, and said—

"May it please your majesty, as Lord High Admiral, I was last night made acquainted by the Water Bailie of Leith, that there is now at anchor within a bowshot of the Mussel-cape, a certain ship of Denmark, the Biornen, commanded by Christian Alborg, who will sail with this evening's tide; and I move that this poor frantic damsel, who declares herself to be a subject of his Danish majesty, be sent on board, and transmitted to her home; and, if a hundred merks of silver will smooth the way to her, my purse shall not be lacking."

"Well, so be it! The presence of this vessel is indeed opportune," replied the too facile queen. "*De tout mon coeur!* let her be removed, and this weary council be adjourned for to-day, that we may ramble into the garden, and see the bright sunshine and the autumnal flowers."

Obedient to a glance from his friend and chief, Sir John Hepburn, with a few archers, approached to raise Anna, but she started to her full height, shook back her heavy locks, and full, with flashing eyes and nostrils curled with scorn, she gazed upon Bothwell.

Pale and rigid as a statue, all save the curving lip and dilating eye, with an aspect serenely savage, she gazed upon her betrayer. Oh! at that moment, wildly as she loved him, Anna could have stabbed him to the heart.

"Farewell, Bothwell!" she said, with an icy smile; "in that dark time which is coming, when sorrow and remorse shall harrow up thy coward soul, thou wilt recall the passage of this hour—the wrongs I have endured—the shame and the contumely I have suffered. Hah! and in that dark time of ruin and regret, (and she shook her clenched hand like an enraged Pythoness,) remember Anna!"

And, as Bolton led her hurriedly away, the memory of that keen bright glance from her wild dark eyes haunted Bothwell, when the hour she foretold came upon him.

"Jesu!" said Mary, crossing herself; "what an eye! what a glance! she must be an ill woman and a vile, to look thus. Argyle! *ma belle Soeur!*—let us to the garden!" She here turned round, as usual, expecting Darnley's proffered band to lead her forth. He was again whispering to Mariette Hubert, from whose blushing cheeks and downcast eyes there was no mistaking the purport of his addresses. Mary thought how different were the days,

”When love was young, and Darnley kind!”

A shade crossed her snowy brow, a haughty smile curled her beautiful lip, and she said somewhat peremptorily—

”Lord Bothwell—your hand!”

The Earl instantly drew off his perfumed gloves, and led the Queen from the chair of state. The whole of the nobles rose, the archers of the guard drew back the heavy arras, the yeomen unfolded a strong glass door that opened towards the palace garden and ancient cloisters of the Abbey church—and from thence the Earl led Mary to her favourite seat, near the venerable and elaborate dial-stone, while Darnley, her ladies, and several courtiers, followed in groups.

CHAPTER XVII. THE BOUQUET.

How near I am to happiness
That Earth exceeds not! not another like it:
The treasures of the deep are not so precious
As the concealed comforts of a man,
Lock'd up in woman's love.

Women beware Women, 1567.

It was now, as we have said, October.

The falling leaves were brown and crisped; the air was cool and balmy; but in lieu of the whistling of birds that marks the merry summer, there was heard at times the harsh screaming of aquatic fowls, as they passed landward. The royal garden, which lies to the northward of the palace, was then (as now) overlooked on the south by the embattled tower of James V., the carved buttresses and aisle windows of the chapel royal; and on the east by the old turreted chateau of Mary of Lorraine. The walks were then sheltered by thick and lofty hedges of privet, thorn, and holly, according to the ancient fashion of landscape gardening; but the latter alone retained their dark-green hue, and were studded by scarlet berries. There were balustraded terraces, a wilderness of walks and hedges, treillages, and little canals; but the chief ornaments were the mossy old fruit-trees, which had been planted and reared by the industrious monks of Abbot Ballantyne's days.

The sun shone joyously in the wide blue sky, and the old towers of the palace, and the square campanile of the church of *SANCTÆ CRUCIS* gleamed in the warm light. The few flowers of the season, which the care and skill of the royal gardener reared under glasses in a sheltered place, expanded their little cups and scentless petals in the warmth; and inspired with joy by the bright sunshine and the fragrant perfume that a slight shower had drawn from the greensward, and the box-edged parterres, Mary's heart expanded like that of a beautiful bird; and forgetful of the cares of state, and the bearded conclave she had just left, she clapped her white hands, and with a girlish playfulness, (that would have horrified John Knox, and petrified the General Assembly into stone,) half hummed and half sang one of Ronsard's sonnets.

Then, seating herself by the beautifully-carved horologue which bears her name, and is still situated in the centre of the garden, fixed upon a pedestal that rises from three octagon steps, she continued her sonnet, while playing alternately with a bouquet presented to her by the keeper of the gardens, and with Fidelé, her little Italian greyhound—the gift of the Conte di Mezezzo, the Savoyard ambassador.

"Of all the poems of Pierre, le gentilhomme Vendomois," began the Earl, as he leant against the pedestal, over which there drooped a venerable weeping ash, and commenced a conversation, because he saw that Darnley and the ladies of the court were promenading at a distance, and that none observed him save his friend the Knight of Bolton. "Yes, madam; of all Ronsard's poems, none has pleased me so much as that addressed to your majesty, in which he portrays three nations—Scotland, France, and England—contending around your cradle for which should possess you."

"And Monsieur Jupiter, to whom the three fair sisters referred their claims, was most favourable to my dear and beautiful France. Ah! Jupiter was very sensible which I should love most," said the Queen; then, after a pause, she added—"O what a glorious lover Pierre Ronsard must be!"

"Oh, yes! think how tender are these lines;" and the Earl sang with a good voice—

"Bon jour, mon coeur; bon jour, ma douce vie;
 Bon jour, mon oeil; bon jour, ma chère amie;
 He! bon jour, ma touts belle.
 Ma mignardise, bon jour,
 Mes delices, mon coeur.
 Mon doux printemps, ma douce fleur nouvelle."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Mary, with sudden animation; "I last heard those lines"—

"At the Palace de la Tournelles."

"One night"—

"Under your window?"

"Then, Mother Mary! thou knowest the singer!"

"'Twas I!" said the Earl, with a low voice.

Mary coloured deeply.

"'Twas I!" he added; "on the night before your marriage with the Dauphin, and my departure to Italy."

"Lord Earl, thou hast really a voice," said Mary, unwilling to perceive the implication of his words.

"Love will achieve any thing, when it desires to please."

"Love!" laughed the joyous Queen, in her tone of raillery. "I do not think thou very well knowest what love ought to be."

"Ah! say not so. When once kindled in a true heart," said the Earl, laying his hand upon his breast, "it can only be extinguished by death."

"*Ma foi!* but when a heart is so flexible that a sudden flame expands within it to-day for one, and to-morrow for another," replied Mary, (thinking of her gay husband, whose white feather was visible at times above the holly hedges), "and can never love as—as one would wish to be loved. 'Tis oddly said, that few are wedded to those they first loved."

"True, madam," said the Earl, with a lower voice; "my own poor heart hath known that too bitterly."

"Indeed!" laughed the Queen, "since when?"

"Since I first beheld thee, adorable Mary! a young and smiling maiden of seventeen, standing by the side of the puny Dauphin at the Tournelles, as his affianced bride," replied the Earl, as half kneeling he lightly kissed her hand, while all the warm passion he had first cherished for her, in the days of his heedless youth, swelled up in his bosom.

"This is too much, presumptuous lord!" said the Queen, suddenly becoming grave, as she rose from her seat, and moved slowly away. "I did but begin in jest, and thou dost end in earnest."

"So it is ever with love, adorable madam!" replied the Earl, clasping his hands.

"Silence!" said the Queen trembling; "thy words are full of sin. One whisper of this to Darnley, and thou art a lost man;" and she glided away like a haughty Juno, with her long train and veil floating behind her. At this threat Bothwell's heart glowed alike with love and anger; but he remained irresolute, and confounded by her sudden transition from gaiety to gravity, and watched her approach the postern of James V's tower. As she was about to enter, two aged, lean, and shrivelled hands, were extended from the narrow-grated loophole of

a strong and vaulted chamber in the basement story, and these immediately arrested Mary's attention. Folding her arms meekly upon her bosom, she bowed her head, and on her pure and snowy brow the forbidden sign of the cross was traced, and the hands were immediately withdrawn within the grating.

There, in that damp vault, lay Sir James Tarbet, a poor old priest, who had been discovered saying mass at midnight in the ruined chapel of St. Anthony on the Craig; and for this heinous crime had been consigned to a dungeon by those champions of toleration, who enforced the iron laws of the new *regimé*.

Softened by the old man's blessing, and the sentiments it called up within her, Mary, as she entered the tower, bowed to the Earl in token of forgiveness, and dropped (but whether by chance or design, the usually acute Magister Absalom sayeth not) her bouquet, of which the enamoured lord immediately possessed himself, and placed in his bosom, bowing almost to the earth as she disappeared. His heart beat like lightning; a new and triumphant glow expanded like a flame within it, and he seemed to tread on air.

"*Parbleu!*" said the Marquis d'Elboeuff, who had observed this scene, and came pirouetting along the walk, looking like a great grasshopper, with his long rapier and short mantle; "ha! ha! art thou still for the Salique law?"

"Blockhead!" muttered the Earl impatiently.

"Remember that clause of it which saith, 'He who squeezes the hand of a free woman shall pay a fine of fifteen golden sols.'"

"Ah! but callest thou the queen a free woman, when she is a slave to the ten thousand caprices of yonder great baboon, her husband?" said the Earl, as, with a bitterness he could not conceal, he abruptly left the Marquis, and retired from the garden.

CHAPTER XVIII. JEALOUSY WITHOUT LOVE.

Eud.—No! we must part. 'Twill ask whole years of sorrow
To purge away this guilt. Then do not think
Thy loss in me, is worth one dropping tear;
But if thou wouldst be reconciled to Heaven,
First sacrifice to Heaven that fatal passion
Which caused thy fall.—Farewell, forget the lost!

Siege of Damascus.

In the Earl's bosom every spark of affection for Anna had long since died away, and his anger at her sudden appearance, in such a presence, and with such a charge against him, now robbed her almost of his pity. After a day and night spent in revelling, in the city, next evening he returned to his own apartments that overlooked the southern court of the palace, rejoicing alike at his narrow escape from disgrace, which was entirely owing to Morton's mismanagement, in consigning Anna to the guardianship of Alison Craig, and at his sudden fortune in finding himself so favoured by Mary; and, with a rapture almost childish, he kissed the flower she had dropped so opportunely at the postern door, and which, like a treasure, he still preserved.

But the Earl knew not that in avoiding Scylla he had fallen into Charybdis; for on ascending to his apartments, up the stair to which he was formally preceded by French Paris and little Calder, he found himself confronted by one, of whom he now thought very little, but whose dark eyes—so soft, so pleading, and so imploring—he was confounded and abashed to meet;—the Countess!

She looked paler and thinner than when they had last met, and a pang of remorse wrung the Earl's heart as he surveyed her beautiful and slender form, so evidently wasted by sorrow and suffering; but the momentary sentiment passed away; ambition resumed its wonted power in his heart; and, though he kissed his wife's brow, it was done with an air so cold and conventional that she withdrew from his embrace, and at that time he cordially wished her ten thousand leagues away.

A moment the peer gazed upon her fair and sinless brow, and the steady gaze of her full dark eye, and he felt himself immensely her inferior in nobility of spirit, in truth, and love, and honour; and to his overweening pride that momentary sense of humiliation was bitter in the extreme.

"Welcome to Holyrood, Jane!" said he, assuming his usual gaiety of manner. "I warrant thou art come to upbraid me for playing the truant so long from thee and the bonny banks of Bothwell."

"Nay, my lord, I am on the way to my father's castle of Strathbolgie in the Garioch, and I seek but one night's shelter in these apartments. To-morrow I will continue my journey."

"Heaven be praised!" thought the Earl, who found it necessary to affect that proper regard which his cold expression showed plainly to have evaporated. "Seat thyself beside me, bonnibel—thou lookest sickly and ill. How comes this?"

"Canst thou ask?" she replied, with a mournful glance, and quietly withdrawing from the arm with which he had endeavoured to encircle her. "Thou hast been absent from me very long."

"And thou art tremendously angry with me, ladybird—is it not so?"

"Oh, no!" she replied gently; "but sorrowful—exceeding sorrowful."

"And so thou lovest me still, Jane?"

"More than thou dost me," she replied, with her eyes full of tears; and Bothwell felt one small ray of his old love kindle in his heart.

"I would a thousand times rather that thou didst reproach me bitterly than weep thus, Jane," said the Earl. "Thy scorn I might repel; thine anger I might meet; but thy tears—now, now, for Heaven's sake and thine own, be pacified; for I do love thee fondly still."

"Love me!" reiterated the Countess, half suffocated by tears.

"Do not doubt me, dear one," replied the Earl, in whose bosom at that moment there was indeed something of a struggle; "be pacified, bonnibel! See—here is a charming bouquet for thee; its perfume is alike reviving and delicious. I had it from the queen."

The Countess made no reply, but her tears fell faster.

"And she, having heard of thy arrival, desired me to give it to thee," said the lying Earl, glad to say any thing that would please her.

"Hah!" exclaimed the Countess, sharply, setting her teeth and growing deadly pale; "is it so? To me? thou shalt see me inhale its perfume, *poisoned though it be*—for, oh, my husband! even death at thy hands is welcome." And tremblingly she pressed her beautiful face into the bouquet, and then turned pale and placidly to the Earl.

"Poisoned!" he exclaimed, with astonishment. "Thou art mad, Jane! Pshaw! dost thou think that Mary of Scotland, (that being, pure as the new fallen snow,) is like her fiendish gudemother, Catherine of Medici, a vendor of poisoned flowers, and gloves, and ribbons? *Benedicite!* Jane of Huntly, shame on thy vile suspicions!"

"Well, I thank Heaven it is all as thou sayest!" replied the Countess, mildly; "but after all I have heard of the love passages between Mary and thee at Hermitage, I expected somewhat worse."

"Love passages? Woman, what hast thou dared to say?" asked the Earl, gravely.

"Only a hint of what I have heard."

"From whom?"

"The Earl of Sutherland."

"Babbler that he is!" exclaimed Bothwell, with a dark frown. "He hath foully lied, and so become guilty of lese-majesty."

"Oh! do not look on me thus, my dear lord—I can bear any thing but your frown. Thou wilt bring war, and death, and shame on the houses of Bothwell and Aboyne; but I mean not to upbraid thee. As thou sowest, so shalt thou reap; but for thy own sake, for the sake of thine ancestors, their name and fame and honour, the honour of me, whose peace thou hast destroyed, whose love thou

hast scorned, whose ties thou hast forgotten, whose prospects thou hast blighted; I implore thee, by each and all of these, to pause, lest thou art crushed by the fall of the castle thine ambition is building.”

”I thank thee, Lady Bothwell,” replied the Earl, rising and putting on his bonnet, the lofty plumes of which he shook with ineffable hauteur; ”I thank thee for these good intentions and kind regards, though, by the mass! I know not thine aim. And so thou art bound for Strathbolgie on the morrow, my gay Gordon? Who of my people accompany thee? Is it long Cockburn of Langton, with his lances of the Merse?”

”Nay; ’tis the Earl of Sutherland.”

A cloud gathered on Bothwell’s brow. The Earl of Sutherland had been a lover of the Countess from her girlhood, and had only given up his faithful suit on her accepting Bothwell; so there was a very unpleasant association of ideas in the mind of the latter, who was generally apt to view incidents through an evil medium.

”I trust the Lord Sutherland is well,” he said scornfully; ”and that his bare-legged gillies, in brogues and breacan, will escort thee through Strathbolgie, as safely as Bothwell’s knights in their Milan mail would have done.”

”His sister, the Lady Elinora, accompanies us,” said the Countess colouring deeply, even at the suspicions of this husband, who loved her now no more.

”Then, my bonnibel, when thou goest hence to-morrow, fail not to make my very particular commendations to the Lady Elinora Sutherland, and the noble lord her brother, and so the benison of God be with thee, and him, and her;” and making a profound bow, he swaggered from the apartment, and hurried downstairs, glad to escape from the presence of the unhappy Countess.

His heart was moved when he saw her sink despairingly down on a cushioned window-seat; but her having mentioned the Earl of Sutherland, had armed his better spirit against her; and, not ill pleased that she had given a legitimate cause for anger and jealousy, affording him an apology to himself, he hurriedly crossed the palace yard, and without any defined purpose, entered the Artillery Park, a large common that lay to the eastward, and there he gave vent to his exciting reflections.

Mary was uppermost in his thoughts. The *flower* had sealed his fate, and that of Darnley too! There had now opened before him a new vista of the most alluring kind—a vista which he determined to pursue. The love of the most beautiful of her sex—one occupying the summit of earthly rank, with his own indomitable pride, ambition, and obstinacy, led him on. Were Darnley, the sickly boy-king, to die of the premature disease that so evidently preyed upon him, or were he luckily to be slain in one of the innumerable brawls and feuds in which his life of debauchery and intrigue involved him, then Bothwell might hope to

hold Mary, the bright, the beautiful, and the winning, in his arms. He already felt the sceptre of Scotland in his grasp; he saw the house of Hepburn seated on its throne; and Moray, Morton, Mar, and all who had ever hated; feared, and wronged, or triumphed over him, in the days of his exile and poverty, grovelling at his feet.

If Mary (as he was bold enough to believe) loved him in secret, as a man of courage and gallantry it was *his* part to progress, as she could not make advances towards him. But Darnley must be removed; and how? for, though weak and ailing, he might live long enough; and now was the time to strike some vigorous political stroke, which might raise him (Bothwell) to the giddy summit of his hopes, or hurl him for ever to destruction and infamy.

"The die is cast!" he exclaimed. "To this will I devote my life, my soul, my existence; and my very energy will raise me even as a demigod above my compeers. Yes, she loves me! Curse on my blinded folly, that saw it not before; and thrice cursed be this lordling of the Lennox, that bars my path to rapture and to power!"

"Pho! hast thou not thy dagger?" said a voice.

The Earl turned, and beheld the lairds of Ormiston and Bolton; the latter looking pale, and fierce, and agitated.

"How now, stout Bolton," said the Earl, "what hath ruffled thy easy temper, and clouded that merry face of thine?"

"By the Rood of Broomholme! I will slay him, even as Fynart slew his ancestor at Lithgow Bridge, by one thrust of a sharp rapier—yea, in the face of men!" exclaimed Bolton.

"Whom meanest thou?"

"The Lord Darnley!"

"Soh! a rare speech, and a bold one too, for the lieutenant of the guard!" said the Earl. "This is treason."

"But even-handed justice though," began Ormiston; "and by"—

"Now, peace with thy 'cock and pie."

"Bear with me a moment, my lord and friend, and I will tell thee how and whence this anger sprung."

But the cause thereof is of so much importance to this history, that it deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARIETTE AND DARNLEY.

Lightly from fair to fair he flew.
And loved to plead, lament, and sue;
Suit lightly won, and short-lived pain!
For monarchs seldom sigh in vain.

Scott.

Mariette Hubert, the sister of Nicholas Hubert or French Paris, one of Mary's favourite maids of honour, was the belle-ideal of a lively Parisian girl of eighteen; her eyes were large, and dark, and laughing; her features regular, piquant, and beautiful; her teeth like a row of orient pearls. She was always like a laughing Hebe: fresh, blooming, and smiling. Her black, glossy hair, was drawn upwards, from temples whose snowy whiteness contrasted well with the sable wreaths. She was ever good humoured, and gay to a fault, with a strong dash of wilfulness and coquetry.

In drollery, her lover, Sir John Hepburn, who had admired her long, was her very counterpart; though, by the influence of circumstances and the manners of the time, he was impetuous, obstinate, and quarrelsome; but there were few gallants who were otherwise at that factious and intriguing court. Mariette, however, could smile him out of his anger, laugh him out of his obstinacies, coquette with him to please him, and with others to please herself. She could prattle, too, and caress him with a playfulness that were quite enchanting; and many a fierce feud and desperate brawl were prevented by her tact, and by the power she could exert over her lover, who, in virtue of his command in Mary's archer guard, was hourly brought in angry contact with the armed nobles and their poor but proud followers; but never was he more enchanted than when he discovered that his pretty and provoking Mariette, was a better shot with the long bow at the butts, than the best archer in the royal guard.

Though young Hepburn loved Mariette deeply and enthusiastically, he had failed in inspiring the volatile and fanciful French girl with a passion equal to his own.

She was gratified to find herself the object of attention, from one who stood so high in the favour of Mary and the great Earl of Bothwell, and who was esteemed one of the handsomest gallants at a court, which, though shorn of the splendour that had characterised it under the late King James, nevertheless retained within its circle all that was splendid in Scotland. With all her coquetry, she dreaded to trifle with the jealousy of her assiduous lover; for there was in his bosom a latent spark, that a little ruffling fanned into a flame; and in the use

of his sword, he possessed that cavalier-like promptitude, which was the leading characteristic of the Scottish gentleman before he lost caste.

The love he bore Mariette had become so much a part of himself, that Hepburn was no longer like other men, or what he had formerly been. He never had an idea in his head, of which Mariette did not form a part. This passion affected his very manner, and interfered with his duties and occupations, imparting a newness and peculiarity to his bearing and manner, which drew upon him the raillery of Mary and her ladies, and the wicked waggery of the fair object herself.

Though never perfectly certain of possessing her whole and undivided heart, Hepburn received all the encouragement a lover could desire; for Mariette loved to keep him in leading-strings, and attracted or repelled him just as she was in the mood to dally or be petulant; and so between hope and fear, and love and joy, a year had stolen away; and though Hepburn fully considered Mariette as his ultimate wife, he knew not when the volatile girl, who wore his bracelets and rings, and gave him ribbons and ringlets in exchange, would yield her consent.

But a change came over the spirit of his dream, and suddenly he discovered (he knew not why) a change in Mariette.

He had frequently observed the profligate young king by her side, and then he began to experience a new and hitherto unknown agony gnawing at his heart, and from thence it seemed to spread through every nerve and fibre. When they were together, he followed with painful interest every movement and expression of Darnley, and could easily perceive that his eyes were full of ardour when he gazed on Mariette, and that her downcast face, so interesting by its waving locks and long dark lashes, wore a soft smile whenever he whispered in her ear.

The lover's impetuous heart became torn by wrath and jealousy, and terrible ideas of revenge began to float before him; for, daring and profligate as he knew Darnley to be, he was more than ever astonished at his cool presumption in addressing Mariette Hubert as a lover under his very eyes.

On the day succeeding that we have mentioned, when the famous scene took place at the dial-stone in the royal garden, the lieutenant of the archers, watching a time when the indefatigable royal *roué* left Mariette alone, approached her. She was seated on a stone sofa; and she who was wont to have eyes only for him, neither saw nor heard him, till he lightly touched her soft shoulder, and then she raised her blushing face, which immediately became ashy pale.

"Thou seemest absent, dear Mariette," said he.

"I wish that thou wert absent, too," she replied, pettishly, plucking leaf by leaf a flower the king had given her.

"Mariette, look at me. What hath come over thee? Art thou bewitched?" asked the young man, in a voice of anger and tenderness curiously blended; for he could not stoop to acknowledge the suspicions which filled his heart with

bitterness and rage. "Wherefore art thou now so strange, so altered, so reserved, to one who loves thee so well, whose every thought is of thee, and whose whole heart is full of thee? Oh, unkind Mariette!"

She changed colour and trembled; but, without raising her dark eyes, continued in confusion and abstraction to pluck the leaves of the flower.

"Grant me patience, Heaven!" muttered her impetuous lover, whose sorrow still overpowered his rising wrath; "dearest Mariette, the gossips of our court (God's malison on them!) say that thy heart is changed towards me; is—is this true?"

"No."

"By St. Bothan! that no sounds too like yes to mean anything else," exclaimed Bolton, giving way to his passion and jealousy; "but if thou forgettest my faithful love, and preferrest the passing admiration of this silken squire o' dames—this carpet-king and holiday moth—whose proffered love is alike insulting and dishonourable, marry, come up! I say, Mademoiselle Mariette—I wish thee joy!" and, with a profound bow and glance of irony, he turned away.

Stung by his words and manner, which were partly assumed, Mariette Hubert, who had been repenting the too serious encouragement given, and still more a fatal promise made to the young king, now bent all her thoughts upon him, and endeavoured to banish Hepburn from her memory; while he, with all a lover's indecision, walked slowly away, deploring in his heart the outburst, which he was too proud and still too indignant to repair. Mariette gazed after him with her cheek flushing, and her dark eyes full of fire, and so they parted—for the last time.

"Fool that I was to love a Frenchwoman!" thought the lover.

That night, as was his wont and duty, Hepburn, as lieutenant of the guard, made his round of the archer sentinels posted at the various gates of the palace, which was then, as we have said, a very irregular but spacious edifice, containing five courts, with various offices, stables, falconries, and kennels attached.

The night was dark and still, and a few large drops of rain plashed on the pavement as he passed through the palace yard; while the red sheet-lightning, flashing in the north, revealed at times the black outline of the Calton hill. Hepburn, in half armour, with his visor up, entered the gardens by that ancient doorway which faces the south, and is ornamented by the Scottish arms and order of the Thistle. The clock of the chapel tolled ten, and on passing the corner of James V's tower, he looked up to the tall casements of the Queen's apartments, to discover the usual light in that of Mariette, though he knew she would not be visible to him to-night. Every window was dark as that of the deserted chamber in which Rizzio was murdered, and the floor of which was yet stained with his blood.

As Hepburn stood among the shrubbery, he perceived two figures approach with all the caution of conspirators; and at once discovered one of them, from his stature and bearing, to be the king. He was muffled in a mantle, and wore a mask and coat-of-mail. The other was his favourite page, Master Andrew Macaige, and they carried between them a long light ladder, which they had purloined from the stable yard.

Darnley clapped his hands, and then, from amid the square colossal mass of James V's tower, which was all buried in darkness and obscurity, a single ray of light shot forth into the garden, a female appeared, and, while thoughts of grief, and wrath, and horror, poured like a deluge upon the mind of Hepburn, he recognised his long-loved Mariette Hubert! He remained in a stupor, and heard the ladder jar as the adventurous prince placed it against the wall, and saw him, after wrapping his mantle round his left arm, and belting his sword higher up, ascend with considerable agility into the apartment, after which the window was immediately closed, and the light extinguished. The page carried off the ladder to a secret place, not three yards from where Hepburn stood, and, rolling himself up in his mantle, lay composedly down upon it to sleep until he was summoned by the king.

The spell that had weighed like an incubus upon the faculties of the lover, now passed away. His first impulse prompted him to put his foot upon the page's neck and strangle him; his second, to wait the reappearance of the king, and slay him without mercy. But these fierce promptings were left unacted, and he turned away to seek Bothwell, of whose secret hopes and long-cherished rivalry and hatred to Darnley he had seen so many proofs. He raised his visor higher, for he felt almost suffocated as he hurried through the cloisters. There he met Hob of Ormiston, also searching for the Earl, who, an archer informed them, had just entered the Artillery Park.

With a manner that was marked by the deepest excitement, the young knight related, not very coherently, the substance of the preceding affair; and, unseen in the dark, a quiet laugh spread over Hob's malicious visage at the wrath and disappointment of his friend; but it was otherwise with the Earl, who foresaw in all this something to further his own ambitious schemes.

"I sought thee, Bothwell," said Hob, "to say, that an especial gentleman of the Lord Morton's train (no other than the knight of Spott), hath come with the Earl's best commendations to your lordship, and to say that he and the Lord Moray, and one or two others thou wottest of, are even now assembled at the castle of Craigmillar, where the queen went about sunset, and where they crave your lordship's suit, service, and attendance. I have ordered our horses!"—

"Thou ravest, Ormiston. Morton and Moray are my mortal foes; and truly no fault is it of mine that they breathe the breath of this life to-nigh! Anent what

is this meeting?"

"The Lord Darnley," replied Ormiston, lowering his gruff voice.

"Ha!"

"And the best mode to rid Scotland and the queen too of his foolish misgovernment, and the tyranny of Earl Matthew and the house of Lennox, who, thou knowest, would gladly cut off thee and them, and every body but themselves, if an opportunity occurred."

"By Jove, Hob! thou art a rash knave, and a bold one, to speak thus; but thou knowest that the queen declined peremptorily the divorce offered her by several Lords of the Parliament."

"True; hence this meeting, at which thou art expected to be leader and chief, to obtain"—

"What?"

"A divorce from Darnley! that Mary may marry again, for her own happiness and the commonweal of Scotland. Thou well knowest how miserable this popinjay squire maketh her. And are we—bearded men who rebelled against James V.—to submit to this new caterpillar? I trow not!"

Bothwell's bosom glowed as Ormiston spoke; but he said sadly—

"Thou forgettest she is of the Church of Rome, and that, being so, she may not wed again. So what availeth a divorce?"

"Psha! 'tis long since I thought much about the Church of Rome."

"I am sure his Holiness, poor carle! deplored thy loss; but here is French Paris with our horses. Dismount, Nick, and give thy dapple to Bolton; so now for Craigmillar—ho! I go at all events."

They mounted and set forth by the old bridle road that ascended the hill of St. John, and in a few minutes the great façade of the palace, the tall and spectral edifices of the Canongate, the city, with its walls and gates and twinkling lights, was left behind, as they debouched upon the open country, which was all wood, and marsh, and pasture land, from the outer walls to the castle of the Provost. On their right, for a mile or two, lay the common muir of the city, bordered by the bleak hills of Braid; and on the left lay Salisbury's ridgy craigs and Arthur's seat, with the deep blue loch of Duddingstone washing its base, reflecting the stars in its bosom, and the dark shadow of the wooded knoll, where, then a ruin, lay the old Saxon kirk in solitude.

Skirting the lake, they struck into the horse-way, that, between thickets of fir, led straight to the venerable stronghold of the knights of Gourtown, which they saw looming before them in the starlight, with its great square keep and

double flanking towers, barbican, and ditch.

CHAPTER XX. THE PLOT THICKENS—THE CONFERENCE OF CRAIGMILLAR.

There's many a feud still slumbering in its ashes,
Whose embers yet are red. Nobles we have
Stout as old Greysteel, and as hot as Bothwell.
Auchindrane.

The celebrated conference of Craigmillar, is recorded too particularly in our national history to be expatiated on here; nevertheless, a brief notice is necessary to preserve the unity of the Magister Absalom's narrative.

In the apartment of the Lord Argyle, in that old feudal fortress, met Bothwell and his brother-in-law Huntly, with Moray—openly their friend, and secretly their foe—for frequently had they conspired each other's death by secret fraud and open violence; and Moray had personally defeated, and caused the death of the old Earl, George of Huntly, at the recent battle of Corrichie. There, too, came the secretary of state, the great Sir William Maitland of Lethington, who, notwithstanding his skill in government and statecraft, lost his head in the desperate game of politics seven years after.

This conference was held around the dais on which stood the couch of Argyle, who was labouring under a severe illness.

Long and eloquently the talented secretary expatiated on the evils that had resulted to the Scottish people, from Mary's ill-assorted marriage with the young and profligate Lord of Darnley; the rebellion it had brought forth among the adherents of Chatelherault, in the west; among the Gordons in the north; and the general discontent it had occasioned by the peculiar religious tenets of the house of Lennox—a marriage against which Master Knox had bitterly and abusively inveighed, and which, to the loving, trusting, and devoted Mary, had become a source of hourly misery; for the passing love of the profligate, unmindful of her exalted rank, her matchless beauty, her sweetness of manner and charming vivacity, had wandered to many inferior and unworthy objects. Among these he had squandered his patrimony, and the revenues of a crown which he disgraced; thus, completely estranging the heart of the queen, by a career of insult, neglect,

and riot; by the hourly scandals he committed in her palaces, and chief of all by the murder of her harmless secretary—thus, making the breach irreparable by his lacking the art and condescension to repair it.

He spoke, too, of those powerful barons who were still enduring banishment as accessories to the destruction of the hapless Rizzio, whose overweening pride and Italian birth had been his only crime; barons, noble in descent and venerated in name—the kinsmen of those he addressed; the veteran Kerr, whose ponderous ghisarma had done his country such service at Pinkiecleugh; Patrick Lord Ruthven, then lying ill of a deadly sickness in an English frontier village; the Laird of Pitarrow and the Tutor of Pitcurr all brave Scottish knights, who were enduring great misery in the land of our hereditary foes, by the seizure of their ancestral castles and the confiscation of their estates; and who, by the subversion of the house of Lennox, would be restored to their country and friends, and released from a degrading position among Englishmen—and the change he would propose, could only be effected by the divorce of the young queen from her cousin.

The Earl of Moray, (who, with Morton, had been the secretary's active colleague in the Rizzio murder,) for private and ambitious views of his own, from an early period had vehemently opposed her marriage, and even proceeded so far as to take up arms against it in 1565. He still, as we are told, "pursued the old conspiracy against the king's life," urging the divorce with all his eloquence; and it may easily be believed that, though his mortal foe, Bothwell seconded him on this occasion with an ardour the source of which the wily Earl was not slow in perceiving; and, together, they spared not the powers of invention and persuasion in obviating Argyle's many doubts that the queen "would consent to a measure so indelicate and unpleasant as a divorce."

Full of ardour, as this new ray of hope dawned upon him at a time so opportune, the Earl was more eloquent even than the subtle secretary; but the morning sun shone through the barred windows, as red amid October clouds he rose above Soltra edge, ere they came to a decision; and the Earl of Moray, and Lethington, the Machiavel of Mary's court, undertook to urge the measure upon her with all their eloquence and skill. Bothwell, with proper delicacy, and policy too, declined being one of the deputation, for whose success he would have prayed, had he not forgotten the way, in these days of reformation and misrule.

They left the apartment on their mission, for the queen was now up, and said to be walking in the castle garden, where she daily offered food to four stately swans that floated on the lake, which, in the form of a gigantic P, (the first letter of Preston, the baron's name,) occupied one half of the ground. It is still distinctly traceable to the southward of the ruins, and was then supplied by the same springs that filled the moat on the north.

Bothwell leaned against a window, watching the sunrise, and he could hear his own heart beating. Exhausted by illness, and the fatigue of the conference, Argyle, after his page had given him a drink of ptisan from a silver cup, had fallen sound asleep. Huntly, perplexed and full of bitter thoughts, turned over the leaves of an old brass-bound and wooden-boarded tome—The Chronicle of ye novel and valiant Earle of Flanders quho married the Devil; and he lay back, half-hidden in the deep recess of the tower window, and never once addressed his brother-in-law, to whose ambitious aspirations, and open neglect of his beautiful sister, he was now no stranger. And thus, though his eyes were on Jehan Trepperel's black-letter pages, it was perfectly apparent, by his knitted brows and sullen silence, that his thoughts were elsewhere.

The sun soared high in the blue vault; white as snow the morning mists rolled up from the dell that was traversed by Lothian burn, on the margin of which, a little hamlet of neatly ornamented cottages had been built for the French attendants of Mary; and these, though changed in aspect, are still known as Little France. The pale smoke ascended in columns into the pure air from the village of Niddry Mareschal, which, with its chapel, dedicated to the Holy Virgin by Wauchope, baron of Niddry, nestled among the brown autumnal copsewood to the east. The woods of Edmiston were bare and yellow; and the hill on which the lords of Craigmillar had reared up their strong square tower of the twelfth century, was arid with whins, and gloomy with clumps of the dark Scottish fir.

The time, and importance of the circumstances under which he viewed it, deeply impressed every feature of that morning landscape on the Earl's memory. His fate, and that of Scotland too, hung perhaps upon the queen's decision; and love and pride, ambition to achieve, and revenge to gratify, all kindled a glow of anxiety in his bosom, that amounted to torture.

Slowly the minutes passed on!

An hour wore away; he thought they would never reappear. Argyle still slept, and Huntly had at last become absorbed in the pages of "The Valziant Earle;" for, thanks to the tutorship of old Gavin Dunbar, he could read a little.

At last the deputation returned; Huntly closed his book, Argyle woke up, and Moray gave one of his cold and mild smiles on seeing Bothwell's paleness and anxiety.

"She hath consented, sirs?" he asked in a breathless tone.

"Nay, my lord, she declined so peremptorily that we felt our heads shake on our shoulders," replied the secretary; "and, by the rood! I never knew my statecraft and natural oiliness of tongue so far fail me in doing service to myself and friends. So here endeth all hope of a divorce; for, though King Henry hateth and feareth her, as a burnt child doth the fire, and though she wept bitterly—yea, like an abandoned Dido, at his coldness and cruelty, and small love for her—she

avows that she will rather die than divorce him.”

”And wherefore, thinkest thou, Sir William?”

”He was her first love, and only one; and, changed though he be, her heart yet yearneth towards him; for though a queen, we find her a very woman yet.”

”Then farewell, my lords,” said the Earl, assuming his cloak and mantle; ”I must wend toward betimes;” and he hurried to the court-yard, summoning Ormiston and Hepburn, who had been stretched on benches by the hall fire, the one asleep, and the other nursing his wrath. They all mounted and galloped back to the city.

”Well, my lord, how went the conference?” asked Hob.

”She hath declined—proudly and wrathfully declined!”

”Cock and pie!”

”Yea, Ormiston, with anger and with tears.”

”All woman’s caprice. Tears! Tush! they should give thee hope. The world”—

”Malediction on the world; it smiles on all but me.”

”For thy comfort, I will tell thee a project which hath just been put into my head.”

”By whom?”

”The devil, who, as thou knowest, never lies dead in the ditch. Approach me”—and, raising his visor, Ormiston whispered something to the Earl, who started; and Hepburn, who watched them with a keen eye, exclaimed—

”Speak forth, Hob of Ormiston; for I see there is assassination in thine eye, and here stand I, John Hepburn of Bolton, ready to be thine abettor, in any deed of stouthrief or bloodshed; for I am frantic in heart, frenzied in head, and ready to ride above my stirrups in the blood of the Stuarts of Lennox!”

”No, no,” replied the Earl; ”Hepburn, thou hast thine own wrongs, and mayest avenge them; but Ormiston, what is this thou hast said to me? No, no, get thee behind me, thou tall limb of Satan, I will have none of thy tempting.”

Ormiston gave one of his deep hoarse laughs that shook every joint of the mail in which his muscular figure was sheathed; and, spurring their steeds, they rode furiously back to the city, by the old road that then passed close to the solitary chapel of St. John the Baptist, on the burgh-muir, and entered Edinburgh by the Old Horse Wynd, a street that led to the porch of Holyrood Palace.

CHAPTER XXI.

FATHER TARBET.

Let us be patient! these severe afflictions
 Not from the ground arise;
 But often times celestial benedictions
 Assume this dark disguise.
Longfellow.

Three months passed away, and the spring of 1567 was at hand.

Bothwell's love for Mary had grown more and more a part of his existence, fostered as it was by the cunning of her brother the Earl of Moray, whose boundless ambition made him hope that ultimately something great might accrue to himself, were this wild passion properly moulded; for Moray had early formed a hope of usurping the throne—a hope based upon the queen's unpopularity as a catholic, his own great influence, and the helpless infancy of his nephew, James, the little crown prince of Scotland.

"He hated Darnley," says Robertson; "and was no less hated by him. In order to be revenged, he entered into a sudden friendship with Bothwell, his ancient and mortal enemy. He encouraged him to crime, by giving him hopes of marrying the queen. All this was done with a design to throw upon the queen herself the imputation of being accessory to the murder (of Darnley), and under that pretext to destroy Bothwell next—to depose and imprison her, and to retain the sceptre which he had wrested out of her hands."

The "godly" Earl saw all this in the distance; and the mistaken Bothwell, whose daring hopes and unruly ambition he fostered and cajoled, now sought his society as sedulously as before he had shunned it. He had long been rid of Anna, who had been conveyed to her native Norway, in charge of Christian Alborg, in the Biornen; and as for his Countess, who resided in her father's solitary castle of Strathbolgie, among the woods and wilds of the Garioch, he never bestowed a thought on her. While her own brother, borne away by the tide of politics, and infected by the spirit of ambition and intrigue that pervaded all, had resolved to sacrifice even her to the giant projects formed by Bothwell and the nobles of his faction.

Mary had resided alternately in Holyrood, and at her summer castle of Craigmillar; but since the scene by the garden-dial, had never again given the Earl an opportunity of addressing her alone; and, even in the presence of her courtiers, she curbed her natural vivacity and gaiety of manner, and addressed him with marked reserve.

In the old tower of Holyrood, enclosed by strong grilles and vigilant archers

of the guard, Konrad passed three months in hopeless and tedious monotony—hopeless, because he knew not what might be his fate; and tedious, because unmarked by any change, save the day-dawn and the sunset, the morning visit of the archer who brought his breakfast, and the nightly one of the warder, who secured all gates and doors when St. Giles' bell struck ten.

So passed the time.

Winter came, and the bleak summit of the Calton was covered with snow; the trees around the palace, and the old orchards that crowned the Abbeyhill, were leafless and bare; and drearily looked the chapel-royal and ancient cloisters, with snow mantling their carved battlements and time-worn knosps and pinnacles.

Then the poor prisoner sighed for his native hills, and night, after night his dreams brought them before him in all their wild sublimity and picturesque desolation. Again he was among them in all the happiness of boyhood, with Anna by his side, as she had been in the days when first he learned to love her—when they had sought the wild daisy and the mountain bee by the green base of the lofty Dovrefeldt, whose summit was glistening with impending glaciers, and crowned by eternal snows; whose old primeval forests were the abode of the bear and eagle, and its unfathomed caverns, of Druid ghosts, of demon dwarfs, and one-eyed gnomes; whose sides were terrible with chasms split by the hammer of Thor, and overshadowed by the petrified giants whom, in the days of other years, his breath had turned into stone. In his dreams, too, he heard the dash of the free and boundless ocean that rolled on his native shore; and he saw the vast Moskenstrom, that dark and fearful abyss, around which for ever boil the eternal waves; in whose deep whirl the largest wrecks are sucked like reeds down—down—to be carried through the bowels of the inner earth, and vomited on the desolate shores of the Bothnian Gulf; and from these stirring dreams of his distant home, and the love and freedom of his boyhood, poor Konrad awoke, in agony to find himself a captive and a slave, a prisoner without a crime; in a foreign land, unpitied and uncared for, and without, a hope of reprieve, save death. Often he exclaimed aloud, as he clasped his lettered hands; for loneliness had taught him to commune with himself—

”How many a giant project have I formed in secrecy and solitude, when inspired alike by the ardour of youth and love, and here they end! Oh, Anna! dearly hath thy perfidy cost the heart that loved thee well.”

He was often visited by Hepburn of Bolton, who, by Bothwell's directions, had him under his immediate guardianship; and, being a blunt and soldierly young man, whose heart had been as yet unseared by jealousy or disappointment, and then felt happy in the ideal love of his Mariette, to console the prisoner, brought now and then a stoup of Rochelle under his mantle; and was wont

to converse with him so winningly and frankly, that he learned the particulars of his story, and the errand which made him seek the Scottish shore.

"St. Bothan! but thou art a rare fellow, Master Konrad," said Bolton. "Loving this damsel, and yet labouring to restore her to the arms of a rival. Rare platonism—by the mass!"

"Sir, thou knowest not the pure sentiment of love that animated me. So refined was my passion for this fair being, that so far from being happy in possessing her, if she loved me not, I would have preferred to see her happiness increased by the love of a rival"—

"Mass! if I understand either this or thee," said the lieutenant of the archers, sipping his Rochelle with a face of perplexity. "But I pray Heaven I may never have reason to argue thus with myself! A blow from my poniard, or a bowshot at fifty paces, were worth a thousand such homilies."

"Oh, yes!" continued Konrad, clasping his hands; "my love, though deep, and passionate, and true, was divested of every sensual thought. I had schooled myself to joy when Anna rejoiced; to sorrow when Anna wept."

"I am no casuist," said Bolton; "but I think thou feedest thy imagination rather than thy love, which must die, as it is hopeless."

"It sought her happiness, not my own—and thus it cannot die."

The young Scottish knight could not perceive this altogether; but he admired Konrad without knowing why, and, to cheer his solitude, introduced to the same prison Sir James Tarbet, the old priest before mentioned, and who had still a few weeks of his term of captivity to endure—a captivity imposed on all who dared to celebrate mass, since it had been forbidden by law as an idolatrous ceremony, dedicated to the devil and scarlet woman.

This good man, who was now in his seventieth year, had served his country in his youth at the fields of Flodden, Solway Moss, and Pinkiecleugh, and, though bent by the infirmities of age and three spear-wounds, somewhat of the old bearing of the knight shone through the mild manner and chastened aspect of the Catholic priest; and in his eye and voice there were those mild and winning expressions, which the followers of Ignatius Loyola are said alone to acquire. His forehead was high, and his failing locks were thin. His magnificent beard, white as snow, lent a dignity to his aspect; and his figure had a stateliness, of which not even his tattered doublet of grey cloth, his hodden mantle, and ruffless shirt, could deprive it. And yet, though changed in aspect, the time had been, when, sheathed in bright armour, he had spurred his barbed horse through the thickest battalions of Surrey and Somerset; and, in the rich vestments of a canon of St. Giles, had held aloft the consecrated host on the great altar of that grand Cathedral, when the sance bell rang, the organ pealed through all its echoing aisles, and while thousands of Edina's best and bravest, her noblest and her greatest,

knelt with bent knees and bowed heads on the pavement of the chancel, choir, and nave, before the glittering star of the upheld Eucharist.

By his manner, when bestowing upon him a silent benediction, Eonrad at once recognised a priest of the ancient church, and he kissed the old man's hand with fervour.

"For what art thou here, father?" he asked.

"For worshipping God as he has been worshipped since his son left the earth," replied the old man. "But now Scotland's apostate priests and unlettered barons have discovered, that the forms and prayers of fifteen centuries are idolatrous and superstitious, and severe laws are laid upon us. A gentleman pays a hundred pounds to the crown if he be discovered at mass; a yeoman forty for the first fault, and death for the second."

"I would then, father, that I were back in old Norway, and thou with me; for there we can worship God as we will."

Interested by the young man's gentle manner, Sir James Tarbet requested to be informed of the crime for which he suffered; and Konrad, who had but a confused idea of the chain of circumstances by which he was then a prisoner, attributed the whole to the malevolence of Bothwell; and when he concluded the history of his life and troubles—for to the aged canon he told every thing with confidence and hope, and without reservation—he mingled with it several threats of ultimate vengeance on the author of his long oppression, and Anna's wrongs.

"This must not be!" replied the priest. "By studying vengeance thou keepest open thine own wounds, and pourest salt into them, so that they never heal, or are forgotten. Forgive this sinful Earl, and thou conquerest him; forgive him for the sake of the sisterly love thou bearest this Lady Anna, who loves him so well. 'Be patient,' saith a wise Arabian, 'and the leaf of the mulberry-tree will become satin.' By avoiding misery, thou wilt find happiness; for misery tormenteth itself. O my son! if, like me, thou wert aged and insensible to every emotion save pity and compassion, thou wouldst know that the expectation of eternal happiness in the world that is to come, will raise one far above the petty strife and turmoil of this."

Konrad sighed, but made no reply.

"One virtue," continued the priest, "will counterbalance a hundred vices; and if the Earl of Bothwell—ha! thou knittest thy brow with wrath and hatred. Remember that he who cherisheth either, is like unto the fallen angels."

"I am but a mere man, father; and know that none would scorn me more for woman weakness than that proud noble, were I to say unto him—Earl Bothwell, I forgive thee!"

"Nay—bethink thee! he is most deserving of scorn who scorneth the humble; even as he is the weakest who oppresseth the weak."

"True it is, father!" exclaimed Konrad, striking together his fettered hands; "then here end all my visions of love and honour—my day-dreams of ambition and joy."

"Say not of joy, or to what purpose serve my exhortations?"

"Father," said Konrad; "I am very desolate and broken in spirit, and there are moments in my times of exceeding misery and depression, when I would willingly seek in the church for that refuge which our holy religion affords us; but I fear I am too much wedded to the world, and am too young for a sacrifice so serious."

"Say not so!" replied Sir James Tarbet, with animation, for at such a crisis of the Catholic church such sentiments were priceless to its upholders. "Youth lendeth additional grace to the practice of religion. Of this I will talk with thee more anon; and I trust that the day may come when I shall see thee hold aloft the blessed sacrament, on that holy altar which this infatuated people have prostrated for a time—I say, but for a time; for lo! again I see it rising phoenix-like from its ashes, in greater splendour than ever the middle ages saw!"

Fired by the energy of the priest, who seemed like something ethereal, as the noon-day sun streamed in a blaze of glory through the grated window on his kindling eyes and silver beard, and soothed by his manner and discourse, Konrad felt a new and hitherto unknown glow in his bosom, especially when the old man knelt down, saying—

"Pray with me, for this is the festival of Saint Edmund, the king and martyr; but, like many another consecrated day, it passes now in Scotland's hills and glens, unmarked by piety and prayer; for now, her sons can view with apathy the ruins of her altars, and the grass growing green in the aisles where their fathers prayed, and where their bones repose."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WHISPER.

Thence rugged toil attends his mazy way,
 And misery marks him for her prey;
Sedition, envy, murder, passion, strife,
 Spread horror o'er his path of life;
 These to the hated mansion lead,
 Where cheerless age reclines his drooping head.

Sophocles.

The whisper of Hob of Ormiston had not been lost on the Earl; hourly it haunted him; he thought of it by day, he dreamt of it by night.

Amid the pleasures of the table, the noise of the midnight revel, the ceremonies of the court, the debates of the council, the solemnities of the church, in the glare of the noonday sun, and, worst of all, in the silence of the voiceless night, that fatal whisper was in his ear, and fanning the latent spark of hell that lay smouldering in his heart.

He deemed himself predestined to accomplish that terrible advice; but still his soul recoiled within itself, and even the ardour of his love for Mary, and his hatred of her husband, were stifled for a time at the terrible contemplation. Life lost its pleasures—power and feudal splendour their zest; his employments were neglected; his attire, usually so magnificent, was never as it used to be—for a change had come over him, and that change was apparent to all. Mary could perceive that, at times, a dusky fire filled his dark and gloomy eyes, and then she immediately shunned their gaze. His brow had become pale and veined, and marked by thought and care. The gentle queen pitied him; and when compelled to address him (for he was still her most distinguished courtier), she did so with a kindness and reserve that only added fuel to the secret flame that preyed upon the Earl's heart.

The coldness, separation, and unconcealed dislike between Mary and King Henry still continued, and they were, to all appearance, irreconcilable; till he, after running headlong on a frightful career of luxury and mad riot at Glasgow, where he was residing at his father's mansion of Limmerfield, was seized with a deadly fever, which ended in that dreadful and loathsome disease, the smallpox, then very prevalent in the west country. And now, when prostrated in all his energies, abandoned by friends and foes, by the panders, and jockies, and boon companions among whom he had squandered his health and wealth, his own peace and the peace of his queen and wife—she nobly was the *first* who flew to his succour.

With a small train she departed in haste to the infant capital of the west; and Bothwell, who, with all his love, could not accompany her on such a visit, (though he admired her the more for it,) accompanied by Ormiston and Bolton, set out for the house of Whittinghame, a stately fortalice in his constabulary of Haddington, and belonging to Archibald Douglas, a kinsman and adherent of the Earl of Morton.

By a strange coincidence, rather than a mutual compact, many other peers and barons who were hostile to the house of Lennox and its heir, were then also

visiting the intriguing lord of Whittinghame; and, like several rills uniting in a river, the whole current of their conversation, thoughts, and sentiments, were bent on the destruction of the Stuarts of Lennox, either by secret and Machiavelian fraud, or in the good old Scottish fashion, with the displayed banner and uplifted spear.

The darkness of a winter night had closed over the keep and woods of Whittinghame; there was no snow on the ground, but as the sky was starless the gloom was intense. Sheet-lightning at times illumined the far horizon, and brought forward strong in relief from the lurid background, the black and towering cones of Gulane hill and Berwick's lofty law—that landmark of the German sea—but all was still, and not a branch stirring in the leafless woods, when silently and noiselessly, all well armed, masked, and muffled in their mantles, the guests of the lord of Whittinghame assembled under the sepulchral shadow of a great and venerable yew-tree, that still stands near the castle wall, and is pointed out to the curious as the scene of their meeting.

Thick and impervious, the yew cast its umbrageous shade above them, and formed a fitting canopy for such a conclave of darkness and desperation; and heavily the chill dew dripped from the pendant branches.

There were present four peers and several of the lesser barons; Argyle, the proud but wavering Huntly, and Morton, cool and determined, and Bothwell, now the arch conspirator and Cataline of the conclave, with knit brows and clenched hands; a bloodless cheek, and lips compressed and pallid; a tongue that trembled alternately between the very load of eloquence that oppressed it, and the darkness of the purpose to which that dangerous eloquence was directed.

How little did some of these conspirators divine the other sentiment, so wild and guilty, that was making public utility an excuse for regicide; and that filled with an agony, almost amounting to suffocation, the breast of Scotland's greatest earl.

Near him stood his friend and evil mentor, that double-tongued master of intrigue and prince of plotters, Maitland the secretary, with his broad and massive brow, so high, so pale, and intellectual, his eagle eye and thin lips; and black Ormiston, the muscular and strong, whose qualities were those of the body only—the iron baron of his time, unscrupulous and bloodthirsty; from childhood inured to rapine, strife, and slaughter; while Bolton, the young and handsome, inspired to seek all the vengeance that rivalry and scorned love could prompt, was by turns as fierce as Morton, as politic and cruel as Maitland, as sullen as Argyle.

And there in whispers, under that old sepulchral yew, was debated and resolved on that deed of treason, of darkness, and of horror, that from Scotland's capital was to send forth an echo over Europe—an echo that would never die—the murder of King Henry, as a fool and tyrant, who had rendered himself intolerable

to the people. What passed is unknown, for history has failed to record it; and not even the voluminous rolls of Magister Absalom Beyer can supply the blank, save in one instance. Ormiston, with a treachery at which we blush in a Scottish baron, proposed that the Norwegian prisoner in Holyrood might easily be made a valuable tool in the affair; and that, by some adroitness, the whole blame of the projected assassination might be thrown upon him. This motion, which exactly suited his own ideas and taste, was warmly applauded by the Earl of Morton, and agreed to by the others, who cared not a jot about the matter.

The die was cast—the deed resolved on.

Then from beneath his mantle, the learned knight of Pittendriech, the Lord President of the supreme court, (a man still famous for his works on Scottish law,) drew forth a parchment, written and prepared with more than legal accuracy, and more than wolfish cruelty, by which they each and all bound themselves to stand by each other, in weal or woe, in victory or triumph, in defeat and death, with tower and vassal, life and limb; and to this bond they each in succession placed their seals and marks, or signatures; and feebly fell the light of a flickering taper on their pale visages and fierce eyes, as they appended their dishonoured titles to that Draconian deed, which the pale secretary received, and put up in his secret pocket, with such a smile as Satan would have done the assignment of their souls.[*]

[*] Mr. Carte, from a letter of Monsieur de Fenelon, 5th January, 1574, acquaints us, that Ormiston confessed that the Earl of Bothwell shewed him a paper subscribed by the Earls of Argyle, Huntly, and Morton, Sir James Balfour, and Secretary Maitland, promising him assistance in murdering the king. Various other authors give us proofs of the existence of the document.—See *Goodal*, vol. i.

Now with some precipitation they all prepared to separate.

”Farewell, laird of Whittinghame!” said Bothwell, as he leaped upon his horse, feeling that the probable excitement of a hard gallop would be a relief from his own thoughts, or more congenial with their impetuosity; ”and farewell, my lords and gentlemen! Now for the bloody game, and Scotland be thou my chess-board of battle! There shall I make knights and queens, and rooks and pawns, to move at my will, and to vanish when I list. Mount, Ormiston! and

ho—for Edinburgh!”

CHAPTER XXIII. THE MOTHER AND HER CHILD.

Victorian. Let me hear thy voice, and I am happy;
For every tone, like some secret incantation,
Calls up the buried past to plead for me—
Speak my beloved—speak onto my heart,
Whatever fills and agitates thine own.

The Spanish Student, Act III.

With the dogged resolution of one who neither will nor knows how to swerve from a purpose, Bothwell, with Ormiston and Bolton, laid their plans with Morton and others for the accomplishment of their terrible compact.

Any qualms the Earl had, were nearly stifled by the intelligence of Mary's complete reconciliation with her husband, for whom all her natural tenderness, as the first love and choice of her heart, returned; and, notwithstanding the loathly and disfiguring disease under which he laboured, and the great personal risk incurred by herself, like a "ministering angel" she hung over the sick-bed of the repentant profligate, who frequently implored her pardon and forgiveness—and in tears poor Mary blessed and forgave him.

Exaggerated tidings of these passages fired the fierce soul of the Earl with jealousy and wrath, at what he deemed the mere caprice of a pretty woman; but the gage had been thrown to fate, and a cloud was gathering over Mary's thorny crown, which as yet she neither saw nor felt.

His youth, and the natural strength of his constitution, enabled the young king to surmount that disease which had baffled the skill of Maitre Picauet, the half quack, half astrologer leech, who attended him; and, as soon as he was convalescent, the queen had him conveyed in a soft litter, by easy stages, to the capital, hoping that by the luxuries procurable there, the purity of the air, and better attendance, he might be fully restored to health and to her.

Upon this the conspirators, still alive to their intentions, sent the Lord President of the College of Justice to make offer of an ancient mansion that was situated on rising ground to the southward of Edinburgh, exposed to the pure breeze

beyond the city walls, from the woods of the burgh-muir, and the beautiful sheet of water which they bordered. The unsuspecting Mary gratefully accepted the courteous offer, and there the poor young king was conveyed to—die.

This house belonged to the Lord President's brother, Robert Balfour, Provost of "the Collegiate Kirk of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Fields." It had long been uninhabited; and was situated, says Buchanan, in a lonesome and solitary place, between the ruins of two churches, "where no noise or outcry could be heard." It stood without the city walls, on the site now occupied by Drummond Street.

Small, ancient, and massive, it was probably coeval with its church, which had been built in 1220 by Alexander II. Its front faced the west; and from thence a view from the windows extended over fields to the hamlet of Lauriston. Its northern gable was so close to the strong wall of the city, that its principal door was but one pace distant from an arched postern which is still discernible in the former, and was then flanked by a massive tower. To the westward lay the Kirk-of-Field, a great cross church with buttressed walls and pointed windows, for so it is shown in a print of 1544. To the eastward lay the ruins of the Dominican monastery, which had been burned down in 1528. Of these the fragment of a tower still survived, with an ancient gate, bearing in Saxon characters the same legend still remaining to this day in the wall of the Kirk-of-Field Wynd, which now bears another name—

Ave Maria, gratia plena Dominus Terum,

i.e., "Hail Mary! full with grace—the Lord be with you." On the south the fields extended to the spacious common muir of the city, which was shaded by many a Druid oak; and to the eastward the ground descended suddenly into the lonely valley at the foot of Salisbury crags. To the north lay the long line of the city ramparts, with the barrier-portes of the Kirk-of-Field and Bristo, with their round arches flanked by strong towers, where the brass culverins scowled through deep embrasures, and the heads of Rizzio's minor murderers grinned on iron spikes.

The humble dwelling in which Mary's incaution and the conspirators' cunning had lodged the young king, was a two-storied house; a small corridor, having a room on each side, led to a tower behind, wherein (after the Scottish fashion) a circular stair gave access to the upper story, which contained but two apartments, corresponding with two on the ground floor.

Darnley occupied one; the queen had the chamber below, and beneath it were those vaults of which the conspirators made a use so fatal; on the south lay a spacious garden shaded by many venerable fruit-trees, which had been reared by prebendaries of St. Mary.

It was now the month of February, 1567.

Thaws, and the increasing heat of the sun, had dispelled the snow from moor and mountain side, though a little still lingered on the peaks of the beautiful Pentlands. The atmosphere was teeming with humid vapours, and the ice that had so long bound the loch of the city, had been dissipated, and once more the snowy swan and the sable coot floated on its azure bosom. The thatch on the cottage roofs of Lauriston was once again of emerald green, and the tufted grass began to droop, where for the past winter the icicle had hung.

Each morning, as he rose above Arthur's Seat, the sun shone more merrily on the barred windows of the close chamber where the sick king lay; and he heard the voices of the mavis and merle, as they sang on the dewy trees of the ancient orchard. A showery Candlemas-tide had come and gone, unmarked by ceremony or prayer; but old people congratulated each other on the prospect of a beautiful spring, as they repeated the ancient saw—

"Gif Candlemass is fair and clear,
We'll hae twa winters in the year;"

and merrily the hoodie-crow cawed in the blue sky, and the sparrow twittered on the budding hedges, while the ploughman whistled on the rigs of Lauriston and St. Leonard, and urged through the teeming earth their old Scottish ploughs, that were drawn by four oxen, and had but one stilt, like those described by Virgil in his first Georgic.

Darnley was slowly recovering, and the young queen, animated perhaps more by pity than affection, still attended him with an assiduity that was no less remarkable than praiseworthy. One of his pages slept constantly in the chamber, and was ever at his call by day and by night; while Mary, when not attending the council at Holyrood, with a few attendants occupied the rooms below.

Many of the nobles came to the house daily, and Bothwell among them, making dutiful enquiries concerning the progress of the king's illness rather than his health; for many of them hoped he yet would die, and so save them from the guilty deed designed.

It was the evening of the 10th February, and every part of the plan for the accomplishment of the king's destruction was in progress: an opportunity alone was waited.

In the antechamber of his apartment, a little room, hung with some of that rich arras which Mary had brought with her from France, she was seated with the young prince upon her knee—then a flaxen-haired and hazel-eyed infant of eight months. Mary was paler than usual; for many a night-watch by Darnley's fever couch had injured her health, and increased that pain of which she so fre-

quently complained, in her side. The prince's nurse or governess, Annabella of Tullibardine, the venerable Countess of Mar, attired in a great tub fardingale of black brocaded satin, and a towering linen coif of Queen Margaret's days, leaned on the back of Mary's chair, toying with the infant, and making it crow and smile.

Bolton, as lieutenant of the archers, stood in the recess of a window at the lower end of the room, accoutred in half armour, and having his helmet lying near him; and Bothwell, clad in black velvet, magnificently embroidered with Venetian gold, his sword and waistbelt, his poniard and bonnet blazing with jewels, as his blue velvet mantle did with spangles, stood in another, clanking his gold spurs, and pointing his well-perfumed and pomatumed mustaches; for, however deep and deadly his projects, he now never omitted an opportunity of appearing to the best advantage in Mary's presence; and on this evening nothing could surpass the splendour of his aspect and the gallantry of his air.

How little could Mary conceive the guilty hopes then animating his proud heart, and the dark purposes concealed under an exterior so prepossessing!

"My Lady Mar!" said she, stopping suddenly in her play with the infant, on whom she was pouring all that maternal tenderness, which was the stronger because there was no other object with whom to share her love; "how goeth the time? Is it the hour at which Picauet the leech desired his grace to receive the ptisan?"

"I have no horologue," replied the aged Countess. "Beside, I deem them the work of sorcerers; but Sir John Hepburn can see the dial-stone at the corner there. What sayeth the gun?"

"'Tis three by the dial, noble lady," replied the archer, peering through the grated casement.

"*Jesu!*" exclaimed the Queen; "*comme le temps passe!*" 'Tis time I were busking me for Sebastian's bridal. Lord Bothwell—thou knowest the Chevalier Sebastian? He is one of my foreign musicians, who is to be wedded to-night at Holyrood, where, in the old fashion, I have promised to put the bride to bed. *Ma foi!* but 'tis droll!"

"Indeed!" responded the Earl, scarcely knowing what he said.

"What! hast thou not heard that I am to give a ball in consequence, despite Knox and his rebellious sermons? Did not the master of the household, Sir Gilbert Balfour, invite thee?"

"True, madam; but I have to keep a tryst with the Knight of Ormiston, which will—will preclude, as thou—pardon me, I mean your Majesty, will perceive"—The Earl paused; he was seriously embarrassed, and his face became deadly pale; but he was relieved on the arras covering the door of Darnley's chamber being softly raised, and a slight but handsome page—a pale and delicate boy—richly attired in a jaquette of carnation velvet, laced and buttoned

with gold, with his well-rounded legs encased in white silk hosen—appeared, and said in a low and hurried voice—

”Madam—his majesty is asking for the ptisan ordered by your physician, Martin de Picauet.”

”It will be ready in a minute,” said the stately old noblewoman, as she peered with her keen eyes into a silver pot, which had been simmering on the warm hearthstone, and contained one of those medicinal decoctions for which the dames of other days were so famous—a notable ptisan, made of barley boiled with raisins, liquorice, and other ingredients, which she carefully stirred widder-shins; that is, the reverse of the sun’s course, otherwise its whole power, virtue, and efficacy, would have been lost. ”Lord Bothwell,” said she, ”wilt thou favour me so far as to see that his grace takes the whole of this, my medicated draught?”

”I assure you, noble madam, that my good friend Bolton is much more of a nurse, and hath more of a lady’s nature, than I,” replied the Earl, who found it impossible, at one and the same time, to love Mary and sympathize with her husband, whom he sincerely wished to take his speedy departure to a better world. Mary gave him one keen, reproachful glance; but Hepburn, who was anxious to behold, but with no compassionate eye, the man whom he had doomed to destruction—for the memory of the night-scene in the garden of Holyrood still rankled in his memory—that night, since when he had never seen his loved and lost Mariette, for the profligate king had spirited her away. Now the full glow of hatred rose darkly in his haughty and resentful heart; so, taking from the countess the old peg-tankard containing the ptisan, he raised the arras and entered the chamber of Darnley; but almost at the same moment the page and the anxious old countess followed.

Bothwell, who had been relieved by the presence of others, now trembled; for the continual restraint he imposed upon his ardour, made him feel how dangerous was the predicament in which he stood. Should he not shun this dark temptation, that was gradually verging him, like a rudderless ship, on the shoals of destruction? Should he not fly the witcheries of Mary, and the charm of her presence, while he yet had the power? No! For the hatred he cherished against Darnley, the secret favour which he fondly imagined was borne him in Mary’s heart, his own unbounded ambition and haughty pride, all forbade such a measure.

His better angel wept, and Bothwell stayed!

He drew nearer the queen.

There, in the full glory of the setting sun, in the curtained recess of that tall pointed window, sat the young and royal mother, in all the bloom of four-and-twenty, and the charms of her innocence and beauty. The little prince (he who, in future times, would ”a twofold ball and treble sceptre carry,”) lay in her

lap, pulling with his dimpled hands the massive tresses of her bright auburn hair, that, like the softest silk, unbound by his playfulness, rolled over her thick ruff, and pure alabaster neck.

The Earl thought her more beautiful and touching in her maternity, then she seemed when in all her maiden loveliness at the court of the Tournelles. Mary, who felt a little confused on finding herself alone with one to whose secret hopes she was now no stranger, never once raised her dark eyes to the glowing face that she knew full well was bent with ardour upon her; and, though secure in the innocence of her own heart, she felt that she was in a dangerous vicinity; and, blushing at the recollection of the garden scene, never once addressed the Earl, who, restrained by etiquette, remained silent and in his place, playing with the gold tassel of his long rapier.

How loveable, how amiable Mary seemed, and how different from her cousin of England, the puissant Elizabeth; in her cold and stale virginity—her old maiden folly, and youthful frippery; her dancing at seventy years of age before the ambassadors of Scotland and Spain, to shew how very young she was!

As the Earl gazed upon Mary, love filled his mind with the most glittering illusions, and cast a halo round her that dazzled him. He almost fancied himself the husband of the beautiful being before him, and the father of the little cherub on her knee; a glow, to which his heart had yet been a stranger, swelled up within it, as the brief hallucination became more complete. His passing flame for Anna and his Countess—his schemes of power and grandeur—were all forgotten and merged in the joy that filled his bosom. There was something almost pure and holy in it; and he felt, that were he really what he strove to imagine himself, he would become an altered man—he could for evermore be good, and just, and saintly.

The sound of a shrill silver whistle (there were then no handbells) from the next room where Darnley lay sick, dispelled the illusion; the queen hurriedly placed her babe in its cradle of carved oak, and hastened away, with buoyancy in her step, and anxiety in her eye.

Dark as midnight was the expression that lowered on Bothwell's brow, when thus brought suddenly back to the world of realities, and, like a flood, the stern compact made under that baleful yew at Whittinghame—that doubly attested bond of blood—the danger to be dared and the deed to be done, all rushed upon his memory, and he smote his pale forehead, as with confusion and agony he staggered under the very gush of his own dreadful thoughts.

But there was no time to be lost.

The sun was verging towards the Pentland's western peaks. He had to meet his friends at the lodging of the laird of Ormiston in the High Street, for much had yet to be done ere.....

He thrust away the thought, and, bowing to the Countess of Mar, drew his mantle about him and rushed away.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE KING'S PAGE.

And thou, my heart,
That idly tremblest at the thought of death,
Soon in the tomb thy anxious pulse shall cease
To slumber in eternal rest.

Panthea, a Tragedy.

The chamber was dark, for its grated windows faced the east, and the time was evening; the curtains were half drawn, to exclude the light, which was already partly secluded by a great gloomy bastel-house of the town rampart. The walls of the room were pannelled, and, like the ceiling, painted with a variety of grotesque designs, amid which, as usual, the thistle and fleur-de-lys bore conspicuous places; but, according to the ancient and primitive mode, the floor was strewn with green rushes, freshly pulled from the margin of the neighbouring lake.[*]

[*] Hentzner, in his *Itinerary*, writing of Queen Elizabeth's chamber at Greenwich, says, "the floor, after the English mode, was strewed with *hay*," evidently meaning rushes—See *Brand*.

The young king was sleeping heavily and uneasily.

Raised upon a dais of steps, his bed was ancient and massive; the posts, of walnut-tree, were covered with quaint designs, and carved into four tall figures, having the heads of men, with eagle's wings and lion's bodies; rising from pedestals, they seemed like dusky demons upholding the canopy of a tomb; for the festoons of the bed were of crimson velvet, flowered by the fair hands of Mary and her ladies; the seats of the high-backed chairs were all of the same costly materials.

Sharpened and attenuated by disease, Darnley's features glimmered in the subdued light, like those of a rigid corpse; and the myriad pustules incident to the hideous ailment under which he suffered, were apparent to the louring eye of Bolton, who, remembering that night in the garden of Holyrood, gazed upon

him with sensations akin to those of a tigress robbed of her cubs; and the age was not one when men sat placidly under a sense of wrong, or repressed their impulses either of good or evil.

He gave the goblet to the page, whose hand trembled, and whose eye was averted as he received it; then, creeping softly to the side of the slumberer, he placed an arm affectionately under his head, raised it, awoke him, and placed the ptisan to his parched lips, and thirstily Darnley drank of the grateful beverage.

At that moment a ray of sunset, reflected from the wall of the adjacent bastel-house, lit up the chamber, and the hollow recess of that great bed, where the kingly sufferer lay; and through the disguise of a page's jaquette and ruff, the trunk hosen and shorn hair, Bolton recognised Mariette Hubert—his lost, his fallen Mariette, with her arm round Darnley's head, that head pressed against her breast; and this was under his own eyes.

He gave an involuntary start—an exclamation rose to his lips, but died there; and all he had lately heard of this false page's tenderness and assiduity, flashed like fire upon his memory, and his hand wandered to the hilt of his dagger, for grimly the thoughts of assassination and revenge floated before him.

Darnley kissed her hand as he sank back exhausted; thus showing that he was aware of her sex, and a blindness seemed to fall upon the eyes of Bolton, for he had loved that French coquette with all the depth and truth of a brave and romantic heart; but the sight of all this tenderness lavished on a rival, and the consciousness that Mariette, whom he would have raised to the rank of a Scottish baron's wife, was content to be the mistress of this profligate king, entered like ice into his heart. There was a terrible expression in his face, when Mariette gave him one furtive glance of her timid eyes, and saw that she was discovered.

Fascinated and terrified by the sad and tender, yet serpent-like gaze of her former lover, she dared not remove her eyes; but sank down on the dais of the bed, and, clasping her hands, said in a low voice,—

"Ah, monsieur! forgive me? If ever thou didst love, in pity now forgive me! Thou knowest not what I have endured since I wronged thee—and how I have endeavoured to atone for it"—

"By such a scene as this?" replied Bolton, with a bitter smile; "but enough! I hope his majesty hath enjoyed his draught of the ptisan; for I doubt mickle if my Lady Mar will make such another browst—for *him* at least."

"Dost thou think he will die?" asked Mariette, breathlessly.

"Not of the fever!" replied Bolton, grimly. "But be true to thy charge, Made-moiselle Hubert—anon I will be with thee."

"Thou—when?" asked Mariette, gathering courage from his stoical coldness of manner.

"*To-night!*" he replied, with a smile that terrified her, as he took the ptisan

cap from her passive hand, and left the chamber by a door opposite to that by which he had entered.

There was an agony in his heart that impelled him to seek solitude. Descending the turnpike stair by three steps at a time, and issuing into the fields, he traversed the path that led under the city walls towards the Porte of St. Mary's Wynd.

The shadows of evening deepened into those of night, and the hour approached when Mary was to set forth to attend the espousal of her favourite damsel, Margaret Corewood, to Sebastian the musician; which ceremony, with her usual love of gaiety and society, she resolved to celebrate by a ball, or, as it was then named, a *hall*.

A strong instance of Mary's returning love for her husband, was this night evinced by her leaving the hall at nine o'clock, and hurrying back to the lonely house of the Kirk-of-Field, with a few attendants, to visit him once more before the dancing began.

Whether the marriage of Margaret Corewood had brought back the memory of their own, in all its first freshness, in Mary's ardent mind, or that joy to behold the changed manner and subdued aspect of her haughty and profligate husband, had rekindled her early love for him, is unknown; but this last interview between them was marked by unusual tenderness.

She kissed him repeatedly, soothed him by her winning and playful manner—and, placing a valuable ring upon his hand, blessed him with fervour; and then, with a light heart and a happy spirit, hurried away to finish the festivities at Holyrood, and "put the bride to bed."

The malevolent Buchanan, who, forgetful of many a favour, was Mary's bitterest enemy, and but for whose elegant Latin the vulgar Edinburgh gossip of 1567 would never have reached us, states, that during this interview the queen was aware that the conspirators were placing powder in the chambers below. But the depositions taken in the presence of the Lords of the Secret Council evince the contrary; and Camden assures us, that Buchanan, on his death-bed, deplored with tears the falsehoods he had handed down to posterity.

It is remarkable that a presentiment of his approaching fate haunted the mind of the young king, who frequently said that he knew he was to be slain. He became sad and thoughtful; and, chanting the 55th Psalm, fell asleep with his

head on the shoulder of Mariette Hubert.

CHAPTER XXV. IN THREE HOURS IT WILL BE TIME.

Thou sure and firm-set earth!
Hear not my footsteps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
And take the present horror from a time
Which now suits with it.

Macbeth.

Evening drew on, while, buried in deep thought, the Earl walked from the house of the Kirk-of-Field, without knowing whence his steps led, until he found himself on the hill of St. Leonard, where the ruined chapel, dedicated to that holy hermit, overlooked the deep and grassy vale that lay between it and the imposing crags of Salisbury, whose brows of rugged basalt towered up against the blue sky in rigid outline.

All around these ruins was desolate and bare; and, save a few sheep browsing on the sprouting herbage, there was no living thing near him. Bothwell could hear the pulses of his heart. He leant against the shaft of Umfraville's cross—a time-worn relic of antiquity, that in those days stood on the pathway near the chapel; and, folding his arms in his mantle, endeavoured to compose and arrange the tumult of his thoughts.

The spring evening was serene, and the scenery beautiful. Afar off, amid a blaze of saffron, the sun's flaming circle seemed to rest on the western flank of the magnificent Pentland chain; and each mountain came forward in strong warm light, while the valleys between were veiled in shadow.

The sound of a distant bell fell on the ear of the Earl.

"Seven o'clock," said he; "in three hours it will be time!"

Sheltered by towering hills, and overhung by the aspiring city, he saw the old monastic palace, sleeping, as it were, at the bottom of a dell, all seemed so still around it; and far beyond lay the dark blue German sea, dotted with the sails of Flemish crayers and galleys of Rochelle; but its bosom grew darker as the daylight died away behind the distant hills.

The shadows grew longer and darker, and obscurity veiled the valley where the palace lay.

Full upon Edina's castled rock and all her lofty hills, fell the last light of the western sun, from between glowing bars of golden cloud; and their giant shadows, broad, vast, and dewy, were thrown to the eastward, becoming, as the sun sunk, longer and longer, till they reached the ocean, that rolled upon the almost desert shore of the Figgate muir. The gradual fading of the light amid the mountain solitude that overhung the city, soothed and saddened the Earl, for the spot was wild and lonely; the black eagle and the osprey then built their nests in the craigs of Salisbury; and the red fox and the dun fuimart reared their cubs undisturbed in the valley below.

He felt an agitation and a compunction hitherto unknown, in his bosom; and, as the day faded, he watched its decline with the anxiety of a man who was to die at nightfall.

The shadows ascended from the low places to the higher, rising slowly, surely, broadly, like a transparent tide, on the trunks of the lofty oaks that shaded the city muir, on the slopes of Arthur's Seat and Samson's stony ribs, on St. Giles's diademed tower, and the castle's bannered keep—up, up the Pentlands' sides it crept slowly and silently, the coming night (that night which was never to be forgotten by him), till the last gleam of the west died away on the heath-clad peak of Torduff, the loftiest of that magnificent chain of mountains.

It was gone! the whole hills were sunk in sombre shadow; the evening star began to twinkle above the ruined spire of St. Mary's Kirk, and night and silence stole upon the world together.

"Would this night were over!" muttered the Earl, passing his hand across his clammy brow. "Would to God it were!—God! how dare I to name *him?*".....

He gave one long, keen glance at the distant house of the Kirk-of-Field, and saw its lofty outline, with crowstepped roofs and turnpike tower, standing in dark relief between him and the blushing west; a light was beginning to twinkle in one of the apartments.

It was from that where Darnley lay.

Already, with remorse, Bothwell thought of poor Konrad of Saltzberg; for aware that, in its first fury, the popular vengeance would require some victim to glut its outpouring, Ormiston—ever cool, calculating and ruthless—had recommended, as we have stated, that the friendless foreigner should be involved in that night's deed of darkness; and rendered almost blindly selfish, in the magnitude of the risk about to be incurred by himself and so many great nobles, he had assented to this additional act of cruelty.

"Alms, noble Earl, for God and our blessed Lady's sake!" said a voice near the ruined cross. Bothwell started and turned, and encountered the reverend fig-

ure of Sir James Tarbet, leaning on a long staff; and stung to the soul by the momentary contemplation of this old man's poverty and humility, when contrasted with his own pride and guilt, he turned abruptly away.

"Thou hast not heeded me, Lord Earl," said the old man; "but may they whose names I implored, bless thee not the less."

Touched by this resignation, he approached the poor priest with averted eyes.

"Alms, sir! for the sake of the soul of old Earl Adam of Bothwell; had he been alive, I had not needed to crave them to-day. He fell by my side at Flodden; and this poor hand was raised to save him from the English billmen."

Bothwell hurriedly placed his purse in the withered fingers of the priest; and thus, with the greatest of all human virtues in his hand, and the blackest of all human crimes in his heart, he drew his bonnet over his eyes, and at a rapid pace, as if he would leave his own fierce ambition and desperate thoughts behind him, began to descend the hill of St. Leonard, towards the palace of Holyrood, where a line of brilliantly illuminated windows recalled to his memory the royal ball given in honour of the nuptials of Sebastian.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE OLD TOWNE OF HOLYROOD.

Mine is the fortune of a simple child,
 That in the glass his image looks upon;
 And by the shadow of himself beguiled,
 Breaks quick the brittle charm, and joy is gone.
 So gazed I—and I deemed my joy would last—
 On the bright image of my lady fair;
 But ah! the dream of my delight is past,
 And lore and rapture yield to dark despair.
Henri of Morunge, the Minnesinger.

Above the northern shoulder of Arthur's Seat, the moon rose red and fiery. Slowly its lurid circle cleared the ridge of the darkened mountain, and ascended into the grey sky, through which the clouds were hurrying, like banners of black crape.

Konrad watched it from a slit in the prison wall where he was confined; and even that slit, though scarcely four inches broad, was secured by a cross bar of iron; and the pale moonlight and the cold wind played on his face together, as they penetrated his strong chamber in the Albany tower, and served but to make it seem more comfortless and desolate.

He was alone now; for Father Tarbet had been released, and "expelled the walls of the city, with all his idolatrous crosses and pictures."

He and Konrad had parted in sorrow, and now every night he missed the soothing prayers and kind consolations of the good old priest; and imagined, with pity and indignation, the insults to which he was certain of being exposed, when wandering in a Reformed and hostile land, without a shelter for his venerable head.

From many of the palace windows, bright flakes of light fell on the green holly-hedges and dewy grass of the royal gardens, and on the dusky buttresses and pointed windows of the chapel, throwing their steady radiance on the grim outline of James V's tower, and the aged sycamore that shaded its massive wall. A faint strain of music stole upon the soft night wind, and then died away.

Again it came, and the chapel's hollow aisles replied—again and again, through the opened casements, burst in full chorus the music of the queen's Italian singers performing Sebastian's bridal hymn.

The pulses of Konrad's enthusiastic heart rose and fell with the music; for he was borne away from himself on the stream of harmony that swept past him. The air resembled one that he had frequently heard Anna sing, and all her memory came rushing on his mind. Bowing his face upon his hands, he pressed his flushed brow against the rusty bars, and groaned aloud.

At that moment some one, who had entered his prison unheard, touched him on the shoulder. He started from his reverie, to be confronted by the same dark and colossal figure, that met his gaze on the night when he fell from the Terrace of Bergen into the Fiord below. Tall, dusky, and muffled in a mantle, he wore a black mask, partially concealing his face; but his bright, fierce eyes shown through it like red stars.

"Groaning—eh! art thou sick?" he asked.

"Yes—of life!"

"Faith! I thought it was the mulligrubs. God-den to thee, Konrad of Saltberg—whilk I believe is thy title—'tis long since we have spoken; yet, methinks, thou mayest still remember me."

"I do, for mine enemy!" replied Konrad, whose indignation rose at the voice.

"Cock and pie! say not that," replied Ormiston; "for may the great devil spit me, if I owe thee any ill-will, or mean thee aught like mischief!"

"Then for what end dost thou seek me now? I have endured here exceeding

misery. Who is there that has known sorrow without some relief—despair without hope—who, but I? An irresistible current of misfortunes has hurried me on, and—I am here—here, where I am almost forgetting the use of my limbs, while life is in its bloom; yea, and the very tone of my own voice. What have I done among ye, sirs, in this land of Scotland, to be treated thus?”

”By Jove! I can scarcely tell; but there are those about Holyrood who say, that keeping thee caged up here, is only feeding what ought to be hanged to feed the corbies; yet, if thou wouldest attain that liberty for which thou longest, do as I bid thee, and thou shalt escape to thine beloved Norway—God amend it! for the flavour of its sawdust bannocks and sour ale are yet fresh in my memory.”

”Thou hast some selfish end of thine own to serve in this.”

”By cock and pie! Sir Konrad, thou measurest thy friends by a low standard, especially such a long-limbed one as I. Thou canst not well be worse. Stay here, and thou wilt assuredly be hanged, whenever honest Gilbert Balfour, the Master of the Household, grows tired of feeding thee; follow me, and thou mayest escape.”

”Thou sayest true; I cannot be worse; lead on—I follow thee!”

Ormiston gave him a mantle, unclasped the massive fetterlocks that secured his stiffened ankles, and led him down the narrow stair of the tower into the outer court of Holyrood, where Konrad almost tottered and fell, on finding himself fully exposed to the keen night wind of February; but black Ormiston, with rough kindness, forced him to take a draught from a hunting-flask that hung at his girdle, and then gave him a sword, saying,—

”If we are assailed, thou must stand by me!”

”To the death!” replied Konrad, as he grasped the sword, and felt his spirit rise with his old energy and ardour on finding himself once again armed, fetterless, and free. His sinews became strong; his bosom fired; his heart danced with joy; and, little dreaming of the treachery designed him, or the trap into which he was falling, he shook the strong hand of the gigantic Ormiston in token of confidence and thankfulness.

The greater part of the vast and irregular façade of Holyrood was buried in darkness; the buildings were of various heights and ages, the highest portion being that which now forms the north wing; and heavily its great round towers and corbelled battlements loomed against the murky sky.

The moon was now veiled by a cloud; scarcely a star was visible; and the chill wind whistled drearily in the empty courts, and through the low gothic cloisters built by St. David I. for the monks of the Holy Cross.

Passing James V.'s tower, Ormiston led Konrad to the southern doorway of the royal garden, and thereon he knocked thrice with the pommel of his long heavy sword.

"Who is without there?" asked a voice.

"One who would *keep tryst!*" replied Ormiston, using Bothwell's family motto—the parole agreed upon.

The gate was immediately opened, and six or seven men well muffled in dark mantles, and wearing swords and black velvet masks, came forth cautiously, one at a time. As they stepped into the palace-yard, the clank of steel made it apparent to Konrad that they were all well armed; and in their general bearing and aspect there was no mistaking them for any thing else than what they were—conspirators; and, though he knew them not, many of them were no other than the very men who had met beneath that baleful yew-tree at the castle of Whittinghame.

"'Tis high time we were fairly set forth!" said one, in whom, by his short stature and long beard, Ormiston recognised the Earl of Morton.

"True," added his vassal, the Laird of Whittinghame; "for the city horologue has struck ten, and by that hour the queen was to leave for Sebastian's ball."

"Bothwell, thou hast wisely changed all thine outward trumpery," said Ormiston.

"Behold," replied the Earl, displaying a coarse, canvass gaberdine above a coat-of-mail, for which he had exchanged his ball costume, "a pair of black velvet hoise, trimit with silver, and ane doublet of satin," as we are minutely informed by the *Depositions in Proesentia Dominorum Secreti Concilii*.

He carried in his hand a maul, to beat down doors or other obstructions.

The other conspirators, John of Bolton, Hob Ormiston of that Ilk, Hay of Tallo, Hume of Spott, and John Binney, a vassal of Whittinghame, were all well armed with coats-of-mail and pyne-doublets. At the palace porch, a gothic edifice, flanked on one side by a round tower, on the other by a projecting turret, they were met by French Paris, leading a sumpter-horse, laden with leathern mails. These contained powder, taken by the Earl from the royal store in the castle of Dunbar, of which he was governor.

Konrad imagined correctly, that some of the voices of his strange companions were not unfamiliar to his ear, but they conversed in low whispers; and feeling no way very comfortable in the company of men whose aspect, in armour and disguise, revealed that they were bent on some mission of darkness and danger, he thought only of escape. But, as if this very thought was divined, Black Ormiston stuck to his skirts like a burr; and, as they passed through the long dark arch of the portal, he whispered hoarsely,—

"Attempt not to escape; for I have here a dague that shoots a three-ounce ball, and I will not be slow in using it!"

Konrad, whose spirit could ill brook this, would have made some suitable rejoinder; but at this moment two archers of the guard challenged.

"Who are there?"

"Friends," replied the Earl of Morton.

"What friends?"

"My Lord of Bothwell's friends," and the whole party issued into the Canon-gate.[*]

[*] Such really appears to have been the incautious answer given to the various sentinels.—
Depositiones, I. P. D.

Where revealed by the mask, which came only down to his dark mustaches, Bothwell's face was white as marble; and, as they passed the Mint, he looked up at the dark windows of David Rizzio's empty mansion, which stood at the corner of the Horse Wynd.

"He was slain just about this time last year," said the Earl.

"And this night will be avenged," replied Ormiston, as if to apologise for the purpose which had brought them together.

At the back of the south garden, they were again challenged by two archers with bent bows, and, replying in the same unguarded manner, passed on.

They ascended the dark and silent Canongate, where not a sound was heard save their own footfalls, and the dull tramp of the felt-shod sumpter-horse that bore the powder mails; and, passing the lofty barrier that divided the burghs by its strong round towers and double arch, they descended with silence and rapidity the broad and spacious wynd of the Blackfriars, and reached the foot unseen.

Here, we are told, they paused a moment, while Bolton purchased a "candell frae Geordie Burnis wife in the Cowgate;" and at that time a blaze of light, flashing along the narrow street, on the octagon turrets of that picturesque old house, where whilome dwelt the great Cardinal of St. Stephen, made them shrink under its shadow with some dismay; for lo! the unconscious queen, attended by three Earls (two of whom were also conspirators), Argyle, Huntly, and Cassilis, with her sister, the Countess Jane, and other ladies, the whole escorted by Sir Arthur Erskine's archers, passed down the opposite wynd, en route for the palace. She was on foot; six soldiers of the guard bore a blue silk canopy over her head, and twelve others carried torches.

She was returning to Holyrood, from her hurried visit to that very place for which all these muffled men were bound—the lonely house of the Kirk-of-Field!

On her beautiful face and smart hood, the black velvet of which contrasted so well with her snowy brow, fell the full glare of the streaming torches, imparting to her usually pale cheek a tinge of red, and to her auburn hair the hue of gold.

Mary Erskine, sister to the captain of the archers, bore her train, and the long stomacher from which it fell was sparkling with jewels; for she was arrayed in all the lavish richness of the time.

Intoxicated by her beauty, every scruple that the impressive gloom of the night, and the cooler reflections of the last few hours, had raised in the Earl's breast, died away; and, with eyes that beamed with the most eager and impassioned love, he saw her pass down the street, and disappear.

Her light heart was full of visions of anticipated gaiety; and, already reveling amid the brilliance, the music, and the dancers at Sebastian's ball, how little could she anticipate what was about to ensue!

Passing through Todrick's Wynd, and the spacious gardens of the monks of St. Dominic (where now the Infirmary stands), they issued from a little postern in the city wall (the keys of which Bothwell had secured), and found themselves under the shadow of *the House* of the Kirk, which was buried in obscurity and darkness, save where one solitary ray of faint light streamed into the desolate garden, from the apartment where the sick king lay.

Every eye was fixed upon it.

All around was silent as the grave; there was nothing stirring save the branches of the leafless orchard, which creaked mournfully in the rising wind, and the tufts of long reedy grass that waved in the rough masonry of the dark old Flodden wall.

At times, the red rays of the moon shot forth tremulously between the flying vapour upon that dreary spot, and the high sepulchral dwelling, throwing light and shadow fitfully upon its dark discoloured walls.

The conspirators drew close together.

They were all pale as death; but their masks concealed the trepidation that would, nevertheless, have been visible in every face, as their voices betrayed it to be in every heart.

"Hist! dost thou not hear groans?" whispered Bothwell, plucking Black Ormiston by the cloak.

"Groans!" reiterated the startled conspirator. "No"—

"By Heaven! I even heard a low wailing cry upon the wind."

"Go to! if thou hearest this before, what wilt thou hear *after?*"

* * * * *

It is very remarkable that the Earl of Moray, (who is not said to have had any share in this conspiracy,) on the morning of that day should have left Holyrood suddenly, to visit his countess, who, he said, was seriously ill at St. Andrews; and it is still more remarkable, that when riding along the coast of Fife, attended by

only one confidential retainer, he should—as Bishop Lesly informs us—burst out with these ominous words—

”This night, ere morning, the Lord Darnley shall lose his life!”

END OF VOLUME SECOND.

M'CORQUODALE & CO., 24, CARDINGTON STREET, LONDON.
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3) ***

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