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THE
BRAES OF YARROW.

A Romance.

BY
CHARLES GIBBON,

AUTHOR OF "ROBIN GRAY," "IN HONOUR BOUND," "FOR THE KING,"
"IN LOVE AND WAR," "QUEEN OF THE MEADOW,"
"WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE BRAES OF YARROW.



CHAPTER I.

THE SOUTERS OF SELKIRK.

“ Up wi’ the souters o’ Selkirk,
And down wi’ the Earl o’ Home,
And up wi’ a’ the braw lads
That sew the single-soled shoon.

“ Fye upon yellow and yellow,
And fye upon yellow and green ;
But up wi’ the true blue and scarlet,
And up wi’ the single-soled sheen.

“ Up wi’ the souters o’ Selkirk,
For they are baith trusty and leal ;
And up wi’ the men o’ the Forest,
And down wi’ the Merse to the deil.”

Old Ballad.

It was not with the best grace possible that Ding-a’-Doon started from the Tower at

midnight, upon the commission of his master to Selkirk, after what he had seen and heard. The companionship of the dwarf did not help much to reassure him, for he had a notion that Hornie himself was uncanny.

As an addition to his discomfort, the night was dark and cold. Heavy rains had cleared away the snow, and had swollen streams and rivers, so that it became a serious matter to ford the Ettrick.

Seeking the safest part to ford, Pate and his companion rode cautiously down the water side. The former had not the slightest thought of helping the journey with good humour; he was surly and silent. He was all the more surly when he heard Hornie chuckling to himself, as if he had fallen upon some excellent jest.

Suddenly, the dwarf—

“It’s a dark nicht, Pate.”

“Ay, it’s dark eneuch.”

“Dark eneuch to make the deil’s licht welcome.”

“No—no,” bellowed Pate, looking around

him uncomfortably, as if he expected to see the light appear at its mention; "no, it's never dark eneuch for that, and ye'd better no speak about sic things enoo."

The latter words were uttered in a threatening growl. Whether he was affected by the threat or not, Hornie allowed the conversation to drop until they were about to attempt the ford.

"Did ye no hear onything, Pate?" he queried, under his breath.

"No—whar?"

"Doon there in the water."

"I didna hear—what was it like?"

"Like the groan o' a man drowning i' the hands o' a kelpie."

"I didna hear—but we'll gang farer doon. The water's ower high at this spot."

Ding-a'-Doon was frightened; he could not have concealed that fact had there been any light to show his big frame shaking in the saddle. As it was, he had betrayed himself to the dwarf, and that worthy rode beside him chuckling in great glee.

They had not proceeded many yards from the place at which they had paused, when Hornie was startled by the sudden stoppage of his comrade, and a loud groan—rather of terror than of pain, however.

“What’s the matter wi’ ye, Pate?”

“So—so—somebody’s grippit me by the throat,” gasped the giant.

“Ding him doon, then,” was the sagacious advice of the little man.

“I—I canna see him,” half-blubbered Pate, “it mun be the—a—ow!”

“Haw, haw, haw!” roared Hornie, who had ridden back just as Pate released himself from a branch of a tree, which had caught him under the chin, stopped his progress, and half-frightened the wits out of him.

After this mishap, and its consequent display of weakness, Ding-a’-Doon was more surly and silent than ever. He did not even make an effort to check the mirth of Hornie, to whom the incident seemed to present a marvellous amount of fun.

But he resolved in his own mind that he would have the laugh on his side some day.

When they reached the next place where they were to attempt to ford the river, Hornie griped one end of Pate's Jeddart axe, and they urged their horses into the water. The current was so swollen that the horses were more than once almost lifted off their feet.

They had got about half-way across, when Hornie reached forward and caught the sleeve of his comrade's jerkin.

“ Did ye no hear onything, Pate ? ”

“ Ay, deil burn ye, ay.”

“ It was the same sound as ye heard before ? ”

“ Ay—let go your haud ; let go, or I'll brain ye.”

He spoke in agitation, but with a fury that was not to be gainsaid. Hornie relaxed his hold of the sleeve and the axe.

The instant he felt himself free, Pate struck his horse with hands and feet, so that the animal struggled forward with all

its might, and speedily reached the embankment. He halted there to see if his comrade had followed him.

But the dwarf had remained in the water, listening for the repetition of the feeble sound which had so frightened Ding-a'-Doon. He did not hear it again, and he was about to make his way to land, when something struck against the side of his horse. He seized it, and drew it across his saddle.

It was the body of a man.

At this, he gave vent to an eldritch shriek that startled a dozen echoes. Then he heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and he knew that the giant was off as fast as a stout horse could carry him.

Satisfied upon that point, Hornie made for land, carrying his sad burthen with him.

Ding-a'-Doon did not draw rein until he had reached Selkirk; and as he had made a long debouch round Merlin's Cairn, in order to avoid the neighbourhood of Kirsty

Hyslop, his horse and himself were considerably fatigued at the end of the journey.

He was rejoined by the dwarf a couple of hours after his arrival in Selkirk.

Before daybreak there were busy doings at the Tower of Tushielaw. There were furbishing and cleaning and cooking enough to suggest that the King was hunting in the forest, and meant to dine at the Tower. All the men were busy with their horses and accoutrements; all the women were occupied with a hundred unusual household duties. On ordinary occasions they had little difficulty in completing the requirements of their lords; but upon this day the master had issued more orders concerning the house affairs than he had ever given during all his life previously.

So all were blithe and busy, except the master himself. He shut the door of his chamber, and only appeared occasionally to give some direction in a gruff, angry voice.

The only person admitted to him was Mess Simon, as all the folk called Barras, and he did not seem to improve matters, for the master was gruffer and moodier than ever after the sham friar had been with him for a little while.

The gloom which enveloped the master of the house spread itself over all his followers and domestics ; for Eddie Craig and Yetholm Will had gone about with sour looks and dark shaking of heads, and muttering mysteriously about the luck of Tushielaw being that day destroyed. They had not dared to break their master's injunction of secrecy as to the occurrence of the previous night ; but the mysterious conduct alluded to was quite as effective in alarming their fellows as if they had told the whole story.

At any rate, this day, which Tushielaw had intended to make the merriest the Tower had ever witnessed, opened with foreboding and gloom.

He was conscious of all this ; but in spite

of Fate itself, he was resolved to carry his intent to its fulfilment. The cup was in his hand, and there was no power to restrain him from draining it to the dregs.

So, with twenty stout men at his back, the unhappy Lady Spens, cold and silent, on a palfrey by his side, and attended by a couple of women, he started for Selkirk as the morning mistily dawned over the hills and forest.

The chapel stood upon the remains of the abbey, which had sprung up partly in connection with the royal hunting seat of David and the Alexanders, and had given name to the town—Sele (holy) Chyrche. The monks having removed to Kelso for better accommodation, the abbey had dwindled down to a simple chapel, attended by three friars, with occasional visits from brethren of the parent establishment, and from Melrose, Roxburgh, and, at rarer intervals, from Jedburgh.

The chapel bells were tolling mournfully. The morning observance was just over, and

mass had been said for the Selkirk burgesses whom William Brydon had left upon the field of Flodden. The goodfolks who had attended the service were quietly returning to their homes and avocations, when Tushielaw's cavalcade rode up to the gate.

Some of the women folk stayed to see what was about to happen, and some of the men stayed to keep them company. Several of them recognised the Border chief, and whispers passed from group to group.

Ding-a'-Doon and Hornie were at the gate waiting when their master arrived. The party dismounted, and Heron Barras, now dressed in the leather jerkin and accoutrements of a Borderer, conducted his sister into the chapel. They were followed by Tushielaw with a number of his men, all armed as if for a battle-field rather than a church. Their spurs and heavy boots clanked upon the stone floor as they advanced to the altar, and their weapons rattled.

There was a slight commotion heard outside, caused by several of the burgesses

attempting to gain access, and, being stopped by Pate and the half dozen men who remained in charge of the horses, the souters persisted in their effort, and the gates were closed in their faces.

Whilst this contest was proceeding outside, the party within ranged in front of the altar, Tushielaw's followers forming a guard round their chief, his bride, Barras, and the priests.

One of the two holy men who were there apparently prepared to perform the ceremony advanced, as Tushielaw thought, to unite him at once to the lady. He was taken wholly by surprise when, in a mild low voice, the priest inquired the purport of their coming.

“Our purport!—by the—I mean that you amaze me since I sent here a messenger some hours gone to acquaint you with our coming and our intent.”

“Soothly I remember an unruly fellow did summon us during the night; but we gave no heed to his errand, for his speech did not make it welcome.”

“ His speech was nothing to the purpose, maybe ; but his errand was of importance. It was to desire your favour in wedding this lady and myself to-day.”

“ It was of import truly ; but you chose a strange time to acquaint us of your desire and a rude messenger to carry the tidings.”

“ Save you, father, his rudeness and my haste shall fill your coffers ; wherefore, I pray you, let the ceremony begin without more delay.”

“ Surely, my son, you shall have your wish, all things agreeing.”

“ I shall have my way whether all things agree or no.”

The priest did not show by any sign that he had heard this gruff speech. Turning to the lady, who was standing a little apart, and retained there by Heron Barras, he said in his mild even voice—

“ Advance, my daughter, and say if it be your will that this marriage should take place.”

“It is her will,” broke in Tushielaw impatiently.

“She must answer for herself.”

“Beware how you speak,” whispered her brother as he released her hand. “Remember, the fate of your child and of Gilbert Elliot hangs upon your words.”

The instant she was released Lady Spens advanced quickly to the priest and threw herself on her knees before him. She seized the rosary which hung suspended from his waist, and holding it up raised her eyes appealingly to his face.

“Good father, I conjure you by this sacred symbol to save me from these men.”

“She is mad,” thundered Tushielaw, starting forward.

“Back, sirrah,” cried the priest, raising his hands majestically, “advance one step upon the sacred ground whereon this poor lady rests and the anathema of the Church shall fall upon you with its blight.”

Tushielaw stood still, abashed somewhat

by the threat, but not in the least degree turned from his purpose.

“She is mad, I say; she came here of her own will.”

“It was to crave your protection, holy father; it was to cry for mercy at your feet; it was to appeal for help against those who have neither pity nor mercy.”

“It is with my authority that this union is to be formed,” said Barras harshly.

“What is your authority?” demanded the friar sternly.

The second priest had advanced behind the other as if to support him.

“My authority is that of her brother, and her only guardian.”

“Has she none other?”

“None since her husband is dead.”

“Are you sure that you are the only one who owns any control over this lady?”

“I swear it.”

“And so, master priest, let your prayer be said and we shall go,” added Tushielaw.

“Your prayer will be a curse, holy

father," cried Mistress Spens passionately. "Your prayer would doom me to perdition for ever, for the day that I am made his wife I—kill myself."

"Peace, mistress; you have given me your promise and I will hold you to it. Are you ready, sir priest?"

"Not yet."

It was the second friar who spoke this time, and at the sound of his voice Tushielaw, Barras, and Lady Spens started. The latter listened with trembling expectancy for the next words, and the eyes of the three were fixed upon the tall hooded form.

"You have seen," said the second priest quietly, "how sorely this lady is troubled by the thought of the union you propose. Why then persist? It is not love which urges you on; and if it be merely to obtain possession of what wealth she owns—whatever your object—I charge you think well before you push the matter to extremity."

"Our purpose is our own to hide or reveal as we think best."

“Then out of pity spare the dame, and let your purpose fail.”

“It shall not fail whilst we have life and strength to carry it. Wherefore, waste no more words.”

“You cannot look upon her misery and say you care not that you are the cause of it?”

“By the Rood, my patience has lasted longer than your argument, sir priest,” cried Tushielaw fiercely. “Answer now, will you wed us—yea or nay?”

“Not till you have satisfied us that it is her wish, and that she is free to wed even when it is her will.”

“Enough said; another priest will serve us with fewer words and better grace. Nay, never look dark and frown at me, for dark looks and frowns will never hurt me. Come, mistress, you have played us a trick that you shall not try again. Come.”

He stepped forward as if to drag her from the protecting hand of the first priest, when the second priest stepped before him.

“Hold, if you value life.”

“ I have risked that with less cause ere now.”

“ You shall not touch this woman.”

“ And who shall stay me ? ”

“ Or who shall stay me ? ” said Barras, advancing with his accomplice.

“ An authority stronger than yours, Tushielaw, and of more sacred kinship than yours, Heron Barras.”

“ Whose authority ? ” cried the two villains in one breath.

“ Mine.”

The priest threw off his hood and revealed a knight in chain armour.

Lady Spens sprung to her feet and threw herself into his arms.

“ Husband ! ”

“ Wife !—they shall never harm you now.”

“ Wat Spens ! ” ejaculated Barras, starting back.

“ A thousand fiends,” growled Tushielaw, in confusion.

“ Which of you two villains will dare to

lay a finger on this lady now? What, are you such poor knaves that you quail and tremble at the sight of one honest man among you? Out upon you, it is such wolves as you, who sack defenceless homes, and frighten helpless women to their destruction, that should be hunted to death, rather than the beasts of the forest. It is such knaves as you that should be burnt in the market place, and, with Our Lady's help, I shall do something toward obtaining for you your meed."

"See you to your sister, Barras," roared the Border chief, "I'll see to that fause loon who speaks so big."

Sir Walter whipped his sword from its scabbard. The lady hid her face upon his breast.

"This is my wife," said the knight calmly, "and the man that touches her dies."

"Have at you, then."

And Tushielaw was about to spring forward, sword in hand.

The priest stepped between—

“Back, sacrilegious man; would you do murder upon the altar of heaven?”

“Out of the way, idiot, else I shall begin with you.”

Sir Walter spoke some words hastily in the ear of the priest, and the latter instantly took Mistress Spens by the hand.

“This way, lady, this way,” he whispered; “do not pause a moment; your husband shall be saved.”

He led or rather half dragged her from her husband’s side, for she was unwilling to leave him in that peril in which, only a minute before, she had been restored to him.

Tushielaw’s fury, when he saw his victim escaping from his grasp, became boundless.

“Look you, lads,” he bellowed to his men, “yonder is the traitor who betrayed our King at Flodden, and for his head the Queen will give a thousand merks.”

There was a savage yell and a clatter of weapons at mention of the reward, and

the men immediately began to surround Spens.

Barras made a fierce effort to pass the knight and reach his sister, at the same time Tushielaw began an attack upon the solitary foe. But Spens adroitly eluded the attack of Tushielaw, met Barras and tripped him, so that he fell heavily to the floor.

Tushielaw, with his men in a body, was now about to rush upon the victim, when the souters' cry rang through the chapel.

“Souters ane, souters twa,
Souters o' the back raw,
Up an' gie the deil a blaw.”

A defiant shout followed. Then a small door at the back of the altar place was burst open and a body of Selkirk burgesses, souters, hammermen, and others, rushed into the chapel with Andrew Howie at their head, armed with axes, swords, spears, and miscellaneous weapons.

There was neither parley nor delay. The struggle commenced at once, and although

they disputed every inch of ground stoutly, Tushielaw and his men were beaten back to the main entrance of the chapel. There they made a desperate stand, seeing their chief engaged with Sir Walter Spens and hard pressed by him.

The shout of triumph was now with the souters and again with the borderers; but the clatter of weapons, the yells of pain, and the oaths of rage never ceased.

With all the might of his strong arms and all the weight of his heavy two-handed sword, Tushielaw struck at his foe. But the perfect mastership of his weapon possessed by Spens enabled him to meet his opponent on something more than equal terms despite his strength. So it happened that for every inch of ground Tushielaw gained, he lost two, and it was more than probable that the final issue would have been against him.

The issue, however, was not tried; for Barras, having relieved himself of the antagonist with whom he had been engaged,

immediately upon regaining his feet, crept with the swiftness and stealth of a tiger to the back of Sir Walter with intent to cut him down.

But by the timely intervention of Andrew Howie and a couple of others, Barras was beaten back, and Tushielaw was separated from his opponent at the very moment when he was smarting with the pain of a deep cut on the left arm.

He was hemmed in on every side, he was hampered at back and front, so that he could not use his sword with sufficient power to cut a way through the midst of his assailants. He was growing faint from loss of blood; and whilst the number of his followers was rapidly diminishing the number of the souters was rapidly increasing.

He saw that victory was impossible, defeat certain, and he turned his face toward the door. Barras had already escaped, and the Border chief could scarcely see one of his own party amidst the crowd of rampant victors.

It seemed likely that the passage to the door would be the hardest he had ever made—supposing he did succeed in making it. There was a doubt of that, but he clenched his teeth and set to work vigorously.

Happily affairs obtained a slight turn in his favour; for his plight was made known to Ding-a'-Doon by Barras; and the giant, clutching his Jeddart axe, with sulky fury rushed into the chapel, and swinging his weapon round him with Herculean strength cleared a way to the side of his chief, and cleared a way back to the door and out of the chapel.

The rest of the Borderers were already mounted, and there were nine horses riderless.

A few minutes breathing space was obtained for them by the success of Ding-a'-Doon, who managed to close the gates upon the enemy and kept them within the chapel long enough to give the Borderers a clear start. Of this they availed themselves, and rode through a shower of stones and vege-

tables poured upon them by the matrons of Selkirk, away from the town, cursing the wedding day with all their remaining pith. It was such a rout as Tushielaw had never previously known.

CHAPTER II.

MERLIN'S CAIRN.

“The flower hangs its head, waving at times to the gale. Why dost thou awake me, O gale? it seems to say. I am covered with the drops of heaven. The time of my fading is near, the blast that shall scatter my leaves. To-morrow shall the traveller come—he that saw me in my beauty shall come. His eyes shall search the field. They will not find me. So shall they search in vain for the voice of Cona after it has failed in the field.”—OSSIAN.

As from a long hideous nightmare, Gilbert Elliot awoke slowly. Little by little consciousness returned to him. First he perceived light, and for awhile he could not bear it, his sight had become so enfeebled by the long darkness through which he had passed. His eyelids closed again, and he began, without any effort of will, to listen.

Once or twice he heard a rustling sound as of a woman's dress, and that led him to an attempt to explain his position by recalling the past.

One by one the incidents recurred to his memory up till the moment when he had begun the endeavour to escape from the cell in Tushielaw Tower by lifting one of the stones of the floor. After that he could recollect nothing; and yet he was dimly aware that many days had elapsed.

All the dreamy self-questioning of returning health followed, and by-and-bye he re-opened his eyes to discover if possible in what place his fortune had disposed him.

He was lying upon a species of settle-bed in a rude chamber, of which the walls were plastered and bare. The furniture was of the most primitive and poorest character; and the window, which was nearly opposite the foot of his bed, was small, square, and filled with greenish knotty glass.

But everything was clean, and, in spite of

the cold foggy winter day which looked in upon him at the window, the place had a comfortable kindly atmosphere most grateful to the returning senses of the invalid.

He at once concluded that, under some circumstances which at present he was unable to recall, he had become the guest of one of the mountain shepherds, who had tended him through his illness—whatever that had been caused by—and had healed him.

Satisfied with this explanation, he turned his eyes dreamily to the blackened cross beams of the roof, and at that moment again heard the rustle of a woman's gown.

This was his good fairy, no doubt, he dreamily speculated; the shepherd's good wife or daughter. He cast his eyes backward and became aware of a dark gipsy face bending over him with an expression of earnest questioning.

It was a woman's face, and a bonnie one. Bright big dark eyes, rich glossy black hair, snooded up in a silken fillet; soft ripe lips,

upon which the words of the eager question her eyes asked seemed to tremble.

This was no shepherd's wife or daughter. Dreamily he owned the fact; and dreamily he thought that it was a face he knew.

“Are you better, Master Elliot?” queried a soft voice, that fell upon his ears sweetly, as the sound of the distant music of home falls upon the ears of a wanderer.

He recognised the speaker, and although everything around him presented too much of a visionary aspect to his newly awakened senses to permit him to be much surprised at anything, he was still dreamily desirous of finding some clue whereby he might reconcile with that place the presence of pretty Mary Douglas, the Queen's lady.

She read his thought, and smiled. But it was not the old bright coquettish smile; there was a shade of melancholy in it; and the invalid perceived that her face was paler than he had formerly known it.

“You are surprised to find me here,” she said. “Well, I, too, am surprised.”

“You are here only by chance, then?”

“Yes; I came here by accident, and accident has caused me to remain.”

“Will you tell me, then, the nature of the accident?”

He spoke in a feeble voice, but without difficulty.

Mistress Douglas bent over him, peering gravely into his face.

“Do you think your doctor would permit me to gossip with you in your present state?”

“I am well, now; I have no pain.”

She shook her head, still doubting the propriety of conversing with him.

“My doctor would not bid you be silent if he knew how pleasing your voice is to my ear.”

She turned away her face carelessly.

“Your doctor is a singular being, and might object to any interference.”

“Who is he?”

“No he at all, i' faith,” she answered, laughing; “but an old woman.”

“ An old woman—who is she ? ”

“ Kirsty Hyslop.”

“ The witch wife ? ”

“ Hush—exactly.”

“ Then we are at Merlin’s Cairn ? ”

“ That is precisely where we are—and now I see you are not only much better, but almost well.”

He passed his hand across his brow, his eyes fixed bewilderedly on the wall. Presently he looked into the face of his friend.

“ My thoughts are so confused that I can understand nothing of what has happened. For pity’s sake, then, explain to me, how I am here—how are you here—what does it mean ? ”

There was some pain in the anxiety he displayed.

“ What it all means I know as little as yourself; but something of what has occurred I can relate to you.”

Drawing a rough stool to the bedside, Mistress Douglas—whose quick, lively, but withal gentle manner was a rare treasure

for a sick room—seated herself, as if preparatory to a lengthy gossip. Gilbert now perceived that her dress was arranged as if she had been within doors for some time, instead of being habited, as he had expected to see her, in her riding dress, fresh from the journey of this charitable visit. He was the more puzzled in consequence, and waited eagerly for the explanation.

“Where shall I begin?” she said, smiling (still with the unusual shade of melancholy perceptible), and playing with the frills of her cuffs. “With yourself?—that will be best; but you must promise——”

“I will—anything.”

“You are rash to bind yourself. However, I only want you to promise not to become excited.”

“I promise.”

“Thank you; and I promise that the instant I observe the slightest indication of forgetfulness my mouth shall close.”

“I shall remember.”

“I am going to be precise in my state-

ment; and so, to begin with figures—it is three weeks and two days since the day appointed for your meeting with the Master of Tushielaw in defence of”—the voice faltered a little here—“in defence of Mistress Spens. You did not appear to redeem your pledge for the truth of her husband and herself——”

“I was trepanned, betrayed——”

She raised her hand warningly, and he checked himself.

“I know all that,” she proceeded, softly. “You were betrayed, made captive, and cast into a dungeon in the Tower of Tushielaw. Beneath that dungeon there is a tunnel through which water flows of depth enough to drown any ordinary man. In the floor of the dungeon there is a secret trap, which opens to the touch of a spring, and drops disagreeable people such as yourself into the depths below, out of which they do not usually rise again.”

“Horrible—by what miracle have I escaped?”

“On the third night of your imprisonment the spring was either touched by your enemies, or you, by some accident, touched it yourself, and fell into the abyss. Happily for you, the water was swollen and the current strong, and you were borne through the tunnel and into the river Ettrick. Out of the river you were plucked by a friend, who carried you to this house, where you have lain since in fever, and with the hand of death so close upon you that none of us dared even to hope that it would be withdrawn.”

“You said *us*—then you have been here some time?”

“Yes, ten days.”

“So long?—you have not told me how you came!”

“By accident, as I have said. Her Majesty has taken a whim to hunt in Ettrick, and we moved to Kelso. In following the chase I became separated from my friends, lost my way, and at length wandered to this house, or hut, I should

call it. Not knowing its ill repute, I stayed to rest and inquire my way. You raved in your fever, and whilst I was in the other room I heard your voice. Upon the assurance of my regard for you, and upon a promise of secrecy, I was permitted to see you, and—and—finally, seeing you were so very ill, a messenger was despatched to Kelso, and I remained here to watch you die, as we thought.”

She had faltered very much during the latter portion of her explanation, and it was evident that there was something she desired to conceal.

“Good friend,” murmured Gilbert, gratefully, as he seized her hand and pressed it between his own.

She withdrew the hand gently, and, as one might have supposed, even with reluctance, but firmly.

“You talked much when you were unconscious,” she said, with a steady voice; “and, now that you have recovered, I shall be able to leave you.”

The blood crimsoned his face as he felt the significance of her first words.

“I spoke of friends, perhaps?” he said, with a feeble smile.

“Yes”—(this unsteadily).

“I shall pray now for strength to rejoin them. First, I shall pay my respects to Captain Lindsay——”

“No, no,” she interrupted, hastily; “you must not show yourself to him or to any one of the Court till you may do so in safety.”

“In safety?—how, what danger have I to fear?”

“Ah, I forgot,” she cried, agitatedly; “you did not know.”

“Know what?”

“Hush, I can tell you nothing more till you are stronger. To-morrow, perhaps, you will be able to hear everything. Now be silent.”

He saw that she was resolute, and as she moved softly from the chamber he closed his eyes as if to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

A CONFESSION AND A NEW PERIL.

O sacred hunger of ambitious minds,
And impotent desire of men to raine !
Whom neither dread of God that devils bindes
Nor lawes of men that common-weales containe,
Nor bands of Nature that wilde beasts restraine
Can keep from outrage and from doing wrong,
Where they may hope a kingdom to obtaine :
No faith so firme, no trust can be so strong,
No love so lasting then, that may endure long.

SPENSER.

BUT, try as he might, Gilbert could not sleep. The face and voice of Mistress Douglas haunted him and seemed to upbraid him for something he had done.

He did not like to feel that, however unwittingly he had caused her pain. He owed her much ; he owed to her his appointment

to the Queen's Guard; and now he owed to her care his life, perhaps. She was generous beyond measure and beautiful—why it was villainous to injure so kind a lady ever so slightly or unintentionally.

If he could have only discovered the nature of her wound, he would have healed it; ay, at the cost of the life she had rescued.

But wherefore should he conclude that it was any wound at all; or, if there were, that he had caused it?

He did not know. One of those instinctive perceptions which men and women at times experience in their relations with each other taught him that the shade of melancholy he had observed indicated a wound, and impulse thrust him to the conclusion that he was himself the cause. How that came about he was utterly unable to comprehend.

She was very beautiful—*how* beautiful he had strangely neglected to remark before. That she was pretty and a little coquettish

he had, of course, been aware this long time; but now—he could not find any reason for this either—she appeared to him absolutely beautiful.

She was kind—so kind that he could never hope to redeem the debt of gratitude under which she had placed him. What had she not risked—what petty inconveniences had she not endured in coming to this poor hut to nurse him back to life; and all out of simple friendship, and because he had once rendered her a slight service. She was indeed kind, generous, and beautiful.

And whilst he was thinking of these matters there glided quietly between him and his thoughts a pale sweet face that made his heart bound and the blood grow hot. It was the face of Lady Spens that seemed to be regarding him with a sad chiding expression.

“I know, I know,” he murmured feebly, “that I have done you grievous wrong; but the saints above know how cruelly I was betrayed; they know how eagerly I

would have entered the lists to serve your cause, how gladly I would die now if I could redeem the past. But our Holy Mother will give me strength to save you yet. Dear Lady, you would not doubt the fidelity wherewith I serve you, if you could only know that had I dared to love my dead guardian's wife I would have loved you, Margaret Spens, I would have loved you!"

The vision of the face seemed to fade away from him at this, and he opened his eyes. The chamber was in darkness. The daylight had faded, and he could see only a subdued misty glamour upon the window.

"How weak I have grown," he said, half in anger with himself; "Mistress Spens will not doubt my truth, and, for the rest, let me but regain strength, then place me face to face with Tushielaw and they shall have proof enough of his villainy."

The door opened gently, as if the opener feared to disturb a sleeper, and Mistress Douglas entered carrying a lighted cruzie. She paused as she closed the door and looked

towards the couch. The light shone upon her face, and Gilbert was startled by its exceeding palor.

He did not speak, and as she advanced to him he closed his eyes involuntarily; he did not like to see her distress.

He felt that she was standing beside him, that she was peering into his face, and he fancied that he could hear her heart beating tumultuously.

A subdued sigh caused him to look up quickly with an exclamation of surprise.

“Something afflicted you, sweet mistress; tell me what it is that I may learn how to help you.”

She drew back hastily, and, as it seemed, with a degree of embarrassment, in being observed in so bad a humour.

“You are not sleeping,” she ejaculated vexedly.

“I could not sleep; all that you have told me frets me with impatience to be up again and able to serve my friends,” he answered hotly.

She raised her finger warningly and smiled; but he felt that the smile was forced.

“Then the more your impatience frets you, the longer it will be till you are able to rise to the service of any one. And I shall blame myself for retarding your recovery——”

“No, no, you must not do that.”

“How can I do otherwise since you have said that my intelligence frets you?”

“Now St. Andrew judge me, there was no breath of reproach in my meaning.”

“Then you must be very calm and quiet,” she said, playfully serious.

“Ah, madam, let us be honest with each other. I cannot be calm, I cannot rest while I see your face so pale, so full of trouble. I cannot be patient whilst I feel that in some way I have been the luckless cause of the sorrow you are trying to hide.”

The playful smile had faded from her face while he spoke; her lips had closed tightly, and an instant she seemed to hold her breath in the effort to restrain her emotion.

But, with drooping eyelids, she answered steadily—

“You are mistaken, Master Elliot, I do not charge you with any share in causing my sorrow—for that I have a sorrow I will no longer seek to conceal from you.”

“I know, I know you do not charge me with any share in it—but, be frank, trust me, and tell me what it is that distresses you.”

She turned away her head.

“I cannot tell you.”

“At least, give me some clue to it.”

She appeared to hesitate and to be perplexed.

“I do not know that I should tell you anything; but you are my friend——”

“Ay, and a faithful one, as the Holy Mother knows.”

“This much, then, I will tell you; my brother Angus has discovered my absence from Kelso; he is seeking me, and I must return. Should he discover the cause of my absence——”

She stopped and looked confused.

“ Well ? ”

“ He is passionate,” she resumed hesitatingly, “ and—and——”

“ Would blame you—would perhaps injure you.”

“ I do not fear him,” she returned proudly, and then softening, “ but that only vexes me, for his disfavour can do me little harm ; my sorrow springs more from matters of higher import.”

“ Connected with whom ? ”

Her embarrassment became more marked.

Presently—

“ Give me your word that you will not refer to this matter again until I seek your help, and I will speak ? ”

“ Can you fear that I would say or do aught wittingly that was not to your liking ? ”

“ I do not fear, and therefore I will speak freely. My brother is ambitious—there is no height to which his ambition cannot rise, no object too dangerous of achievement that he would not attempt to gain.”

“What is it he seeks now? Does he not stand at the head of our nobles in the Council and in the grace of her Majesty? What more can he desire?”

“He desires to wed.”

“Is there anything very terrible in that?”

As he spoke the memory of the conversation he had heard between Angus, Tushielaw, and Barras flashed upon him.

“There is, for the wife he seeks is the Queen herself.”

Prepared as he was for the disclosure, Gilbert was startled by its nature. When he had learned the object of the ambitious Douglas on that night in Edinburgh at the house to which the Chevalier Night had conducted him, he had been impressed by it rather as one is impressed by a singular dream than by a matter of fact. In the whirl of events through which he had passed the subject had almost entirely escaped his memory. Now, it came back to him and struck him with all the force of something of which he had been long dimly conscious,

and which was at length laid bare to his ken.

“He is a bold man,” exclaimed Gilbert thoughtfully, “and I fear he may overshoot his mark.”

“My fear is greater than that,” cried Mistress Douglas excitedly, and beginning to pace the narrow limits of the chamber, with hands clasped tightly, as if to control her emotion.

“Bending what way?”

“Can you not divine?”

“Nothing clearly.”

“Oh, can you not understand—the man who would mate with the Queen Regent of Scotland, be he what he may, must be an object of suspicion to the peers; but when that man is the head of the house of Douglas he becomes the object of their hate and fear.”

“What then?” his eyes kindling with excitement, and partly raising his head.

“What then—why plots, enmity without end, and perhaps murder.”

“ But that can only be should the Queen favour his suit.”

“ And the Queen does favour his suit.”

A pause, during which Mistress Douglas continued to pace the floor; and Gilbert lay musing upon her singular revelation. At length he said—

“ What would you do ? ”

“ I would save him, if that were possible, from the ruin towards which he is rushing.”

Gilbert shook his head discouragingly—

“ Think you he can be turned from his bent ? ”

“ He may be shown its madness—or he may be frustrated.”

“ That will be no easy task.”

“ I have surely a few friends to aid me ? ”

“ I am one of them—— ”

“ You ? ” — her face brightened for an instant and then grew dark; “ but no, there is danger—— ”

“ I am not afraid,” he said, as if somewhat pained by the suggestion.

“ But I am, for your sake.” She

crimsoned as the impulsive words left her lips, and again became pallid—"I mean that—that—I do not wish to be more indebted to you than I am already."

"I am the debtor, and I shall think that you hold my friendship without value if you refuse my aid in this."

"I am too poor in friends to slight any, and you I value most of all."

"Then I am with you in aught that you do, come good or ill."

"You shall be my first councillor and general. There is my hand."

She smiled half sadly as he pressed it reverently to his lips.

"I shall be well to-morrow, since you need my help."

"No compliments, or I leave you."

"I shall be gruff as Tushielaw himself if so you would have me."

"Be what you will, but be secret."

"Ay, as the grave. I will only report myself to Captain Lindsay, obtain a few weeks' grace——"

“ Stop, stop, you must not be in such hot haste to see Captain Lindsay.”

“ And wherefore, since it is my duty ? ”

She turned away her face again, while she spoke as if to conceal her agitation.

“ You have already been absent four weeks without permission, and—— ”

“ Go on—why do you stop ? Do I lose my commission ? ”

“ Worse ; you may be condemned to death for desertion, which is equivalent to treason.”

His countenance was overshadowed by the consciousness of a new difficulty.

“ I will straight to Edinburgh, nevertheless, so soon as my limbs have strength enough to steady me in the saddle.”

She would have pleaded with him to be wary, but a tap at the door interrupted her. She answered the summons. Something was whispered to her. She passed out, closing the door after her.

The summoner was Kirsty Hyslop. This strange creature, who has been so frequently

mentioned in this chronicle, was a woman whose appearance was as peculiar as her reputation.

She would have been tall had she not stooped so much that she appeared to be rather under than over the average height. Her body was stout—not fat—and her hands were long and marked on the back by veins and sinews. Her features were harsh and haggard, forming a singular contrast to her robust body ; and her eyes were red and fiery as those of the basilisk. To conceal them she had apparently contracted a habit of keeping the lids half closed so that she looked always as if she were half asleep. When she raised the eyelids the effect of the large burning eyes was all the more startling.

Her dress was composed of a petticoat of the commonest stuff, striped red ; a short-gown of brownish hue, and a large red kerchief wound round her head so as to conceal her brow partly and her hair entirely. For the rest she was reticent to a degree,

and singularly noiseless in her movements. Her age was as great a mystery as her life. The oldest men of the country-side declared themselves to have been familiar with the dreaded name of Kirsty Hyslop from their infancy.

She lived upon the contributions of the country folk who sought her assistance in sickness and distress. Their propitiatory gifts were enough to have enabled her to live well; yet she always seemed to be in poverty. Some said her evil master carried away the greater share of her profits; but there were also strange tales told of gifts of produce finding their way mysteriously into the hovels of the poor. There had been talk of burning her at one time, but she had somehow hitherto escaped the usual fate of acknowledged witches. That might have been partly on account of the protection extended to her by Sir Walter Spens of Halstane when his word was of import in Ettrick and Yarrow.

These were the words that Kirsty whispered to Mistress Mary—

“There’s a man at the door wants to see ye.”

“Who is it?”

“The same ye sent upon the errand to Kelso.”

She was about to hasten to the door when the spawife detained her, griping her skirt.

“Well?” queried the lady in surprise.

Kirsty seemed to be searching for something in the bonnie dark face wherein lay all the fierceness of which her own haggard countenance was capable, only more subdued and more hidden by the beauty of the features.

“Well?” repeated Lady Mary.

“Dinna see him,” said Kirsty in her whispering voice.

“I must; he comes from my friend, who may have tidings of deep moment for me.”

Kirsty gave her high shoulders a jerk and released her hold. There was no change of expression, but the movement made the lady pause. The movement said—

“I have warned you—take your own course. I care nothing what haps.”

Overcoming her momentary hesitation she passed to the door where the man was waiting. He placed in her hand a piece of ribbon upon which were three knots.

“I was to gie ye this token,” he said, “and to tell ye frae your frien’ that him ye ken o’ has fan ye oot and will be here the-nicht.”

The friend alluded to was one of the Queen’s ladies, to whom Mistress Douglas had intrusted the secret of her whereabouts so that she might give her timely warning of any matter of moment.

The message she had now received alarmed her, for she had no time given her to seek concealment.

“Did you receive no other message?” she queried, breathlessly.

“Nane ava’.”

“No letter or packet?”

“Nane, for the leddy was feart that I micht hae been grippit on the way.”

“How did she know they would be here to-night?” exclaimed Mistress Mary, rather to herself than to the messenger.

The latter, however, responded.

“I dinna ken, for the leddy didna say. But wha is’t ye’re expekin? Gin it’s a band o’ brow horsemen they’re coming up the glen.”

“Coming up the glen!”

“Ay, can ye no hear the horses an’ the clink o’ armour?”

“It is them—it is them!” she cried, below her breath, and looking around bewilderedly, seeking some place of hiding or some means of escape.

The rage of her brother; the shame that in his passion he might heap upon her on finding her there filled her with dread, but it was a dread that would have been only momentary had there not flashed before her vividly the sight of the helpless invalid in the inner chamber whose life might be the forfeit of her being found under the same roof with him.

She became conscious that the burning eyes of Kirsty Hyslop were fixed upon her inquisitively; and in her confusion she resented the look as treacherous. She suspected her of having played traitor and relented the minute afterwards; but it was a minute too late.

“Come with me and close the door,” whispered Kirsty. “I can save ye from them if they were a thousand strong.”

“Gin ye gang but the house they’re sure to find ye,” said the messenger, who appeared suddenly to comprehend the whole position. “Come wi’ me, leddy; I ken a pass doon the cairn, an’ ye can hide safe i’ the glen till they gang awa’.”

“Yes, yes, that will be safest. Go on.”

She had not followed her guide more than half a dozen yards when she regretted the suspicion that had caused her to lose faith in the wife of Merlin’s Cairn; but she heard the tramp of horses’ hoofs, the clank of armour—she fancied she could discern the

steel plates glistening—she heard the door of the hut close behind her, and it was too late to turn back. So she went on after the man towards the pass.

Gilbert lay a long while waiting and watching for the return of his gentle nurse; but she did not come.

Soon after she had left him he had heard sundry noises without, as if a number of horsemen were surrounding the building. Then voices, and a word of command passed for some quick movement. Clatter ensued; he raised himself in the bed excitedly to listen, and a shriek, subdued by distance, seemed to rise up to his ears and make his flesh creep.

It was the cry of a woman in sore distress, and the big bound of his heart, the wild throbbing of his pulse, told him that it was Mary Douglas who needed aid.

From what?—from whom?

He sprang from the couch, but the instant

his feet touched the earthen floor his head swam, his eyes became dazed, he reeled and fell.

There was a sudden stillness, as it seemed to him—a stillness so strange that, as he lay upon the floor, he began to doubt that the peculiar sound which had disturbed him was a mere trick of his fevered brain. He was perfectly conscious of everything in the chamber, even to the flickering of the cruzie. The moment his head rested upon the ground all the dizziness had left him, and he listened calmly for some corroboration of the singular occurrences he had fancied going forward outside. But he heard nothing, and he became half convinced that he had been dreaming.

So he crawled back to his couch and lay a long while watching and waiting for the return of Lady Mary.

He could form no idea of the length of time he had waited, he only perceived that the light was burning dimly and would soon expire; he only knew that the gloomy

thoughts and fears which were flitting through his mind were rapidly bringing back the fever of his blood.

The door creaked upon its hinges, and the haggard face (with downcast eyelids) of Kirsty Hyslop appeared.

He regarded this queer vision with an odd feeling of amaze. He had expected to see the bonnie face of Mary Douglas, and the one he saw in its stead appeared to be anything but a happy substitute.

“Would ye like anything?” questioned the woman, in a whispering voice.

“No—I—where is—she?”

“Mistress Douglas?—I dinna ken.”

“How?—she was here only a little while gone?”

“Four hours syne—ay; but she has gone awa and micht be at Kelso by this time.”

“She did not tell me she was going.”

“Maybe she didna ken hersel’,” was the dry response.

“But she would not have gone without

bidding me adieu. Stay, tell me has she been forced hence ? ”

“ She gaed oot of her ain will. I ken nae mair. Drink this, and the-morn we’ll maybe learn what’s happ’d.”

“ Ah, then, something has happ’d—— ”

“ Drink this.”

“ I cannot till I know more.”

“ Drink this or maybe ye’ll never ken mair.”

There was a stolid firmness in her persistence that overcame him, and in the hope of satisfying her and of thereby obtaining satisfaction for himself he took the wooden coggie she offered him and drank.

The instant afterwards he returned to his inquiry, but without obtaining further information than that he had already received. Presently his tongue moved awkwardly, as if it had been tied ; his ideas grew confused, and, as a faint suspicion flashed across him that he had been drugged, his head drooped, and his eyes closed.

Whatever object of good or evil the weird

woman of the cairn had in thus quieting her patient there was no indication of its tenor in her hard features. Stolidly she watched him fall into insensibility, and then stolidly she turned from the chamber, carrying the light with her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOSPICE OF ST. MARY.

“ Whilst thou wast hence, all dead in dole did lie ;
The woods were heard to waile full many a sigh,
And all their birds with silence to complaine :
The fields with faded flowers did seem to mourne,
And all their flocks from feeding to refraine :
The running waters wept for thy return,
And all their fish with languor did lament :
But now, both woods and fields and flowers revive
Sith thou art come.”

The Faery Queene.

THE hue and cry rang loudly through the land from Berwick to John O’Groat’s. Sir Walter Spens, the suspected assassin of the late King, lived, and had been seen at Selkirk. The punishment of death was proclaimed against all who gave him shelter.

For three weeks the wardens of the Border lands, the sheriffs of every shire, the provosts and bailies of every town, the people and the soldiers everywhere were on the alert. Everybody suspected everybody of being the traitor, and several unfortunate fellows were laid in the tolbooth under the suspicion of being Spens himself or of aiding him in his evasion of justice.

But in the end they were released, and as the excitement began gradually to fade under the light of other events, it was admitted that the outlaw had cunningly baffled all pursuit. Some doubted the truth of the report that he had been seen alive, only they were puzzled to account for the fact that he had carried off his wife when she had been about to be married to some one in Selkirk Chapel.

Amongst the most persistent of the pursuers—if not the most persistent—was Adam Scott of Tushielaw. But even he had failed to obtain the slightest clue to the hiding place of the fugitives. At least

so he had acknowledged to the Lords of the Council. He, however, prayed their lordships to retain possession of the child Alice Spens, and he pledged himself, in consideration of certain privileges and gifts, that he would bring before them Sir Walter Spens, alive, by the end of three months.

During this time the Royal party was still at Kelso Abbey following the chase almost daily and partaking of what other entertainment the good Abbot Thomas—who had been released from the thralldom of Lord Home—could devise to pleasure his guests.

Wherever the Queen was, the Earl of Angus was sure to be near; and there were not a few murmurs of discontent at the supposed influence he exercised over her Majesty. That there were grounds for the supposition was soon afterwards placed beyond doubt. Meanwhile, the lady walked with so much circumspection that there were several of her Court who discredited the rumour of her favour to Angus. Out-

side, there were few who heard the rumour, or suspected what was about to happen.

Affairs, generally, were in this unsatisfactory position when the fatal year 1513 died, and its successor came to add its number to the century.

There was feasting and mirth in the Abbey Hall. The royal party was about to return to Holyrood, and good Father Thomas desired to impress her Majesty and the young King with a pleasant memory of Kelso. He had made an effort to render the last days of their residence at the Abbey memorable in the gratitude of the stomach, and he had set his banquet with the rarest dishes, meats, and fruits that money or labour could obtain. The banquet began about dusk, and rarely ended much before midnight; for, although the Queen and her ladies retired from the board in decorous time, many of her lords and squires sat long wine-bibbing. So the lights were glaring, the jest and song were pass-

ing, and the Abbot's cellars were tested thoroughly. The only quarter which was quite dark was that of the Abbot's private chambers. From these a narrow staircase conducted to a small door, of which the holy father alone possessed the key.

This door opened quietly, and a man, dressed in dark garments, stepped out upon the frosty lawn. The door closed behind him, and, after glancing quickly around as if to assure himself that he was unobserved, he passed quickly round by the fish-pond and over to the wall. He entered a thicket of shrubbery and trees, where he found a horse saddled and bridled. He led the animal out of the thicket, and through a low doorway in the wall. When he had secured the door, he sprang into the saddle and rode quietly away, without wardens or sentinels being in the least aware that anybody had passed out under their very noses, so to speak.

The horseman at first seemed to be moving towards Selkirk, but as soon as he

had got half a mile from Kelso, he put his steed to the gallop, and turned its head a little more to the north than a traveller proceeding to the souters' town would have done had he been acquainted with his route. This traveller proceeded with so much decision that he clearly knew his way well.

The night was keenly cold, and the frost on the ground and skeleton trees glistened in the soft, clear light of the stars. When the horseman had crossed the Melrose road, he proceeded by a rough pathway which led to the hospice of St. Mary.

The hospice was a small building inhabited by a few Franciscan monks, who employed themselves in the kindly offices of sheltering all pilgrims who might, by necessity or liking, desire to spend the night with them; and, by tending within the walls of their house the sick and wounded, using all their simples and art to restore health. They welcomed all, without biding to ask of what country or faith the pilgrim or invalid might be.

The hospice, or Maison Dieu, was a species of tower outwardly; and within there was a small chapel, guest-hall, chambers for the invalids and wayfarers. At the top of the tower a light burned always through the night, to guide the weary or wandering traveller to its hospitable walls, and the friendly beacon was of vast service. On all these accounts the place was regarded with awe and reverence by the common people, and held sacred from harm even by the wildest of the borderers.

The horseman who had journeyed from Kelso with such hot speed, was within about two hundred yards of the hospice gate when his horse suddenly swayed and reared backward, as if startled by some object on the ground. The rider, looking down, perceived that a man was lying upon the road dead, exhausted, or drunk.

He dismounted, in order to discover the nature of the man's plight.

He found him apparently in a faint, as if from fatigue and privation; and, guessing

by the pilgrim's gown which the man wore, his unshorn beard, and matted hair, he appeared to have been performing a pilgrimage, in observance of some vow.

He was no Christian who would hesitate to relieve a fellow-mortal in so sad a plight as this; and the horseman instantly raised the insensible pilgrim on to the horse, and conveyed him to the hospice. His voice was apparently well known to the warden, for the gate was speedily thrown open at his summons.

When the stranger had passed within the Abbey gates, however, he did not, as was usual with the comers to the kindly house, proceed by the main entrance into the guest-hall. He passed round to a small arched door, which stood by the side of a buttress, knocked, and waited for the response. A few minutes, and the door was opened.

“The night is dark,” said the horseman, in a low tone.

“But dawn approaches,” was the answer, in a solemn voice.

At the same time a cover was raised from a lantern, and its light revealed the person of the holder. He was one of the holy brothers, and was dressed in the simple garments of his order. His features were prominent, and rendered sharp by the lack of flesh. The eyes and cheeks were somewhat sunken; his age might have been about forty years, but he looked more than fifty. His whole bearing was that of a man who had in all sincerity devoted his life to the service of his Master, and who rendered that service in the most austere fashion.

“You have brought a guest, my son,” he said, in his solemn, mild voice, and advancing to lift the insensible man from the saddle.

“Ay, Father Michael; a pilgrim he seems to be, and I found him not many yards from the gate, lying on the road exhausted, as you see him.”

“As one in need of help, he is welcome; but you should be wary.”

“I know, and yet I dared not pass him without helping him hither. How is my lady?”

“Well, but sadly impatient for your return, to gain tidings of her child.”

“Poor dame, I shall be with her speedily,” and the speaker proceeded with his horse to the stables at the rear of the building; the while Father Michael carried the pilgrim into the house and placed him under the care of the brethren, who exerted themselves, in the first instance, to restore their patient to consciousness.

The mysterious rider from Kelso Abbey, having groomed his horse without waking the stableman, returned to the door beside the buttress, and, as it opened to his touch, he entered a dark passage. But he was apparently well acquainted with the place, and the darkness did not make him hesitate. He hurried along the passage, turned to the right, and found another door, which also opened upon slight pressure. He ascended a narrow, winding staircase, until

he reached a small landing. Here he halted and listened.

Satisfied by the silence which prevailed, he touched a spring, and an oaken panel moved aside. The aperture was covered by a thick velvet screen. This he raised, and then entered a chamber, the furniture of which was massive, but simple. He slid the secret panel into its place, dropped the screen over it, and turned as if expecting to see some one.

The chamber was untenanted. He touched a little silver bell, and immediately the hangings at the farther end of the apartment were thrust aside, and a lady entered. With a half-subdued cry of joy, she sprang to his arms.

“Walter.”

“My bonnie Madge.”

These were the exclamations of the gladness of two hearts, and after they had been uttered there was silence. Her hands were clasped around his neck; and he held her head a little way from him, the while

his eyes sought the depths of hers with a passionate yearning. Then he drew the head toward him, and kissed her with serious fondness on the brow.

There was a quiet nobility in his bearing, a firmness in the expression of his sharply-defined features, and a keenness and, withal, frankness in his dark searching eyes, that marked him a man of generous mind and brave heart.

The outlaw, Walter Spens.

“You have failed?” at length said the lady very slowly, and as if she feared the import of her words.

He seemed to be startled from a reverie.

“Not wholly, wife, albeit I bring you less of comfort than I had hoped. Our bairn is safe.”

“But not with you?”

“No” (huskily).

The lady’s head sank upon his breast.

“But have good cheer, wife, for though she, poor thing, be held captive, happily it is a gentle captivity, and her jailor is the

Queen herself. I have failed to bring our Alice back to you, but for the rest—by my hand—we have reason to thank our Holy Mother.”

“Ah, then the proclamation is withdrawn,” she cried, eagerly; “the brand is lifted from your name——”

“Nay, nay, you are too fast. I have told you, so long as Earl Angus is at the head of affairs, my credit can only be redeemed by such broad proof of innocence as the bitterest foe dared not dispute.”

“Then we are still in danger?”

He regarded her for a moment sadly and even doubtingly.

“Are you so soon weary of sharing my danger; so soon made hopeless by our exile?”

She looked up with a reassuring smile.

“Were the danger a thousand times more terrible, the exile a thousand times more cruel, I should still find gladness in your presence.”

“My bonnie wife.”

“But when you are absent, then I feel the many perils through which you walk, and every coming footstep which is not yours makes my heart sick with fear lest it bring tidings of your doom.”

“Then think that I am always with you, as my heart is; Madge. Think that there is a good angel watching over us that will hold me scatheless till the truth be made known.”

“I will try to think all that,” she responded, brightening.

“Think of our enemies——”

Her eyes flashed angrily, and she interrupted him—

“Ay, when I think of them all sense of danger leaves me, and some evil power within makes me fierce—unwomanly, so that I long to be with you, in despite of peril, seeking retribution.”

“Heyday, my mistress,” he cried, laughing, “we can be fierce betimes. I rede you heed that Father Michael sees nothing of this humour, else he may ask

you to find other lodging than in the secret chamber of the Maison Dieu."

"He would not blame me, knowing all that we have suffered."

"He could not, poor lass; but let the jest go. You must content yourself to bide here in safety for Alie's sake. There are only two people in the hospice besides ourselves who know the secret of these chambers—Father Michael and one of his holy brethren. Wherefore, even if our hiding place were suspected, it would not readily be discovered. So, knowing that you are safe, I can work more boldly for my friends and for our cause."

"But should the conspiracy be detected?"

"There is no fear of that; and if there were any danger—then Arran is strong enough to defend himself and his compatriots till all find means to escape to other lands."

"I would that you could avoid this perilous venture now, and leave our name to the cleansing hand of time," she said, thoughtfully.

“No, you do not wish that, Madge—it is not alone my honour that is to be redeemed. We have a loyal cause to serve—to save our Queen from an ambitious husband, and our country from a despot.”

“Angus is powerful.”

“Arran is powerful, too.”

“Angus is your foe, you say.”

“Because Arran is my friend; and perhaps because the tools with which he desires to work his way to the throne have reason to fear me. But why do we talk of this? You, Madge, you would not have me turn aside from the path which loyalty alone, and honour, have marked out for me?”

“My heart is so sick with hope and fear that sometimes I feel that I would have you fly from the midst of all these broils. Again, the vane of my heart is blown quite the other way, and I would have you fight the good fight out, and win or die fighting.”

“As I shall, wife, as I shall,” he murmured, with a subdued passion in voice and look.

A low whistle interrupted them. Spens raised the velvet screen that covered the moveable panel by which he had entered the apartment. He tapped upon the panel lightly, and immediately it was opened. Father Michael presented himself.

“Peace be with you, my children,” said the friar, in his quiet voice; “I have come to separate you.”

“Separate us!” ejaculated Mistress Spens.

“Be not afraid, daughter, it is only for a brief space.”

“What is the cause, father?” said Spens.

“The unhappy pilgrim whom you conveyed to the hospice is dying, and prays that he may be permitted to see you before his eyes are closed for ever upon the world.”

“Why should he wish to see me?”

“He had been acquainted that a friend found him exhausted on the way and brought him to our house. He will not be satisfied till he sees you, and to us it seems that he has left some mission unful-

filled, and would seek your aid to complete it, that his bones may rest in peace.”

Spens reflected; he saw that there was danger in seeing a stranger, even when the man was supposed to be dying. Presently—

“I will go to him.”

He drew a black silk mask from a leathern pouch that hung at his girdle, covered his face with it, and with decisive step followed the friar.

“Be wary,” said Lady Margaret, warningly, as the panel closed and she was left alone.

A little while she remained motionless and thoughtful. At length, starting from her reverie—

“My heart trembles strangely, and I feel that evil is near us. Ah, sweet Mother, guard him—save him,” she murmured, as she knelt before the small crucifix of a quaintly carved prayer desk. The light fell upon a pale troubled countenance which gradually became calm.

CHAPTER V.

THE PILGRIM'S REVELATION.

“ ‘ Then sith ye needs,’ quoth he, ‘ will know my shame,
And all the ill which chaunct to me of late,
I shortly will to you rehearse the same
In hope ye will not turn misfortune to my blame.’ ”

SPENSER.

THE pilgrim lay on a simple pallet. His face was haggard and his eyes were dull. At his feet knelt one of the frairs, who held up a large oaken cross, upon which the eyes of the apparently dying man were fixed. The chamber was dimly lighted by a single lamp, which sufficed to show the severe simplicity of the furniture and to inspire a sense of awe in the prevailing cold silence of the place.

Father Michael and his masked companion had entered the room and had been standing

several seconds beside the pilgrim's couch before he showed any sign of having observed their presence.

"You are devout, my son," said Father Michael softly.

The man slowly, and, as it seemed, reluctantly, withdrew his gaze from the sacred emblem and turned his dull eyes upon the speaker. His eyes seemed to brighten, and he made a feeble effort to extend his hand'.

Father Michael took the hand.

"Do not exert yourself, you are too much exhausted. I have brought the friend you desired to see."

"Ah, holy father, I am indeed sorely exhausted; but I have gained much strength from your prayers and the prayers of the good man you left with me. I am very weak, and I feel that my last moment is close at hand, else I would try to tell you all the gratitude that fills my heart."

"We have our reward if we have given your last moments some Christian comfort."

“You have, you have”—a hollow cough stopped his utterance.

The cough continued several minutes and appeared to leave him utterly helpless, for he lay with arms outstretched and a vacant, glazed look in his eyes, as if he had spoken his last.

Father Michael regarded him anxiously ; and after a brief silence spoke—

“My son, I dare not hide from you what is written upon your face—your end is near. Wherefore, say quickly that which you may desire to have done, for time passes swiftly.”

The man made many efforts to speak, and, failing in that, he made a feeble motion with his hand, the meaning of which was not intelligible. The friar bent down and placed his ear close to the invalid's mouth.

“Leave me—good father—leave me—for a little while with the friend who brought me here,” were the words which were spoken so faintly that they were with difficulty caught.

“Do you fear to speak before us?” queried Father Michael, surprised.

“No, no, I will tell you all, good father—but—faces confuse me—I cannot explain—it is the prayer of a dying man—you will not deny it.”

“Would you not be shriven?”

“Yea, but not in the presence of other than yourself—grant my prayer.”

“As you will.”

Father Michael beckoned to his brother monk, and together they noiselessly quitted the chamber.

Spens had been standing hitherto a little in the background, but, obeying the motion of the pilgrim's hand, he now stepped close up to the couch. He noted that the man seemed startled on looking up and observing the black mask which covered his face.

“Are you he who lifted me from the road and carried me hither?” was the faint query.

“I am he,” answered Spens, marvelling what could be the nature of the mysterious

communication he was evidently about to receive.

“Why do you hide your face?” gasped the dying pilgrim.

“I have reasons.”

“You will not trust me with them?”

“I cannot.”

The man drew a long breath, which might have been accounted a sigh of regret. He seemed to be regaining strength rapidly from the instant the friars had left the room. This, however, did not strike Sir Walter as particularly notable.

“Water.”

A jar stood close at hand, and the parched lips of the invalid were speedily moistened.

“Thanks, thanks, my friend—I am better now. But bend near to me, for my voice is feeble, and the effort to speak exhausts me.”

“Delay then till the morning.”

The man shook his head hopelessly.

“The morning will be too late.”

“Nay, nay, you will recover.”

“I cannot trust to that. I must find some friend whose hand is strong and whose heart is generous—I must find him at once. Are you the man?”

“My hand is none of the weakest, and for my heart—well, it has never yet refused pity to the unfortunate. But before pledging myself to you I must know the service you would have done.”

“It is honourable.”

“Without doubt, and I divine by your eagerness that it is of import.”

“Ay, it is of high import, for it concerns the good name of a noble lady—perhaps concerns her life.”

“And you can save her?”

“I could have saved her had not this illness come upon me. But now—you see how powerless I am.”

“Then you would have me undertake the work.”

“That is what I would implore you to do.”

“You cannot understand the circum-

stances which hamper my actions, and I cannot explain them. But to this I pledge myself that, these circumstances permitting, I will do the service you desire.”

“I cannot thank you enough for that pledge; but you will know how much I feel when I tell you without your promise my death would have been miserable, my spirit could never have found peace.”

“Be satisfied, I shall not be easily turned from the accomplishment of your desire.”

“I believe that—I believe that.”

“Who is the lady?”

“Give me your hand.”

Spens obeyed, and somehow as the pilgrim grasped his hand, he felt a chill as if a cold draught of wind had passed through the chamber. At the same time a strange fancy flashed upon his mind—that a diabolic gleam of triumph had been for an instant faintly visible in the dying man’s sunken eyes. But he endeavoured to thrust the fancy aside, and in the endeavour he remembered with some surprise the utterly

exhausted condition of the man only a few minutes previous, and contrasted it with the comparative ease with which he spoke now. That, however, might be accounted for by the great anxiety he felt to relieve himself of a matter which evidently weighed heavily upon him.

So Sir Walter gave him his hand frankly, and awaited the revelation which appeared to be of so much import.

The pilgrim held the hand between his own, as if it were his last hope, with an eager suspense upon his haggard countenance, but withal possessing in his manner and look a species of undercurrent which kept suspicion alive in the mind of the observer despite of himself. Holding the hand tightly, and partly raising himself upon his elbow, he peered at the masked face as if vainly endeavouring to pierce the disguise.

At length—

“Give me one promise,” he gasped.

“Of what nature?” demanded Sir Walter

with that sense of suspicion strong upon him.

“That you will not betray me whatever I may reveal.”

“I promise,” was the hasty response ; for as the man appeared to be dying it did not seem to matter anything whether he were betrayed or not.

“Enough. I can speak freely now.”

“I listen.”

“It is not easy even after your promise to make known my guilt. The cord should have been round my neck long ago, and folk would have been the better for it. But I have escaped it, as you see, and am like to escape it altogether.”

Sir Walter made a slight attempt to withdraw his hand, but the man held it with all his strength.

“Don’t draw away from me—I have repented, and I have suffered bitterly for my crimes. I am called Ritchie, and have spent most of my time on the Borders. I was one of the band of traitors who at Flod-

den turned upon Sir Walter Spens—what made you start?”

“Nothing, nothing! go on.”

“I was one of them, and was commanded to aim at the life of Spens——”

“By whom commanded?” was the somewhat excited interruption.

“By Heron Barras.”

“The villain! what motive can he have had?”

“You are a friend to Spens, I see,” said Ritchie with a strange quietness of manner, and he now slowly released the hand he had been holding.

Sir Walter was startled by the remark into a consciousness that he was betraying himself.

“Yes—yes,” he answered quickly; “I know Spens, and will swear he has given Barras no cause for enmity.”

“You are right, no doubt; but enmity springs from odd sources sometimes. Barras and Spens have not met for years—I do not think they would recognise each other were

they to meet now. But Spens holds in his possession the proofs which would give to an unknown lad the title and wealth to which Barras aspires."

"Say you?"

"The good knight of Halstane must suspect as much, but of course you did not know the circumstance. Do you not think there might be cause enough for enmity in that?"

"Mayhap there is; but to your own matter."

"I come to that. I was to aim at the knight's life, and in my effort to obey the command I would have fallen had not the generous Spens, even in the heat of battle, listened to my prayer for mercy, and spared me."

"Yet you turned against him."

"Not after that. I was grateful, and resolved that when the fight was done I would seek him out and warn him of the treachery which surrounded him."

"Were you faithful to this resolve?"

“ So far that I sought him, but failed to find him. He had fallen, some said ; he was prisoner, others said. At all events I did not find him, and I returned to my old master.”

“ That was a sorry end to your gratitude.”

“ You shall see. I had my purpose now ; and that purpose was to learn the plans of Barras and give Lady Spens timely tidings of any evil he might threaten to her. But he is wary, and trusts no more to his tools than is enough to enable them to execute his infernal work. I learned very little of his intentions, and that little was not learned early enough to be of service to the lady, else much of the evil that has befallen her might have been guarded against.”

“ Well ? ”

Ritchie had paused as if his exertions were fast overcoming him. He passed his hand slowly over his brow, and resumed.

“ I watched him narrowly, and tried hard to find some means of showing my gratitude to Spens, but failed. At last I discovere

this — that Gilbert Elliot loved Mistress Spens, and that she regarded him with some favour——”

“It is false!” cried Sir Walter Spens passionately and forgetting himself.

Ritchie seemed startled by his companion’s vehemence, and that suspicious expression before alluded to glimmered for an instant in his eyes.

“And wherefore so?” he asked, with every appearance of simple amaze at the flat denial given to his words by the masked knight.

The latter responded somewhat vexedly, as was apparent in manner and voice.

“I mean—that is, I should have said, that it seems false to me.”

“How to you?”

“I know the folk. Elliot is a mere stripling, and has learned to regard Lady Spens too much as a mother ever to fix on her the eyes of a lover.”

Ritchie shook his head doubtingly.

“He is a man in years, in action, and in

thought. She is very fair, I am told, and still young."

"True, true," muttered Sir Walter meditatively.

Ritchie went on in a slow tone, pausing often between his words as if for lack of pith, but in reality to note the effect of the poison upon his hearer.

"He is a comely youth as you would say, had you ever seen him. He is brave, and when Flodden fight was lost he fled to her with the tidings of her husband's death."

"Not so. He endeavoured to give her hope."

"Ay, but in such a way that he filled her with despair."

Sir Walter clenched his hands behind him and closed his lips tightly, trying with all his might to suppress the indignation which the man aroused. He kept singing to himself that the man lied; nathless his blood grew hot and his brain feverish.

"When she was driven from Halstane he came to her aid; he watched over her

day and night with an ardour which nothing but love could inspire. She could not fail to observe the nature of his regard—she could not fail to like him for his devotion. Soothly, they were not human if they could be so much together and not learn to feel something more than mere respect for each other.”

“ Well, well, but what has this to do with the service you seek from me ? ” said Sir Walter sharply, and unable to conceal his impatience.

“ You will understand presently. Would you know the writing of Mistress Spens ? ”

“ Perhaps.”

“ Then read this. Barras took it by force from the messenger who was despatched to Elliot with it, and I stole it from Barras.”

His pilgrim’s gown was lying upon the couch beside him, and from a pocket in the breast of it he drew a scrap of paper.

Sir Walter took the paper, and, despite himself, his hand shook slightly. He read—

“ My good friend and lover, Gilbert Elliot, greeting.—Dear heart, why should you risk your life and my hope in this contest with Tushielaw? Should you be victor that will not bring the dead to life; should you fail, the shame which now lies upon us will be confirmed for ever. I would have you live for sake of one who loves you more than all the world beside. Wherefore I pray you, pause, and go not into battle.—“ M. S.”

It was with difficulty that the knight suppressed a cry of pain. The letter was written by his wife—it was no counterfeit, he could have sworn—and it gave a terrible confirmation to all that Ritchie had said. He had discredited him all along, or he had found some probable explanation for all that was imputed to his lady. But now?

What explanation could he find for this letter? How argue away the meaning of the words—“ live for sake of one who loves you more than all the world beside? ” There was no explanation, no argument that he could find to alter the conclusion to which

the mind leapt at first sight of this letter—that his wife was untrue to him, and that Gilbert Elliot was his foe.

His pulse seemed to stand still; and yet his brain seemed to swell and beat wildly against his skull. He became giddy, sick, and suffocated. He wanted air, and as he staggered toward the window a thousand lights seemed to be dancing in the chamber like so many fiends mocking his agony, and through it all he was conscious of two dark evil eyes fixed steadily upon him.

He thrust the window open and looked out into the cold dark night. He raised his mask and allowed the sharp wind to play upon his face.

His vision cleared, the oppressive throbbing of the brain ceased, and he seemed to waken from a horrible dream. It was no more than a dream; he would not believe that it was more, for he knew her love, and in spite of every proof he would trust in it till she herself told him that it was no longer his. He would forget the dream.

He drew the mask over his face again, closed the window, and returned to the invalid's couch.

“Were you ill?” asked the latter, faintly.

Spens answered, calmly.

“I fancied I heard some one without there, and desired to assure myself that there was no spy observing us. I pray you be brief with what remains to tell.”

“Few words will serve. When that letter came into my hand I thought of delivering it to him for whom it was intended. Before I could accomplish that I learned that Spens still lived.”

“What then?”

“I donned the pilgrim's garb in which you found me, and resolved to seek him through the land by night and day so that I might acquaint him with the danger which threatened him—a danger which his generous heart could never have suspected. For weeks I have been seeking him; but in vain. Three days ago sickness seized me, and when struggling to reach this house

to crave help I fell where you found me, helpless and dying.”

“Have you finished?”

“I have finished. I pray you to take up the work which I have left undone. Seek the brave Knight of Halstane and acquaint him with all that I have related to you.”

“Be sure that he shall know all.”

“Then I am satisfied to die now.”

“Should you live, I shall send you some token when the task is completed.”

“The Holy Mother’s blessing be with you; for I can only hope for pardon through my exertions to atone for the past.”

“If there be any atonement in making Spens acquainted with these matters, you may count that it is made. And now, good night.”

“Good night.”

Ritchie caught Sir Walter’s hand and pressed it to his lips with every appearance of humble gratitude. Spens somewhat abruptly drew his hand away and quitted the room.

The pilgrim lay for several minutes watching the door. A strange grin as of triumph slowly dawned upon his face, the sunken eyes brightened, and at length he gave vent to a low chuckle of impish delight.

“Won,” he muttered, “won, by the mass. Now, let me see the loss and gain. It is he himself who has been with me. Then this is his hiding-place. He did not believe what I told him, but he felt it, and betrayed himself. It will work upon him, do what he will; that letter will poison his rest and make him hate the man who would have been of most service to him. Well, they will meet, perhaps fight, and one will fall. I do not care which. What next? in any case he will say nothing of Binram for a while, and in that while the lordship will be mine.”

He drew his hand meditatively over his tangled beard and again laughed.

“What comes next? Why, that if Tushielaw be not a bigger dolt than I take

him to be we may ride our quarry down ere another sunset.”

He half rose in the bed, and, bending forward toward the door, listened.

There was no sound to indicate the approach of any one.

The pretended invalid stepped stealthily out of bed and secured the door by placing one of the chairs against it in such a way that the latch rested upon the back and so rendered the door fast.

He stepped to the window, threw it open, and looked out. He gave vent to a peculiar sound like the tu-whit tu-whoop of the owl.

A few minutes passed; the wind swept moaningly and coldly in upon him. Then from no great distance came what might have been the echo of the owlish sound.

He repeated it once, then leaned over the window ledge.

“Deil’s bird,” he said, in a low voice.

“Here,” responded some one from below.

“Hark, and mind well. The prey is here; the word is, ‘the night is dark,’ and

the answer, 'dawn approaches.' Get the place surrounded and we win everything."

"A' richt."

The false pilgrim stealthily closed the window, withdrew the chair from the door, slipped into bed, and was as faint and helpless as man might be—in appearance—when the friars returned to tend him.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNPLEASANT RECEPTION.

“To seek het water beneath cauld ice,
 Surely it is a great folie—
 I have asked grace at a graceless face,
 But there is nane for my men an’ me.
 But had I kenn’d ere I cam’ frae hame
 How thou unkind wad’st been to me,
 I wad have keepit the Border side
 In spite of all thy force an’ thee.”

Johnnie Armstrong.

WHEN Gilbert awakened from the sleep into which he had been thrown by the potion which Kirsty Hyslop had given him, he experienced a peculiar sense of gratitude and relief. He looked back to his illness, to the presence of Mistress Douglas, and to her strange disappearance as one might have looked to something that had hap-

pened a long time ago. But this calmness was gradually overcome by an eager desire to be up from his couch and out in the world doing the work that had fallen to him.

Youth and the kindly treatment of his strange doctor and nurse—Kirsty—worked wonders. She had told him of the ominous manner in which Mistress Douglas had gone, or, rather, had been stolen away, and when at length he stood dressed upon the floor, with renewed health fluttering through his blood, one of his first thoughts was of his fair friend, and he was ready for her sake to confront even the great Earl Angus.

A few days more, and he was able to walk about, and at last came the day when he was able to take leave of the spaewife.

Kirsty stood with her hands clasped behind her, and with a queer inquisitive look upon her face.

“So ye’re weel noo, an’ ye’re awa frae the nest as soon as your wings can bear ye. But ye’ll come back again.”

She spoke as if she were quite indifferent on the subject, and as if indicating a necessity rather than a probability.

“I will come back, Kirsty, be sure,” he said, gratefully, “and I’ll try to make my coming worth looking for.”

“Nae doot but ye’ll live to come on your ain account, no mine.”

“Whatever it may be, I will be here before long.”

Whilst he had been lying under the woman’s care he had become so familiar with her appearance that all her peculiarities disappeared. He had learned, too, that beneath a rough exterior lay much kindness, although its expression might be made in the grimmest manner. So he spoke with freedom to her, and with gratitude.

He walked to Selkirk, and there procured a horse at the Souters’ Inn. From the garrulous host he learned something of Tushielaw’s rout and the occasion of it.

At first he attributed the report that Sir Walter Spens had appeared in person to

rescue his wife from the Borderer as a mistake arising from the timely interposition of some unknown knight. But when he was shown the proclamation of the council of a reward for the head of the traitor Spens, who had been seen in Selkirk, he became convinced and joyous.

Marvelling at the strange story which had been related to him, he rode to Edinburgh.

He put up at the hostelry of St. Andrew's Rest, and there he heard something further of the discovery that Spens still lived, and of the unavailing efforts that had been made to capture him. The joy afforded him by the tidings was not affected by the knowledge that they involved a change in the nature of the thoughts he had lately given to Lady Spens. He had always regarded her with affection; but he had never dreamed of any tenderer relationship than that of brotherhood until he had seen her a widow, as he believed, and friendless. Then for a brief space he imagined that he

might win the right to become what duty seemed to require him to be—her protector. The hope was dismissed without a pang. And now the bright face of Mary Douglas shone full upon him, filling him with strange sensations of unaccountable happiness and fear.

He pledged his friends in a cup of Burgundy, and then, feeling very much as if he had been left alone in the world, he proceeded to Holyrood.

He was informed there that her Majesty and the King and Court had returned from Kelso on the previous day, and were at present at the castle, where he would find Captain Lindsay.

To the castle Gilbert hastened, and his heart palpitated a little as an ordinary ushered him into his captain's presence.

Not a word was spoken until the door was closed ; then Captain Lindsay, who was engaged deciphering some despatches, looked up sharply. There was, however, a faint gleam of surprise and pleasure perceptible

in his eyes in spite of the abrupt, unsympathetic manner in which he spoke—

“What the devil brings you here, sir?”

“I have come to deliver myself to you, captain.”

“Deliver yourself! Are you tired of life?”

“Not yet.”

“No? Then I suppose you thought it was never too late to be shot.”

“I have not yet been tried.”

“It’s all the same. You have deserted. You are held a coward in failing to enter the lists against the Borderer. You will be condemned. Zounds, sir, why didn’t you stay where you were?”

Gilbert’s face flushed at the word coward.

“I thought, captain, that my duty called upon me to report myself to you whenever I had freedom and strength to do so. That I am here is surely some proof that I am no coward?”

“Humph, that is so; but it will not save you.”

“Then I must suffer.”

“You take it coolly; but what the devil am I to say to—to—the person who obtained you your appointment?”

“Say that I was trepanned by a villain who feared to meet me in the lists. That I was carried away, and my life aimed at. A lucky accident saved me, and I hastened hither to declare my innocence of intent to desert either my regiment or my duty.”

“Have you any one to bear testimony that this is truth?”

“Yes; one.”

“Whom?”

“One whose word will not be doubted—
one who——”

He stopped, and looked confused. He remembered that in bringing forward Mary Douglas as a witness in his favour, he was risking her reputation, and certainly exposing her to the malice of her proud brother Angus.

“Well, well, go on,” said Lindsay, impatiently.

“ I—I was mistaken. I have no witness—no proof beyond my own assertion.”

“ You said but now that there was one who could testify to what you state.”

“ I have no witness,” he repeated, slowly.

“ Humph; that looks bad—bad.” Stepping to the door—“ Sergeant.”

A soldier entered.

“ Master Gilbert Elliot is under arrest. Take him hence. Give him whatever he requires.” (This in an undertone.)

The sergeant saluted his captain, and motioned to Gilbert to follow him.

At the door the prisoner paused.

“ Can I speak with you for an instant, captain? ”

“ Yes.”

The sergeant withdrew in obedience to a sign from Lindsay.

“ I only wanted to tell you this, sir,” Gilbert said, quietly. “ There is one who could testify to all that I have told you, and to all that I will tell my judges, but—— ”

“ Well, what do you stop for now ? ”

“ I speak to you, sir, as a friend, and as one who will regard my confidence as sacred.”

“ Go on.”

“ Were I to name the witness to whom I refer I would compromise a lady. Therefore I must be silent.”

The captain strode up to him, took his hand, and peered into his face. Presently—

“ I understand ; and I believe you.”

Gilbert left the chamber. He found the sergeant waiting outside, and by him he was conducted to one of the cells of the castle.

The good-natured captain, who tried so hard to speak and act in the most disagreeable manner, paced his room for half an hour afterwards in perturbation, growling at every piece of furniture that came in his way as if it had done him an inexcusable injury, and growling at Elliot for turning up again.

Captain Lindsay had received from nature

two gifts which did not work well together—or rather, which he fancied did not work well together. First, he had been endowed with a tender heart; next, he had been endowed with an overpowering passion for arms. In the course of his career he had often found his heart severely tried by the duties which his position as a soldier forced upon him. Hence he adopted that sharp, unceremonious manner which has been observable in him. He endeavoured to convince himself that he was overcoming the weakness of his nature, and that he was ready to execute any duty which might devolve upon him without a single twinge.

But this affair of Master Elliot upset his calculations. He liked the youth, admired his courage and frankness in returning to Edinburgh; and, having no hope of being able to save him from the penalty of his apparent desertion, he was perplexed and fretted.

The forebodings of the captain found a too

speedy corroboration. In two days after his return Gilbert was tried under the martial law. He pleaded the ruse by which he had been taken away, and related all that had happened. But he had nobody to confirm his statements, unless they would send for Kirsty Hyslop, and this his judges declined to do. There was no one else to help him in his difficulty; and the only kindly word spoken for him was the argument of Captain Lindsay, that had he deserted of his own will he would not have returned, knowing, as he must have done, the penalty of his offence.

To the judges the case appeared to be clear, and were they to pardon one offender there would be nothing to prevent the whole of the guardsmen taking flight when the whim seized them. Therefore an example must be made, and he was condemned to death.

Lindsay followed him to his cell, apparently gruffer, if possible, than usual in his manner.

“Good-bye, captain,” said Gilbert, smiling sadly, when he stood again in the gloomy prison which he was only to quit for the grave; “I will try to die as becomes a gentleman of your company.”

“I am sure of that.”

“One word before you go: I believe that I have not been fairly tried——”

“What—what?”

“I am convinced that my fate was decided before I had spoken a word. Whatever the reason, my judges met to condemn me.”

“That’s treason; but what the devil did you come back for?”

And, as if afraid that he might show more of his weakness than he would like to think about afterwards, he hurried away, leaving Elliot to find what comfort he might in knowing that at least one man believed him innocent and injured.

He was perfectly calm; and, whether or not engendered by a touch of frenzy which had lurked somewhere in his blood as a lingering result of his late fever, he was

even disposed to be mirthful towards evening. At any rate he astonished the sentinel by suddenly bursting into a snatch of song and beating time with his fettered feet upon the floor, whereby he produced a clank, clanking sound. The indignity of the fetters was hardest to bear.

“Hallo, sir! what’s like the matter wi’ ye?” asked the sentinel.

“A malady for which there is no cure that I wot of.”

“An’ what may that be?”

“Sentence of death my doctors call it.”

“Weel, ye seem till take kindly wi’ it.”

“I don’t like it at all, and so I try to forget it. Am I not wise?”

““Oh, the King went seeking a pretty maid
Mang Yarrow braes sae bonnie, oh;
An’ he met wi’ a maist cantankerous jade
That wouldna be won by ony, oh.’”

“Puir sowl, he’s daft,” muttered the sentinel, moving away.

But when the night closed, and he sat upon his stone seat in darkness, his humour

changed. Through the loophole, which served as a window to his cell, he could see the stars shining, and, watching them, there slowly crept upon him a sense of loss. Another night, and he would never look upon the stars again from this side of the grave. Another night past, and all that he had ever dreamed of achieving would have vanished from him.

“Is all hope gone, then?” he asked himself.

Yes, it was all gone, and he bowed his head upon his hands to pray. But he could not pray. Thoughts glanced through his mind like the shadows of birds upon a lake, never pausing, never leaving any trace behind.

As one who has been a long time trying to sleep begins mechanically to count the ticking of a clock, so he began to count the steps of the sentinel, and he was startled almost when suddenly the steps ceased. He listened for them, and waited for them with the impatience of a child waiting for a

toy. The absurdity of this state of mind presently occurred to him, and he made an effort to shake it off.

This effort was assisted by a peculiar circumstance.

The key turned in the lock of his cell, the chain was removed, the door opened cautiously, and some one appeared to enter, but he was unable to assure himself of that, as there was no light. Soft breathing, however, speedily confirmed his impression that he had a visitor.

Who, and for what purpose ?

“ Are you there, Master Elliot ? ” said a low voice.

“ Yes. Who are you that ask ? ”

“ A friend.”

“ Why are you here, and why come so stealthily ? ”

“ I am here to lead you back to liberty ; that is why I come so stealthily.”

“ To liberty ! What is your meaning ? Has the judgment of to-day been revoked ? Have they recalled me to life ? ”

“It is I only who revoke the judgment and who recalls you to life.”

It was a woman's voice, its sweet sadness revealed so much ; but the speaker had her mouth covered with the fold of a cloak, and by that means disguised the voice so that he could not recognize it. He had a suspicion, though.

“You bewilder me by these riddles. Tell me simply, how am I to regain my liberty?”

“The doors and gates are open : here is the key of your fetters. Walk forth. At the foot of the West Bow you will find a man waiting with a horse. Mount and ride for your life from Edinburgh.”

“Ah, then this is not by order of the Court ; it is an escape that you offer me ?”

“Yes ; and you must quickly accept, or escape will be impossible.”

A slight pause, during which Gilbert was endeavouring to reconcile the voice and circumstance with his surmise as to the identity of his friend.

“Give me your hand,” he said, “and let

me know who is the friend to whom I may owe my life."

"Stay where you are, Master Elliot; you must not touch me or seek to know me. You must leave Scotland, until the friends you have at Court can obtain pardon for you."

"I have been guilty of no crime, and therefore need no pardon. Some have called me coward, and were I to fly even from the unjust verdict which condemns me, others would join the cry. I shall give them the lie."

"This is rashness."

"Say rather it is calm resolution. For, observe, there is another reason why I should reject this offer to run like a thief from my prison. My escape would attach blame to Captain Lindsay, under whose charge I have been placed. I will not have suspicion cast upon him, and shame upon myself, even for life, which is precious to me now as ever. I will not go."

"Think again—think of the future that

you are throwing away ; think of the wrong you are doing to those who love you."

"They are few, and would not wish to see me disgraced."

"I tell you that you will be recalled. Your escape is but to procure time to prove your truth."

"I will not go," he repeated, doggedly.

"Gilbert!"—it was a cry of pain.

He sprang towards her ; but, swifter than he, she had withdrawn and closed the door before he could touch her. So sudden indeed was her departure, that for an instant Gilbert stood in doubt as to whether or not he had been dreaming all the while. But there was a faint perfume in the chamber which sufficed to convince him that it had been no dream—that he had been offered liberty, and he had refused it.

He did not repine, much as he valued the treasure he had refused to accept. He would have refused it again, for he was resolved to pass forth with reputation untarnished or to die.

But the friend who had come to him in his need? There was only one who could or would do so much, and he blessed her for the act. So he waited quietly for the day of execution.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE TOILS.

“Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly but not dark;
The thin grey cloud is spread on high—
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind and at the full,
And yet she looks both small and dull.
The night is chill, the cloud is grey.”

Christabel.

SIR WALTER SPENS was pale and his eyes glistened with excitement when he removed the mask from his face in the secret chamber in which his lady awaited him.

“You are agitated,” said the wife, regarding him earnestly. “What was it the stranger sought with you?”

“Nothing—nothing of import.”

She regarded him questioningly.

“Then why are you so troubled? A little while ago you left me, and your brow was unruffled and your voice steady. You come back to me, and your brow is clouded, your voice is hoarse, and you speak hesitatingly.”

“Is it so? You are watchful. I forgot to tell you that I must leave you again presently. Perhaps that will account for my—the change which you observe.”

“But you will not go to-night?”

“Yes, to-night—within the hour.”

“So soon?”

“It must be. Wherefore, good wife, take comfort and pray for my return.”

“I would that I could hold you here; but, since that may not be, I pray Heaven speed you back again.”

“My faith, sweet dame, you will learn wisdom betimes,” he broke out with a short unpleasant laugh.

“Why think you so?”

“You take my going with so much philosophy.”

There were surprise, pain, and fear in the

look she fixed upon him. His eyes sought the ground uneasily.

“It is scarce an hour gone,” she said, quietly, “since you were chiding me for the weakness which feared your absence, and now—you seem to chide me for having hid the aching of my heart that the thought of my unhappiness might not mar you in the work you have to do. The Virgin Mother knows how hard has been the struggle to wear the mask which veils the sore you make in leaving me.”

He folded her in his arms and kissed her passionately. “My sooth, I think I grow peevish, wife, and weak as you grow stronger. But we shall mend in time.”

“What was that noise?” she cried, starting.

“I heard none.”

“It was like the clank of armour.”

“My sword perhaps struck the chair.”

“And my watchful ears gave it all the significance of an armed force come to arrest you.”

“We are safe here.”

“I do not think we are safe anywhere in Scotland,” she said, shaking her head sadly. “Let us talk of other things, and be happy if we can for the little while you may be with me. I have a commission for you.”

And she forced a smile as if anxious to win him from the gloom which she saw hung over him despite himself.

“A commission?”

“Yes, and one of import too. A friend whom we prize dearly, and who, when all the world was most against us, was most our friend, has fallen into the hands of our envious foes, and for our sakes I fear will die. I would have you learn his fate, and save him if he still lives.”

“You mean——”

“Gilbert Elliot.”

Sir Walter’s mouth twitched and his eyes wavered. The name jarred upon some chord of his nature, although before it had been pronounced he had known whose name she had on her lips.

“I will seek him,” he said, as if the promise distressed him in some degree.

“He wished to serve us, and so made Tushielaw his enemy,” she urged; “he has been betrayed——”

She stopped, for she began to perceive that her words fretted Spens for some reason which she was utterly at a loss to divine.

Before she could express her marvel at this, both were startled by a distant murmur of voices, then a sharp cry of some one in pain or great terror.

They listened with bated breath; and the cry was repeated. This time the sound appeared to be close at hand.

“There is some one on the secret staircase,” said Spens, in a low firm voice, coolly. “I fear our burrow has been sniffed by the bloodhounds. But they must be cunning indeed, if we do not outwit them.”

“They are trying the panel,” whispered Mistress Spens. “What are you about to do?”

He had approached the door, and in answer to her question, signalled her to be silent. He drew the tapestry aside, and placed his ear to the panel.

“ Save me—save me ! ” moaned a feeble voice without.

Spens hesitated, then touched the spring.

The evil face of the false pilgrim glistened as it were out of the darkness. There was a shout of triumph. Spens gripped the man, and dragged him through the aperture into the room. He regained his feet instantly, and, with a malicious glare in his eyes, appeared to be about to spring upon Sir Walter. But suddenly he sunk upon the floor, as if overcome by weakness. He had observed that Lady Spens had closed the panel, and stood watching him.

He cleverly concealed his face from her in falling to the floor, where he lay moaning helplessly.

There were footsteps on the staircase without.

“ Why and how are you here ? ” said

Spens, under his breath, and hastily removing his mask.

“I have been tracked,” moaned the man, in a shrill voice. “I heard their voices——”

“Not so loud; and tell me whose voices,” interrupted the knight.

“The soldiers. Barras has sent them after me. I know he is here himself; and despair gave me strength to rise from the bed and fly through the corridor, I did not know whither. Groping along the wall of a dark passage below, one of the holy fathers met me, and when I told him that the crime for which I was pursued was my fidelity to the poor knight Sir Walter Spens, he thrust me through a dark doorway. I fell upon the staircase which took me up here.”

“Not so loud, or by my soul I will help nature’s work with my poignard.”

“Mercy, mercy——”

“Be still, then. Since you were seeking to escape, how was it that you shouted so loud?”

“I was in darkness—I was bewildered—mad. I did not know what I was doing. Save me, save me, good master, and the Knight of Halstane will thank you.”

“Humph! I am not so sure of that; and, besides, you told me that which might make Spens desire to see you dead rather than alive.”

“Save me—save me!” cried the man, again raising his voice shrilly, as the noise of clanking armour indicated the precincts of the pursuers.

“I will,” said Spens, sharply. “In here with you.”

He half dragged, half carried the man into the inner chamber, left him there, closed the door, and fastened it.

The secret panel had been discovered, and was yielding to pressure and the heavy blows of two strong men. It was smashed into pieces, and half a dozen men burst into the room just as the Knight of Halstane and his lady had passed into a small square closet at the farther corner.

Tushielaw, grim, fierce, and sallow by repeated disappointment, was the first to appear. After him came Ding-a'-Doon, Hornie, and others. They all stood staring at each other and the walls when they perceived that the chamber was untenanted by other than themselves.

“A thousand curses,” muttered the Border chief, gnashing his teeth. “Are we to be again tricked? Seek, lads—seek every corner for them.”

“Open, open quickly.”

This was the voice of Heron Barras, and proceeded from the inner apartment.

One kick from the heavy foot of the giant Ding-a'-Doon broke open the door, and the false pilgrim sprung forth.

“Have you got them?”

“No. Where are they?” growled Tushielaw.

“They were here a minute ago—they must be here still. Curse you, why did you not speed—three minutes sooner, and we would have had them safe?”

“ We had trouble with one of the friars, who struggled with us like a devil, and managed to close the door in the wall. Why did you not lay hold of him ? ”

“ Never mind the why now. Search— ha, yonder closet. Quick, we have them yet.”

The door of the closet was fastened, but with the help of a couple of spears it was soon forced open. The closet was empty, and the men stared at each other in bewilderment. A slight noise as of the creaking of a board overhead attracted their attention. They looked up, and Tushielaw, snatching a spear from one of his men, struck the planks of the ceiling. They were loose, and the mode of escape was made clear. They did not stop to speculate how it was possible for a woman to get up to the roof.

“ Here, Pate, give me a shoulder,” said Tushielaw, briskly.

Ding-a'-Doon leaned his head and arms against the wall, and his master climbed upon his back, reached the ceiling, easily

knocked the boards aside, and drew himself up through the aperture. Barras followed.

“Bring the light, one of you,” he shouted, looking back.

Hornie, with the nimbleness of a monkey, climbed up the giant's back, holding the cruzie in his hand. But as he was holding it out to Barras, accidentally or intentionally, the cruzie dropped to the ground and the light was extinguished. Barras swore, and Tushielaw growled, for they were now in complete darkness. Hornie descended swiftly to the floor and made a great ado seeking the lamp.

One of the men produced a flint, and presently a light was obtained. This time the dwarf managed to hand it up safely, and followed it himself. Ding-a'-Doon ascended next, and in a few minutes all were up except one man.

They found themselves in a narrow, low-roofed passage, along which they moved cautiously, fearing some trap. The passage appeared to extend around the building, and

all the cunning of Tushielaw and Barras failed to discover any outlet in the walls or floor. They congratulated themselves upon this, for the fewer the outlets the less chance there would be of escaping; and if the fugitives were penned in the passage, they would be captured with little trouble.

The passion with which he regarded Mistress Spens—a passion rendered all the more fierce by the difficulty he had found in achieving its object—and the cupidity which attracted him to the wealth of Halstane, rendered Tushielaw eager in the pursuit. But another and stronger motive still urged him forward in the evil work: he knew that between Spens and him there was only one way of settling accounts—it was life against life.

With Barras there was a certain enmity arising from chagrin and disappointed ambition. He would not have troubled himself in the least about Spens had he not barred the way to the lordship of Binram. But since the way was barred, he wished to

remove the obstacle as speedily and as effectually as possible. So these two united to hunt him down.

It was well that they had been proceeding cautiously, for at the angle of the building they came upon a chasm in the floor of about six feet wide. There was darkness below and darkness beyond. Their light only sufficed to show them the width of the hole, and to indicate the depth; it revealed no means of crossing or descending.

“Who joins me?” said Tushielaw. “I shall jump across.”

“Do,” said Barras, drily; “and you will probably alight upon some trap which will hurl you into the arms of the fiend who waits for you.”

“I have another plan, then”—and the Borderer smiled grimly—“which will cheat the fiend and our foes together.”

He took the Jeddart axes from his foster-brother and two of the men. Having placed them across the chasm, he cautiously tried their strength, then crawled across them

and reached the other side in safety. He found that the suspicion of Barras had been nearer the mark than they had calculated. Sitting on the side of the chasm, he pressed the floor with his hand; it yielded to the slightest touch, and sunk downward. Had he jumped, as he had proposed at first, he would not have troubled Spens again. Having warned his followers of the danger, he easily stepped over the trap and waited for the others. Barras joined him immediately, and the rest followed.

They now proceeded with even more caution than before, and about twenty steps brought them to the end of the passage, where they found two doors, one of them of strong oak, studded with iron nails, opened into the tower where the friendly beacon of the hospice was kindled every night, and was now burning. The other door opened to the roof or ramparts of the building.

The first was fast, the second open; and the pursuers, leaving one man to guard the entrance to the tower, passed out upon the

roof. Tushielaw again made use of his gigantic foster-brother's shoulders, this time to enable him to look in at one of the windows of the tower.

With a subdued growl of satisfaction he slipped to the ground again.

“They are there—I saw them.”

Ding-a'-Doon and three men were posted at the corners of the tower, whilst Tushielaw, Barras, and the others returned to the door. At first they attacked the portal with their axes; but it soon became apparent that the iron-studded woodwork was strong enough to resist their efforts for several hours. They were at this juncture at some loss for a battering-ram or other engine by which an entrance might have been speedily forced.

Tushielaw, skilled in all the tricks of Border broils, hit upon an expedient.

He set the men to work chipping the door which led to the roof. The splinters flew about like hail, and were hastily collected into a pile at the foot of the door

they wished to force. Tushielaw applied a torch, but the chips were damp and for some time refused to kindle. At length, however, by dint of much coaxing in the way of puffing and blowing from Tushielaw, who knelt before the pile with all the eagerness and devotion of a fire-worshipper before his deity, a bright flame shot up, illuming his dark countenance.

Whilst the blue smoke curled and wreathed upward and over him, and the chips crackled and sent their sparks flying up into his face and around him, Tushielaw remained upon his knees encouraging the flame by feeding it with chips and blowing upon it vigorously. He smiled with diabolical satisfaction as he saw the flame rapidly increase.

The stout oaken door blistered and fretted and hissed, as the fire began to take effect upon it; whilst Barras and the men, encouraged by the success of the project thus far, continued lustily chopping the wood.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ESCAPE.

“They hurried but, they hurried ben,
But whar to gang they didna ken.”

Old Ballad.

ON entering the closet of the secret chamber, the fugitives had found a light ladder which was always there to be ready for emergency such as this. Having ascended to the passage above, Sir Walter had drawn up the ladder and replaced the short planks on the floor. Then, carrying the ladder and leading his wife by the hand, he had moved quickly along the passage till they had reached the chasm at the angle of the building. There he had hesitated. He knew that by descending he could readily obtain egress from the Hospice ; but he did

not doubt that the place was surrounded, and so he would only escape from foes behind him to fall into the hands of those in front. Aided by his knowledge of the place, his decision was promptly made. By means of the ladder he conducted his lady across the opening. Then he let the ladder down to the floor beneath, giving it a shove over to the side they had just quitted. By this means he hoped to lead their pursuers into the belief that they had made their way to the lower part of the building with intent to escape thence. Lest the wolves should not be caught by the trick, he loosened the bolt of the spring trap, and felt convinced that if the ruse was unsuccessful the trap would save him further trouble.

As has been seen, the ruse and the trap were both avoided—the one by accident, the other by cunning caution.

The fugitives then hurried on to the tower, and, as another bait to catch their foes tripping, Spens left the door to the

roof unfastened. For, should the pursuers pass out upon the roof, he would be able to double upon them, and, as a last resource, venture a descent.

In all these anticipations he was disappointed, and husband and wife now stood prisoners within the tower with men outside thirsting for his life in which hers was bound, and the enemy Fire creeping in upon them. There was terrible suspense and fear in their hearts as they listened to the work progressing outside; and both were pallid with emotion, but calm and firm.

Silently they joined hands, as if with hand linked in hand to die.

“If I have ever wronged you in thought or act, forgive me now, Madge,” he said, in a low tremulous voice.

“I forgive, and grant you me like mercy.”

He kissed her sadly for answer.

Then with firm hand he drew his sword. The place was nearly filled with thick, blinding smoke which the damp wood

produced. A few minutes more and they would not be able to see each other.

Outside the smoke was even more dense and suffocating, so that Barras and the men had ceased chopping the wood and had stepped out to the roof. Tushielaw still knelt, fanning the flame. In that position the smoke did not affect him unbearably, and behind him crouched the dwarf, with eyes strangely red and malignant.

The burning door was suddenly flung open. Before the gust of wind and swirl of the smoke enabled him to comprehend what had taken place, a foot was planted upon his shoulder, some one sprang over him and disappeared in the cloud of smoke which filled the passage.

Tushielaw sprang to his feet with a shout of rage. Barras and the men, mistaking the import of the shout, rushed into the tower.

Tushielaw darted along the passage; only a few yards, however, and he fell heavily

over something—the dwarf. But before Scott could discover the cause of the tumble Hornie was up and away.

Spens had taken the desperate resolve to peril all on one last venture for life. So, gripping his wife stoutly with one arm, and bidding her cling to him with all her might, sword in hand he burst forth upon his foes. Fortune favoured him; and having passed Tushielaw, he dashed onward to the opening in the floor. [He avoided the trap; then bending down, slipped over the side of the chasm, and dropped to the floor beneath— Mistress Spens clinging to his neck the while, and leaving both his arms free.

She was now able to relieve him of her weight entirely, and they descended a narrow staircase into another passage, like the one above. Here they paused an instant to listen.

There was a soft pattering sound, as of some one with shoeless feet close behind them. Farther back a tramp of heavy feet, and a murmur of angry voices.

They hurried on, but presently some one behind them whispered, sharply—

“Hist—stop a wee. Ye’re rinnin’ richt into the arms o’ the guard.”

Spens recognized the voice, and slackened his pace.

“Hornie?”

“Mysel’—but dinna talk.” The little man had griped Sir Walter’s arm now, and leading the way, continued in a whisper—
“All the friars are tied up hand and foot. I couldna get warnin’ o’ this—the place is surrounded, an’ I maun get a road cleared for ye.”

They reached the ground floor, and emerged into the entrance hall.

“Stan’ ye in that hole a minit.”

Hornie indicated a recess in the wall which had been intended for the statue of some saint. Then the singular being rushed out at the open door, shouting loudly—

“Help here, help, some o’ ye. There’s the deil’s wark gangin’ on ben the house,

an' ye're a' standin' like sae mony gowks out there."

Several men rushed into the hall.

"Rin, rin, straicht on," shouted the manikin, and the men with a great clatter obeyed him.

"Awa wi' ye now," he whispered to the fugitives, "straicht out at the yett. Ye'll find horses there; tak your will o' them, an' awa."

"And you?" said Mistress Spens, quickly.

"Doam it, my lady, never mind me," he said, impatiently.

Spens dragged her away in the direction indicated.

The dwarf ran back along the hall, and out at the side door into the gardens. He fired a petronel, and hallooing and screaming, galloped about like one mad. The ruse took, and a fruitless search commenced.

The torches flashed in the night through bush and brake. Hither and thither rushed the border chief, foaming with passion and swearing roundly at the stupidity of his

men in allowing the fugitives to pass through their midst unseen.

The passion and chagrin of Barrás were as great as that of Tushielaw, but the expression was very different. He remained perfectly cool and deliberative, and, in consequence, he had nearly discovered the route of Spens and his lady.

He went round the several posts and counted the horses; the absence of two opposite the chief gate of the hospice at once suggested that the fugitives had found an opportune moment and escaped southward with the horses of their foes.

He was on the point of giving the word to mount and pursue when suddenly the horses, frightened by the hubbub and the flashing torches, neighed wildly, reared, kicked, broke their halters, and ran helter-skelter amongst the searchers, scattering them to right and left, alarming and bewildering them.

This delayed pursuit considerably, and as Barras, discomfited and enraged, ran

amongst the men to allay any superstitious fears they might obtain from this event, Hornie stood grinning broadly at him, and congratulating himself upon having for once outwitted the cunningest knave in all Scotland.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EXECUTION.

“ Adieu the lily and the rose,
The primrose fair to see :
Adieu my ladye and only joy,
For I may not stay with thee.
O, ye may weep an’ wring your hands,
Nae comfort can I gie,
For fausely hae they judgit me,
An’ here noo maun I die.”

Lord Maxwell.

ON the morning of the day fixed for the execution of Master Elliot, Gentleman of the Queen’s Guard, there was as much bustle in the town as there had been on the occasion of the expected trial by combat between the now condemned man and the Border outlaw. The burgesses were eager to witness all spectacles ; and there

had been an unusual degree of interest excited in the spectacle of this day by the remembrance of the disappointment Master Elliot had given City and Court on a former occasion. But interest and curiosity were most excited by certain rumours which had got about, to the effect that the condemned had been unfairly dealt with at his trial, and unjustly convicted.

Their Majesties and Court were at Holyrood, and the execution was to take place on the Castle Esplanade. A dozen of the best marksmen of the arquebusiers had been deputed to carry the harsh sentence into effect at noon.

As the sun climbed through the morning mists toward meridian, the twelve men were together in the guard-room. They knew nothing of the man who was to die under their hands, yet their faces were gloomy, and they had clearly no relish for the work.

“By my han’ this day,” said an old soldier, whose scarred brown face betokened

active service, "I'd rather be the warst marksman o' us a' than hae to share in taking that young chiel's life."

"I say wi' you, comrade," added another, grimly plucking at his beard with a big rough hand.

"He's a braw callant," said a third, "an' I'se warrant him a true man, for a' my lords hae condemned him—craving their honours' pardon for dootin' their judgment."

"Weel, comrades, it's nane o' our doing," said the first speaker; "we hae jist to blaze awa at command, and that's a' our concern."

"He's deserted," broke in one sour-visaged fellow; "and if you or I, comrades, had done the same, we'd have been punished in like way, with a dooms less fash about it. Let him have it, then, say I; and my musket shall let fly as fairly as ever she did in the Low Countries."

But this ill-natured observation found no response. The men were called out to

parade, and were soon busy enough with their own affairs.

The burgesses began to ascend the Castle Hill at an early hour, and continued to arrive at intervals in groups and companies till noon.

Meanwhile, the prisoner within his cell awaited his doom with a calmness which amazed the holy father who attended to shrive him and prepare his soul for its passage.

He was pale; and a subdued sorrow in the expression of his eyes, as now and again they turned from the face of the friar to the loophole by which the sunlight gleamed in upon the dark chamber and lingered upon it, indicated that his resignation was not obtained without a struggle, and a severe one. The regret with which he quitted life was painfully expressed in one little action.

It was close upon the hour when he was to be led forth; a ray of sunlight streamed into the cell, forming a slanting column of

light that fancy might have pictured as a path upward. At sight of this, Gilbert suddenly rose from his chair, and with a tender yearning stretched out his hands until the ray of light touched them and brightened them.

Then one big sob, and he sank back upon his chair.

The friar had raised his head from the illuminated missal he had been reading, and watched this movement. The good man's eyes glistened with pity.

"You still cling to life, my son," he said, shaking his head sadly.

"Ah, father, forgive me, but it is hard, hard, hard, when the heart is so young, to quit the world; to close the eyes for ever to the warm sunlight; and lie down in the cold earth. And to die in this way!"

He shuddered, and covered his face with his hands.

The friar compassionately remained silent for several minutes; he felt that only the bitterest anguish had wrung the words from the man.

Then he rose and laid his hand kindly upon the shoulder of the condemned.

“It is only the body, my son, that lies in the cold earth,” he said in a low voice; “the soul rises to the source of sunlight.”

“Thank you, thank you, father; I am still weak, you see, although I accepted your good counsel in faith and thought myself resigned. But there, I am better now. You shall see that my step is firm and my face calm as if I walked to a post of honour.”

Gilbert clasped his hands tightly together and turned his face to the dark side of the cell so that his thoughts might not be distracted by the light, with its whisperings of the world, its ambition and strife.

Very soon he had regained his self-possession, and when the drum beat in the square without he rose to his feet perfectly calm.

The voice of the holy father, monotonously repeating the usual exhortations of the occasion, sounded drowsily in his ears,

like the hum of bees ; and listening to it and trying to occupy himself with obedience to the words, he still heard every other sound with acute distinctness.

There was the steady tramp of feet in the passage outside ; the halt, the grating of the bolts, and the slow opening of the massive door ; then the guard appeared, waiting for him.

The officer in command summoned him forth.

He obeyed quietly, and took his place without a word. There were four soldiers behind him and four in front. The friar walked by his side, and, with head erect and firm tread, he marched out to the daylight once again.

They passed across the square, and were joined by the arquebusiers. Then slowly, with the muffled drum beating before them, they marched to the Esplanade.

There the whole force of the Castle was drawn up, forming three sides of a square. Behind the soldiers, and perched at every

available standpoint, crowded the citizens, from whom arose a murmur of commiseration as the condemned appeared, for his manly form and resolute bearing commanded their sympathy at once. The rumour of unfair treatment suddenly obtained a strong semblance of truth; and the crowd immediately accepted the semblance for the fact.

The murmur of sympathy passed down the Castle hill, and at the foot took shape and passed back from lip to lip in words of discontent. A name, too, was whispered amongst the crowd; a name at sound of which some looked scared, others doubtful, and many ill-humoured. The name was that of Angus, and it was associated with the deed about to be performed as the main cause of it all—whether the deed were just or wrong. None seemed to know by whom amongst them the name had been first pronounced and associated with the event of the day.

But one may form a fair guess as to the origin of the whisper when it is known that

the faction of Arran was represented in the crowd, and it was of some import that the growing distrust of the ambitious Douglas should be fostered.

The murmurs of the people served only to quicken the Governor of the Castle to the conclusion of the work in hand.

The condemned had taken his place beside the oaken trough which was so soon to close upon him. As his eyes first alighted on this object a momentary tremor passed over him; then he was calm and firm again.

He bowed his head while the priest pronounced his last benediction, and the sun shone radiantly down upon the glittering armour and the sea of excited faces.

The twelve arquebusiers were drawn up in line at twenty paces from their victim; and the drummer stood by ready to drown the outcries of the condemned should he utter any. The twelve men stood with their muskets at rest, still and grim as death.

A sergeant of the guard prepared to

bandage Gilbert's eyes ; and at that juncture Captain Lindsay rode forward to the prisoner.

The Captain was evidently struggling hard to preserve that stern expression which he believed to be the necessary adjunct of his authority. He bent down and gave his hand to Gilbert.

“Have you no message, no word to send any one that I can take for you, Master Elliot?” he said huskily.

“None, Captain Lindsay,” was the quiet answer ; “but none the less thanks to you for your kindly offer.”

“Damn it,” ejaculated the stern soldier, drawing his gloved hand across his eyes, “is there nothing I can do for you?”

Gilbert shook his head with a sad smile ; and at the same time his eyes lighted upon the sergeant, who was standing with a silken sash for a bandage.

“Stop, Captain, there is one service you can render me.”

“Out with it.”

“ Let me die with my eyes open and not blindfolded ; and let me give the word to fire.”

“ You shall have your wish.”

“ Many thanks. I wish only that I had lived long enough to show you that your kindness has not been shown to one without gratitude. Good-bye.”

The Captain wrung his hand, and, without trusting himself to speak again, galloped away.

A few minutes after the Captain had rejoined his brother officers one of the Guardsmen approached and whispered hastily—

“ There’s a man tearing up the Canongate on horseback as if he were crazed.”

Captain Lindsay wheeled his horse about and went to see what purport there might be in the haste of the rider.

A murmur swelling up from the foot of the Castle hill rendered the Governor somewhat uneasy, and he hastily passed the word for the execution to proceed promptly.

The bell of St. Giles’s tolled noon.

Gilbert was now standing alone, the friar and the Guard having retired to the rear of the arquebusiers.

He clasped his hands behind him offering a fair mark to the executioners, and, whilst the hour was still tolling, gave the word—

“Ready.”

The murmur of the crowd was still swelling and rolling over him like the sound of distant thunder.

“Present,” he said in a steady voice.

The twelve muskets were levelled at his breast.

The murmur of the populace burst into a loud shout like a clap of thunder.

Gilbert pronounced the final word—

“Fire.”

The sharp volley of the guns rang deafeningly amidst a wild confusion of voices shouting, shrieking, and commanding, and waving of hands and caps.

“A respite, a respite,” were the only intelligible words of the many voices for the first few seconds, and a horseman, having a

despatch in his hand, galloped into the midst of the arquebusiers before the smoke of their guns had cleared away.

Gilbert had fallen prone to the earth.

Captain Lindsay was beside him instantly, and raised him from the ground, endeavouring with much agitation to make him understand that the Queen had been pleased to accord him a free pardon at the earnest entreaty of certain friends.

“It is too late,” he muttered, and turning sharply to a sergeant bade him seek the surgeon.

But that gentleman was already hastening forward to render what assistance was in his power.

He examined the body, and was somewhat astonished to discover only one wound; it was in the left shoulder, and had the bullet entered only two inches lower it would have pierced the heart, and death would have been instantaneous.

“As it is,” said the surgeon, in answer to Captain Lindsay, “I do not think the wound

will prove fatal if we can only find the bullet. It is lucky as well as singular that only one man hit him.”

The truth was that eleven of the men had fired high and so missed the mark intentionally.

The whole force of the Castle was now occupied in keeping the populace at bay. The citizens, knowing that a pardon had arrived, and having seen the man fall, were eager to learn his fate ; and the haste of the Governor promised to bring about the riot he had hoped, by haste in completing the work, to avoid. The verdict of the physician, however, was made known and quickly spread amongst the crowd. The intelligence appeased the citizens, and soon afterwards they began leisurely to disperse. But during the whole afternoon there were many groups about the Luckenbooths, and about High Street and the Grassmarket busy discussing the event of the day.

Master Elliot, wholly unconscious of the happy turn affairs had taken, was conveyed

to a chamber above the old Portcullis Gate.

He was laid upon a couch, undressed, and then the surgeon succeeded in extracting the bullet. Captain Lindsay was present during the operation, and as soon as it was finished he resumed his abrupt stern manner, being assured now that the patient was certain to recover.

The prediction was verified. At the time he received the wound Gilbert had almost completely recovered from his previous illness, and so escaped fever. In a week he was able to sit up in bed and talk with Captain Lindsay, who acquainted him with what had occurred after he had fallen.

“But who were the friends whose solicitation obtained this act of clemency?” queried Gilbert, puzzled.

The Captain smiled grimly and did not answer.

“You were one of them?” proceeded the invalid.

“Right.”

“But who were the others?”

“Can you not think of any one who may have the ear of her Majesty, and who is interested in you?”

“Not one”—and as soon as the words were out he crimsoned and corrected himself—“Yes, there is one.”

“Well, one true friend, with opportunity at command, can do much to help a friend out of a difficulty. I can say no more.”

He had said enough, however, to convince Gilbert that pretty Mistress Douglas was the friend to whom he owed the pardon.

In another week he was able to rise from his couch and to sit for several hours by the window, looking down the Castle hill, watching the Esplanade and the promenading citizens. Here at twelve noon he was punctually visited by the Captain.

“I have good tidings for you, Master Elliot,” he said, in his abrupt way; “your appointment to the Queen’s Guard has been renewed.”

Gilbert’s pale face glowed with pleasure, and with gratitude to her Majesty.

“ I will live, I trust, to show our gracious Mistress that I am a loyal servant.”

At the end of the third week he was able to walk out on the battlements, and when the fourth week drew to a close he professed himself ready to join his company. Captain Lindsay's gratification was apparent through all his sternness, and it was arranged that in two days Gilbert should take his place amongst his comrades at Holyrood.

On the second morning after this was agreed upon a soldier informed him that an old man was waiting without to see him, bearing a message of import. The messenger was admitted, and Gilbert greeted him with pleased surprise.

“ Andrew Howie ! ” he exclaimed.

“ That's me,” answered the old servitor, with a grin upon his weather-beaten countenance ; “ an' richt glad am I till see ye in life again, Maister Elliot, for certes it's a pleasure I didna expeck two or three days syne.”

“ What tidings do you bring me of our

lady—is she well and safe?—and Aly, where are they?—when——”

“Hooly maister, hooly,” cried Andrew; “I canna answer a’ that in a breath. Besides, I’m no at liberty till speak to a Gentleman o’ the Queen’s Guard a’ I ken. But she’s weel an’ safe.”

“Saints be praised for that. You come from her?”

Andrew shook his head.

“No exactly.”

“From whom, then?”

“I’m here to tell ye that if ye’ll be in the north aisle of St. Cuthbert’s the-morn’s nicht at vespers ye’ll see ane that ye would like to see, an’ ye’ll ken a’ that ye would like to ken.”

Not a word beyond this would Andrew declare. That was his message, and he “wasna at liberty to say mair.”

Gilbert promised to keep the mysterious assignation, and Andrew left him to puzzle his wits as to the probable import of the message.

CHAPTER X.

THE ASSIGNATION AT ST. CUTHBERT'S.

“ *Vipont.* What ails thee, noble youth? What means
this pause?

Thou dost not rue thy generosity?

Gordon. I have been hurried on by strong impulse.
Like a bark that scuds before the storm,
Till driven upon some strange and distant coast,
Which never pilot dream'd of.”

Halidon Hill.

WHEN the bells of the abbeys of Greyfriars, Blackfriars, and St. Cuthbert's were chiming to vespers, and the good people of the city were flocking to prayers in larger numbers than usual on account of certain rumours that the plague which had so recently devastated their homes had appeared amongst them again, Master Elliot

walked down from the Castle to keep his assignation.

His step was firm, his form erect, and, but for the pallor of his countenance, none would have guessed that only a few days had elapsed since he had been rescued from the brink of the grave.

He was amongst the last of those who entered the abbey, and as his eyes wandered up the great aisle, the massive masonry of which was always sombre even in daylight, and was now positively gloomy in the feeble light of the small lamps hung upon the columns at long intervals, and leading to the blaze of wax candles upon the altar, he experienced that sense of awe which this cunning arrangement of lights was calculated to inspire.

Bowing low and muttering a paternoster, he glided round to the north aisle in the shadow of the arches. He felt almost as if he were committing sacrilege in holding an assignation in this sacred house at the time when the people were engaged in their devotions.

The voices of the monks intoning their exercises in Latin murmured along the aisles solemnly, and the responses of the people swelled upward to the roof, now like the subdued moan of distress and again like the cry of joy.

The north aisle was almost in total darkness; only one feeble lamp scattered the shadows for a small space round a column upon which hung a painting of the Virgin. The column opposite rose like a gaunt grey ghost dimly out of the darkness.

Here Master Elliot halted, leaning his back against the pillar, with arms folded and head sunk upon his breast.

He had been standing for nearly half an hour in this position, glancing at intervals sideways towards the picture of the Virgin on the opposite pillar, when a low voice sounded in his ear and made his pulse quicken with pleasure.

“Do not budge from your present position, Master Elliot, but listen. I fear we are watched.”

Gilbert so far controlled himself that he did not shift his position; but his eyes could move without danger of being observed, and he saw a lady in black with hands crossed upon her breast, kneeling devoutly before the painting of the Holy Mother. A black veil covered her face.

“By whom are we watched?” he said in an under tone.

“By some of Angus’s creatures; and therefore I am unable to explain to you what I had purposed in coming hither. Can you trust me without explanation—can you follow me in the dark?”

“My life is yours,” he answered promptly.

“But your honour—can you risk that to me?”

“I confide in yours.”

“Holy Mother grant that your confidence be not misplaced; for I am only a weak woman, following a strange course in the hope that I may save from ruin those whom I love.”

“You mean your brother?”

“And our Queen—I would save him from the destruction which will fall upon him when he becomes her husband; I would save her from the disgrace which this hasty marriage will bring to her.”

“Is the union so certain, then?”

“Alas, yes; I believe it is already arranged; and the Lords of Council meet in secret to-night, with Angus at their head.”

“With what design?”

“Should the marriage take place, they propose summoning his Grace of Albany from France to take the Regency.”

“That is treason.”

“Yes, but they are powerful; Douglas is hated, and the Queen can only be saved by preventing the union.”

“What would you have me do?”

“You will be on guard to-morrow night at Holyrood. You must give me the watchword, and leave the portal of the Palace garden open——”

“Stay, for pity’s sake; are you not asking me to betray my post?”

“ You said only now that you would confide in me.”

“ Yes, but this you propose is treachery.”

“ Do not trust me, then,” she said, sadly, “ and let the ruin come.”

The sad tone disturbed him, and he answered falteringly—

“ Will you not explain ? ”

“ To-morrow night you shall know all.”

“ But why not now ? ” he said, thoughtfully, his eyes fixed upon the ground.

No answer.

He looked round quickly. The lady who had been kneeling before the Virgin's image had disappeared. He fancied that he caught a glimpse of her dress fading into the darkness of the recesses of the aisles, and he took a few swift strides in that direction. He was suddenly checked by the voice of the lady with whom he had been conversing. It sounded quite close to him.

“ For our dear lady's sake, do not attempt to follow me.”

“ I shall obey you, but of one thing I

must be first assured," he said, a suspicion flashing upon his mind that in all he had heard there might have been some trick—"are you Mistress Douglas?"

"Can you doubt that?"

The reproach conveyed in the tone stung him, and he responded quickly—

"I am satisfied; and if I may do so without dishonour, I will serve you in all that you desire."

He waited for some acknowledgment of this pledge, but none came. She had gone, and he was chagrined with himself that he had pained her by his hesitation. He wished that he had promised at once to sacrifice for her the life she had twice saved. That he was willing to do at any moment; but to betray his post—he could not do that, even for her sake.

He paced slowly down the aisles towards the west doorway.

"Do I not wrong her with these suspicions?" he reflected; "has she not told me that she desires to save the Queen and her

brother—to save Scotland from the thrall of France in the person of Albany? And I dare to suspect her—to suspect the noblest heart, the loveliest lady——”

He checked himself there; he began to fear that it was her beauty which influenced him.

“I dare not hide from myself that she is allied to the conspirators whom Arran leads. . . . Would that I knew how to act. To-morrow night, she said, I shall know all.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE RIVALS.

“ Sweet prince, the untainted virtue of your years
Hath not yet div'd into the world's deceit.”

Richard III.

ON the succeeding day Master Elliot was in his place amongst the Gentlemen of the Queen's Guard at Holyrood.

Her Majesty had decided upon laying aside her mourning that there might be more festivity at the Court to amuse the child-King, as was given out. The event was to be celebrated by a masquerade and the illumination of the Palace Gardens at night, under the direction of the Ambassador of France and several French gentlemen of his suite.

Workmen were busy in the gardens all

the morning hanging ornamental lamps upon the trees and shrubbery. There was bustle in many parts of the Palace preparing for the evening's fête.

At noon the King, carrying his tennis ball with more genuine pleasure than his sceptre was ever to afford him, and accompanied by his Royal mother, Angus, and Arran, walked forth to see the present which had arrived that morning from the Earl of Perth. The gift was a singular one—it was a wild boar which had been captured alive and secured in a massive iron cage.

His Majesty viewed the animal with childish wonder and delight. But he soon tired of staring at its fierce red eyes and dangerous-looking tusks, and of listening to its savage grunts as it beat against the bars of its prison. He began to play with his tennis ball, the grim Angus joining gravely in the sport. The earl threw the ball up into the air; it rebounded from the earth into the boar's cage.

“My ball, my ball,” cried his Majesty lustily and petulantly.

“I will get you another,” said Angus.

“But I want that ball,” continued the child-King, who, like other children who find themselves pampered, was apt to take whims and cry for what there was most difficulty in obtaining.

But there seemed to be no one willing to gratify his present whim until one of the Gentlemen of the Guard advanced quietly to the cage, thrust his left arm in between the bars, and drew forth the ball.

There was a little scream from all the Queen’s ladies except one—Mistress Douglas. She became ashy pale, and uttered no sound. The gentlemen stared in mute amaze.

Master Elliot, the hero of the moment, advanced to the King, and, bowing low, presented the toy. His Majesty took the ball, smiling happily, and instantly dropped it with a cry of horror.

The ball was covered with blood, as was

the arm of the guard. The boar had managed to tear off a piece of the flesh before he had succeeded in withdrawing his hand.

The King, in the first moment of his childish terror at the sight of the bleeding arm, had fled to his mother and hid his face in the folds of her skirt. Her Majesty speedily coaxed him out of his fright, and on looking round shyly he saw that Captain Lindsay was busy binding the wounded gentleman's arm with a silken kerchief which one of the maids of honour had given to him.

“Your Majesty sees how ready your people are to stake their lives for you,” said Angus, smiling.

“Are they all my people—all my men-at-arms?” queried the King, opening his eyes and still clinging to his Royal mother's skirt.

“Every one of them, and I like the rest.”

“Would you stake your life for me?” pursued the little King, as if struck by some comical idea.

“Most assuredly, if your Majesty required it,” returned Angus.

“Then why didn’t you get the ball?” said his Majesty, with an old-fashioned grin.

The gentlemen in waiting laughed at the King’s wit more than Angus deemed the joke warranted, and the ladies smiled. The little King, without giving Douglas time to reply, marched over to the Gentleman of the Guard.

“I am very much pleased with you, Master Elliot, and I am sorry that you were hurt,” said the boy, gravely; “and I will give you a share of these comfits which Arran gave me this morning.”

He produced a small ornamental box from his pouch. Master Elliot bowed as the King proceeded to open the box.

“Stay, your Majesty,” said Angus, advancing hastily with an expression of suspicion; “who, say you, gave you this box?”

“Arran.”

“With the Queen’s leave?”

“Why should he ask her leave?” said the King innocently, about to place one of the sweets in his mouth.

“Pardon me, your Majesty, but you must not eat these until they are examined.”

He held out his hand for the box.

Arran, frowning darkly, had advanced to the spot. He now stepped between Angus and the King, and snatched his present from the hands of the boy.

“Your Majesty will forgive me, and will understand me when you are a year or two older,” he said with a short laugh, and coolly beginning to munch the sweets himself; “these are pleasant to the taste, although I am too little of a gourmand to be much of a judge. They have a rare flavour to my palate; but those who have most liking for your Majesty fear that they might disagree with you. For that I can say nought; they were given me by his lordship the Ambassador of France—an honourable gentleman, as I take him, and one who hopes I will be sworn to see your

Majesty ruling Scotland with the sceptre in your own hand. They are very excellent sweets."

He handed the box back to his Majesty. All the time he had been speaking his eyes had been fixed upon Douglas, although his words were addressed to the King.

"But you have eaten them all," cried his Majesty, disappointed.

"Our cousin Angus will procure more for your Majesty—with the Queen's leave, no doubt," said Arran, drily.

"His Majesty's life is valuable," said Angus, hotly, "and comfits from France are not the safest things in the world."

"He has eaten them all," muttered the little King, "and he will make himself sick."

There was a likelihood of an open rupture between the rival earls; for Angus, at all times hot-headed, was smarting under the laugh which had been raised against him only a few minutes previously; and Arran was indignant at the suspicion which had

been cast upon him. The Queen Regent, however, was observing them, and, fearing the issue of the warm interchange of words between their lordships, gave instant directions for the party to re-enter the Palace. This separated Douglas and Hamilton for the time, and delayed the rupture which came soon afterward, and of which she herself was the main cause.

The Royal party retired within doors. The preparations for the evening's fête proceeded briskly. When the night fell, the gardens of the Palace were aglow with the lights of the many-coloured lamps which the Parisian taste of the French ambassador had prepared. The great hall of the Palace was decorated under the directions of the same nobleman, who had also procured the services of a number of musicians from his own country for the occasion.

The masques were rich and curiously varied, and the festival promised to be one of the gayest which the Court of Scotland had witnessed for many a day—certainly

the gayest since the coffers of the late chivalrous King had become exhausted. James IV. had expended the wealth which the almost miserly care of his father had left to him on tournaments and festivities of this character; and his memory was revived by the present event.

The mirth was at its height, the musicians were performing at their best, when the King was most unwillingly conducted to his bedchamber, and the guards were placed for the night.

“Your conduct to-day has procured you a post of honour,” said Captain Lindsay to Master Elliot; “that is, if you still persist in going on duty despite your wound.”

“It is a mere scratch, sir; and besides, it is my left arm.”

“Have your way, then. You will guard the private entrance from the gardens to his Majesty’s apartments, with six men-at-arms.”

“The word for the night?”

“Scotland for the King!”

Master Elliot selected his company and was conducted to his post by the Captain.

The part of the gardens which lay behind the King's chambers was only faintly illuminated by a few lamps placed at such distances apart that the spaces between were quite dark. This arrangement was observed in order that the masquers should not penetrate to this place and disturb the repose of his Majesty. The pathway from the portal of the wall which separated the gardens and the park was not lighted at all.

The keys of this portal, and of the gate which guarded the entrance to the small court in which was the private entrance to his Majesty's chambers, were delivered to Gilbert. He placed his men, and, although the fire in the guard-room burned pleasantly, he proceeded to pace up and down in front of the gate instead of taking his ease within.

His feelings were a puzzle to himself. He felt that it would have been better to have availed himself of the excuse his wound supplied of shirking duty on that night, for

he instinctively and unaccountably feared the issue. Yet he was eager again to meet Mistress Douglas, that he might better express his gratitude to her than he had done, and that he might receive from her the explanation she had promised.

Captain Lindsay had told him that he was deputed to this post on account of his conduct during the day.

How, then, did Mistress Douglas know on the night previous that he would be on guard here ?

It was singular, and seemed as if the action of the day had been made the excuse for appointing him to the post which it had been previously determined he should guard.

By whom was this arranged ?

CHAPTER XII.

THE POST OF HONOUR.

“ A hundred torches flashing bright
Dispelled at once the gloomy night
That lour'd along the walls,
And show'd the King's astonish'd sight
The inmates of the halls.”

The Bridal of Triermain.

FOR nearly an hour Master Elliot continued his solitary promenade, without other interruption to his meditations than the occasional sound of music which the wind brought to him from the farther end of the Palace.

But at length he came to an abrupt halt, at the sound of the voice of one of the sentries.

“ Stand ; who goes there ? ”

“ A friend,” answered a low voice, which sent a thrill through Gilbert’s heart.

“ The word ? ”

“ She has not got the word, for I was to give it to her,” thought Gilbert; and almost as the thought flashed upon his mind, the answer was given.

“ Scotland for the King.”

Breathless and amazed, Gilbert now waited for the appearance of the pretty intriguante. He strained his eyes through the dim light in the direction whence the sound of the voice had proceeded; but he saw nothing, heard nothing more.

Ten minutes—it seemed more than half an hour to him—he waited, and then strode hastily forward to the sentinel’s post. The soldier was not there. Gilbert walked over the man’s ground, and still failed to find him.

He went on to seek the second sentinel. He, too, had apparently deserted his post. Gilbert called to him by name—

“ M’Kay.”

No response. Becoming now alarmed as well as perplexed, he hurried on to the third sentinel's post, at the portal of the park.

The man was there ; but he was sitting upon the ground, his back leaning against the wall, and fast asleep. Gilbert shook him violently, but the soldier only answered with a drunken snort.

With a cry of alarm, Gilbert rushed back to the gate, convinced that there was some treacherous act in progress. He had the key in his hand, intending to summon the Gentlemen of the Guard from the King's ante-chamber, when his arm was gently grasped by some one behind him.

He wheeled round, and descried a lady—one of the masquers—in the dress of an Egyptian girl. Her face was concealed by a mask of lace.

“ Stay, Master Elliot, do you not wait for me ? ”

“ Mistress Douglas ? ”

She removed the mask from her face.

“Are you surprised that I am here—have you forgotten your promise?”

“No, madam, I have not forgotten it,” he said, taking her hand respectfully; “and you, I hope, have not forgotten how the promise was given—it was without knowledge or suspicion of what it might lead me to. You said I should know all to-night.”

“And so you shall. If, after you have heard me,” she said, sadly, “you wish to withdraw your promise, do so; but there our friendship ends.”

He touched her hand with his lips almost reverently.

“I owe you my life, Mistress Douglas, and in your service I will yield it whenever and wherever you may command me; but the service must be yours.”

The latter words were spoken firmly.

“And is it not my service when I ask you to save our house from ruin, my brother from assassination?”

“Show me the destroyers, and here is my sword.”

She hesitated, as if his manner rendered her communication perplexing.

“It is not swords, but stratagem, that must serve me in this pass,” she said, slowly.

“Then I am sorry; but speak on.”

“I wish to prevent this marriage of Angus with the Queen, for the reasons I have already made known to you.”

“That is that Arran and the others will call Albany from France to the Regency.”

“Yes; and banish, if they do not kill, Angus. But neither Arran nor the other Lords of Council desire to have Albany here; but they would rather twenty times that he should rule than Douglas. Prevent this marriage and all goes well.”

“How would you prevent it?”

She pressed his arm spasmodically with her hand as she whispered in his ear—

“The Lords of Council have resolved to obtain possession of the King.”

Gilbert started—she placed her hand upon his mouth.

“Hush—they are his Majesty’s loyal subjects, and they dread what might befall him should Douglas gain his object.”

“What then?” (He spoke calmly but with difficulty.)

“The Countess of Arran waits with horses and an escort at the end of the Park—the Gentlemen of the Guard are with us—all save you; and you will act with us for my sake.”

“In what way?”

“Open this gate; come with me to the King’s chamber and carry his Majesty to the Countess.”

“And to-morrow—where will his Majesty be?”

“At Stirling, surrounded by his friends, and those who were the staunchest friends of his father. Then with the King’s authority the marriage which lords and people fear can be interdicted. You have heard all now. Say, will you serve me—I who have risked so much for you?”

“Your words pain me,” he said bitterly, “and you intended that they should do so.”

“Do you hesitate?”

“No, Mistress Douglas, I do not hesitate—I take back my promise. I gave my word as I am ready to give my life to you; but I did not pledge myself to become the instrument of ambitious lords. I do not blame you, dear lady, for I believe you have been deceived into the part you play. Have they not told you that they wish only to sustain her Majesty in power by preventing this marriage.”

“I have said so.”

“But they have not told you how they have spread among the people the foul suspicion that Queen Margaret, as sister of Harry of England, is willing to bend Scotland to the yoke of England. They have not told you that their real object in obtaining possession of the King is to force her Majesty from the Regency, to disgrace your brother, and to summon Albany from France. Oh, it is foul treason that you have been dragged into. Break, break now from the mesh of lies in which you are

involved and return to your allegiance. You will serve neither the Queen nor your brother by aiding this plot ; you will destroy both."

Whilst he spoke Mistress Douglas had clasped her hands upon her breast as if in pain ; but when he finished she answered haughtily—

"Mary Douglas is more faithful to her promise than you whom she trusted."

"Again you reproach me. Ah, madam, you cannot know how much bitterness your words cause me," he cried passionately ; "for I love you, Mary Douglas, and in you my every hope of happiness is centred. But this is a choice between my country and myself ; and not even to win you will I dishonour myself. You would despise me for it when you learned how cruelly you had been deceived. I am here to guard the entrance to the King's chambers, and I will guard it against all comers. I stand here to save the King, and I will be against even you, if you would force a way to him."

“ I have promised that yonder gate shall be opened, and I will keep my word,” she said in half-smothered voice.

“ Back—back, or I will sound the alarm of treason.”

“ Call, then—it is I whom you will destroy.”

“ Ho, there, Scotland for the King,” he shouted at the top of his voice ; “ treason, treason.”

She rushed by him, and with the key she held ready opened the gate of the Court.

“ Within there,” she cried, “ to the King’s rescue.”

She was about to pass through the gateway when Gilbert grasped her by the arm and held her back.

“ For our Holy Mother’s sake do not blindly rush upon disgrace,” he said hastily ; “ the alarm has been caught up, and the sentinels are passing the warning—hark ! ”

She listened : first, like the shout of despair, the word “ treason ” passed from mouth to mouth of the alarmed sentinels,

who did not know in which direction to expect the appearance of the enemy. Then, like the swell of the wave upon the shore, came the distant sound of the burst of amaze and horror amongst the masquers when the terrible word "treason" fell upon their ears while folly was rampant.

The festivities ceased upon the instant, and every man and woman regarded each other with suspicion.

It was only an instant Mistress Douglas paused to hear all this; and then she attempted to relieve herself of Gilbert's grasp. But she had scarcely made a movement when a tall man in the attire of a red-cross knight, with vizor drawn and sword in hand, rushed forth from the Court. He stopped at sight of Mistress Douglas and spoke quickly in a low voice, which Gilbert recognized as that of Arran.

"We are betrayed—Captain Lindsay with the Queen's guard have surprised our friends. Fly."

"The King is no longer in danger," said

Gilbert to the lady; "and my sword is at your service."

"I know you no more, Master Elliot," she responded haughtily, and with a sad glance in the bright dark eyes.

Another red-cross knight rushed from the Court.

"Why do you halt here?" he said hurriedly to Arran; "everything is lost, and nearly all our friends are taken."

"Go you, then," answered the Earl resolutely, "and bid the Countess take heed to herself in instant flight. I will back and die with our friends."

"Madness!" cried the second knight, barring the way; "our hopes rest with you. Away, then, and I will guard the portal. I will keep them long enough in killing me to give you time to escape. Away."

"For the King's sake, Spens, I again become your debtor."

Arran hastened to the portal and passed into the Park. Spens placed himself on guard.

During the brief colloquy of the two knights, Gilbert had rather dragged than led Mistress Douglas to a path which opened amongst the shrubbery.

“If you are not bent upon destroying yourself take this path,” he whispered eagerly; “it leads to the central garden, where you will find the masquers assembled. Once amongst them you are safe.”

“I will not move,” she said firmly, while the clatter of armour and the hurried tramp of feet rung in her ears, and while the rapid movements of the many pursuers were indicated by the red flashes of the torches through the trees.

“You are resolved to perish,” he said calmly, “while there is yet a way open for your escape? Be it so, then; I shall stay with you, and at least I will give back the life you gave me in defending you.”

“No, no,” she cried hastily, and as if awakening from a species of torpor, “that must not be. Holy Mother, help me—I think I am crazed by what has happened

and by thought of what may happen. I will do as you wish—I will save myself. Farewell—good friend—for ever.”

He had no time to speak; she sprang from him and disappeared amongst the shrubbery.

He rushed back toward the gate and encountered half a dozen men-at-arms with torches, about to take the path by which Mary Douglas was escaping.

“This way, this way,” he cried confusedly, “to the portal of the Park.”

The men recognized him, and, without hesitation, followed him. They found the portal guarded by the red-cross knight.

“Make way there,” shouted Gilbert.

“You cannot pass here, master,” responded the knight coolly, and placing himself in an attitude of defence.

“Make way or we strike.”

“You cannot pass here,” was the answer, in the same stolid voice as before.

“Traitor, then have at you.”

Gilbert attacked him fiercely: their swords

clashed and flashed in the torchlight. They paused an instant, each as if waiting for the other to strike. The knight quietly raised his vizor.

“Spens!” cried Gilbert, starting and withdrawing his sword in his amaze. “You against the King?”

“No, Master Elliot,” said Spens, coldly. “I am not against the King, but against you and any one who would pass here.”

“Do you not see—defence is useless.”

The sound of horses’ hoof-treads were heard in the distance.

“The traitor has escaped,” shouted Captain Lindsay, rushing forward with another body of men-at-arms, the glare of the torches flashing upon their steel breastplates and headpieces. “Hark, there go the horses.”

“Then Arran is safe,” muttered Spens to himself; and then aloud, “To you, Master Elliot, who should have been my friend, I surrender my sword.”

And he allowed the weapon to drop from his hand to the ground as he spoke.

Gilbert was surprised by this sudden encounter with the man whom he had some time thought dead, and of whose life he had heard with so much joy. Now, he was dismayed by the circumstances under which they met. He had, however, no alternative but to place him under arrest.

“ You may think hard of me for this,” he whispered in the ear of the prisoner as they were conducting him to the guard-room ; “ but be of good cheer, sir, for you shall not die if my life can save yours.”

Spens made no reply, and Gilbert moved to the front of his men with a new twinge of pain at his heart. This seemed the cruellest thing of all that night’s suffering—to have been compelled to arrest the man under whose protection he had been reared, and whom he loved.

Although the knight had not answered the pledge of fidelity which had been tendered to him, he thought that the words were not those of the man who had been represented to him as trying to win his

wife from her allegiance. Still that note—written beyond doubt by Margaret's hand—which the false pilgrim had given to him, tortured him; because he had not yet dared to ask Mistress Spens for the explanation which might have relieved him at once of doubt, and he had failed to discover any explanation for himself other than that she had learned to regard the youth with deeper feelings than those of a friend.

They marched through the gardens, passing many excited groups of soldiers and masquers, who peered at them curiously. Lindsay, walking first, refused to give any information to those lords and ladies who made inquiry.

Everywhere signals of alarm were found; but most of all in the hurried passing to and fro of the men-at-arms, and in the appointment of double sentinels at every gate and doorway.

Having placed the prisoner in the guard-room, Captain Lindsay beckoned Master Elliot to follow him. As soon as they were

in the court the Captain halted abruptly, and by the torchlight, which made every object palpable almost as at noontide, he scanned the features of the guard closely.

“How did the gate of the court and the portal of the Park come to be open?” he demanded sharply.

“Here are the keys you gave to my charge,” answered Gilbert, frankly; “they have not been used since I received them.”

“Why had you quitted the gate—that was your post?”

This question was not so readily answered. He had resolved that no power should force from him the disclosure of the part Mistress Douglas had played in the night’s work, and so he was for the moment at a loss. Then—

“I found that the sentinels had been whiled from their posts; I raised the cry of treason, and left the gate to follow one whom I suspected, but whom I lost sight of in the darkness.”

“I am glad your answers are satisfactory. I trust you with the prisoner.”

The Captain turned upon his heel and entered the Palace to seek instructions.

Gilbert hastened back to the guard-room, hoping to obtain a few minutes' conversation with the friend from whom he had been parted on the fatal field of Flodden, and whom he had met again under such unhappy circumstances.

In the Queen's ante-room Captain Lindsay found Angus in close conversation with a sallow-faced cunning-eyed man, who instantly became silent on his entrance.

"Sir Walter Spens has been taken, my lord," said the Captain.

"No one else?" queried Angus, apparently disappointed.

"No one else, my lord. What shall we do with him?"

The man of the sallow face whispered a word to the Earl, who thereupon spoke fiercely—

"Cast him into the safest and deepest dungeon of the Castle and let him lie there."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE DUNGEONS OF THE CASTLE.

“ What things lie hidden there
No man, I wot, can say—
Hope’s lost in deep despair,
Yet calm is he alway.
In anguish still he keeps his faith ;
Tortured, still is true as death,
And will not breathe a treach’rous breath.”

Marjorie.

SIR WALTER SPENS, with arms folded upon his breast, and head bowed as if in deep meditation, sat upon one of the wooden benches of the guard-room. His vizor was partly down, but Gilbert saw that the face was pallid and sad, and that the mouth was closed firmly.

Four men-at-arms and a sergeant were on

duty. Gilbert requested the sergeant to withdraw his men.

“ Pardon, master,” said the man, “ but the Captain’s order is that we do not budge hence till he returns.”

Gilbert, without attempting to alter this decree, advanced to Sir Walter with extended hand. The Knight of Halstane did not unfold his arms or look up. Gilbert, astonished and pained, waited an instant, and then slowly dropped his hand to his side.

“ Have I offended you, Spens ? ” he said, with difficulty subduing his agitation. “ Heaven knows that I would rather you had run me through than surrendered your sword to me.”

“ You did your duty, Master Elliot, as a Gentleman of the Queen’s Guard was bound to do ; and I should have despised you had you acted otherwise.”

“ Ay, my duty thrust the accursed task upon me ; and you say I have done well in fulfilling that duty despite the anguish it

has cost me. How, then, are you so cold with me—why treat me so like the enemy which accident has made me appear? Why do this—you who have filled the place of a father to me—of a brother and protector to my poor mother—and who are dear to me as a father might have been?”

For a minute Spens was silent, then with a sudden revulsion of his old love for the youth who had grown up under him and who had stood by his side in all dangers, he threw suspicion away and held out his hand.

“I believe you are honest, Gilbert, and that you would not wittingly wrong me.”

“I would die rather.”

“I believe you speak truly. Forgive me that the lies of a villain made me for a time doubt your truth.”

“What villain—what doubt?”

“Heron Barras——”

“O cursed knave!—what lie could he tell you that you should credit it even for an instant?”

“He spoke when I believed him to be a dying pilgrim, and backed his words with a proof that maddened me, I think, and made me doubt not only you, Gilbert, but my true wife also ; for he said you liked her better than you should have done if you respected my peace.”

Gilbert flushed crimson and then became pallid. The change of countenance struck Spens as singular and renewed his misgiving, for Gilbert’s answer was prevented by the abrupt appearance of Captain Lindsay.

“Return to your post, Master Elliot,” said the Captain, sharply. “I have chosen six men for you and they wait outside.”

“Whither do you take Sir Walter ?”

“To the Castle.”

“Shall I be permitted to see him to-morrow ?”

“I can say nothing of the morrow. Sir Walter Spens, we attend you.”

Spens rose on the instant. Gilbert clasped his hand warmly.

“Do not doubt me till you have heard me.”

The knight became cold again.

“There is something to explain, then?”

“From me, but not from her,” he answered falteringly.

“You delay us, Master Elliot,” broke in the Captain, impatiently.

A twinge of acute pain passed over Gilbert's face as he withdrew. He knew the Captain's reverence for discipline, and feared that he might injure the cause of Spens by delaying further.

Attended by six men-at-arms the Captain conveyed the prisoner to the Castle in safety.

He placed him in the “traitor's dungeon,” a damp gloomy cell underground, to which daylight never penetrated. Air was obtained from the passage through a number of small perforations in the wall above the iron door and close to the roof. A table, a stool, and a straw mattress were the only articles of furniture in the place.

“I will direct a fire to be kindled for you,” said Lindsay gruffly, but evidently regretting the harsh command which compelled him to place a noble gentleman in this loathsome cell.

A small cruzie had been left with the prisoner, and its feeble light scattered the darkness of the centre of the dungeon, but left the sides and corners in gloom.

Sir Walter quietly took off his helmet and laid it upon the table. Then he threw himself upon the mattress, with his arms crossed under his head and his eyes fixed upon the blank damp roof.

“Here ends the venture for me,” he said calmly, reflecting; “escape is impossible; the sentence is inevitable. How long before it comes? . . . Not long, for in my death Angus rids himself of a troublesome enemy; Barras gains Binram, and Tushielaw safety from the discovery of his treachery to the King.”

He smiled half contemptuously as he heard the footsteps of a sentinel passing and repassing the door of the cell.

“ They value my safe keeping rarely since these walls and yonder iron door are not secure enough without a guard of honour. . . . Umph, I may outwit them yet. Arran will not desert me in this extremity; and Gilbert—— ”

He paused at the name.

“ Is he honest? His manner was strange; the note is unexplained. Tush! it is all a lie, made to set me against those I love. I will trust them in spite of everything until they tell me that they wish me dead.”

The door opened, and a sergeant, with four men carrying torches, entered.

“ Your attendance is required in the Council Chamber, Sir Knight.”

“ I am ready.”

He took his place between the soldiers, and was conducted along the narrow underground passage, up a narrow winding staircase, across a court, and into the tower in which the Council and Parliament anciently met.

The sergeant's guard remained at the door of the Council Chamber, and Spens was ushered in. He found there the Governor of the Castle, and beside him a tall man, whose face was concealed by the plumes of his hat, which drooped over it as he bent to read some document he held in his hand. His body was covered by a large roquelaire, but Spens had no difficulty in recognising Angus.

At the table sat a clerk, pen in hand, as if ready to write at a signal from his masters.

The Knight of Halstane felt his pulse quicken as the suspicion flashed upon him that he was to be judged here by Douglas alone, for the Governor would not dare to oppose his judgment. He remained, however, perfectly calm, waiting the issue.

Angus looked up suddenly.

“Walter Spens, you are aware of the dangerous position in which you stand?” he said, in a harsh deliberate tone.

“I am aware that I stand in the midst of enemies,” was the quiet answer.

“You are aware that you are an outlaw, condemned by the Lords in Council to death for treachery to his late Majesty James IV.”

“I am aware that I was condemned unheard, and on the word of a villain who hoped by my death to screen himself.”

“You speak with mighty coolness of the matter,” said Angus, feeling irritated by the calm dignity of the man whom he had hoped to awe into submission. “But beware, sir; for even had the former charge been proven false, your life is now forfeit for your attempt to steal the King from his lawful and loving guardians.”

“I sought to save my country from more useless bloodshed and my Queen from shame.”

Angus scowled fiercely, and, in the effort to subdue his passion, gnawed his lip until the blood started. At length—

“I am not here to bandy words with an outlaw,” he said haughtily. “I am here to show you that the Queen, whom you would have grievously wronged, and the

King, whom you would have stolen from his friends, for what evil purpose you know best, can be merciful even to you."

"I do not doubt the mercy which comes through my Lord Angus must be paid for. I listen."

Again Douglas with difficulty suppressed his rage; and only the warning look of the Governor enabled him to succeed.

"You do not wish to die, I presume?"

"Not more than other men, my lord."

"Then if a few words could obtain for you liberty—complete liberty, with the former sentence of the Council rescinded, and all consequences of the plot you have been engaged in avoided—would you refuse to speak those few words?"

"There are some words, my lord, which are worth more than as many heads as they require letters to spell them."

"Do you refuse?" demanded Angus, with barely controlled choler.

"I must first know what you desire me to say."

“If words be sometimes worth heads, take care that silence does not cost you yours.”

“I wait, my lord.”

“Answer only one question, and the gates are open to you. Who were your accomplices in your attempt to carry off the King?”

Spens was silent.

“Your head is in the balance, Sir Walter; be silent if you dare.”

Still Spens did not open his lips.

“Not only your head,” said Angus, fiercely, “but the happiness of your wife and child depend upon your answering.”

“That is a sorry threat, my lord, but it fails the mark; for the happiness of my poor wife and bairn will be safer if I die an honest man than if I live a knave.”

“Have you not heard my question—will you not answer?”

“I cannot; for were I to tell you I made the attempt alone you would not believe me.”

“No, surely.”

“Then if I denounce them who may have placed confidence in me I should be a knave and a poltroon. Wherefore, my lord, you see it behoves me to remain silent.”

“Is that your final decision?”

“It is the last word I have to speak upon the subject, credit me.”

“Probably I would credit you in this,” said Angus, sneering, “were it not that we happen to have some marvellous instruments here which have the power of making even the dumb speak.”

“Try them, my lord.”

And he bowed with a smile of resolution which brought a darker frown to the brow of Douglas than anything that had yet occurred had done.

At a signal from the Governor of the Castle the door was thrown open, the sergeant's guard entered, and Sir Walter Spens was conducted back to his dungeon.

When he had been taken from the Council Chamber, Angus plucked at his beard savagely. He had counted upon

bringing Arran to disgrace through this man, who, with his life in the balance, had refused to speak the words which would have achieved so much for him.

The Governor touched him on the arm and he started from his reverie.

“I know something of faces, my lord,” he said, “and torture will fail to make yonder man speak. He will die; and that is all.”

“We shall see,” muttered Angus, chagrined and disappointed.

Spens had no means of marking the progress of time, but he divined that morning had arrived by the degree of coldness which the atmosphere obtained. His cell remained as dark as at midnight.

He slept soundly upon his rude couch, and started to his feet refreshed at the entrance of a trooper with some bread and ale. Of these Spens partook with a relish which surprised his attendant.

Another long interval and the man appeared with the same articles of diet.

“ How goes the sun, my friend ? ” queried the prisoner.

“ I am not free to answer,” said the man, respectfully.

“ What, is it treason to tell a poor wretch who cannot see for himself how the time goes ? ”

“ Those who enter here are not permitted to measure time in any way ; and we are not allowed to say when the sun rises or sets.”

There was something exquisitely cruel in thus closing the door upon time, by which life is usually measured ; and the prisoner was silent. He felt that if he were to be kept there long in darkness without one gleam of light to tell him when day came and closed, he would go mad.

He calculated that about twenty hours had passed since he had bearded Angus in the Council Chamber, when he heard the clank of footsteps upon the stone floor of the passage without.

The door opened, and the sergeant, with

his four men carrying torches, appeared as they had done on the previous occasion.

“ Will you accompany us, Sir Knight ? ” said the sergeant.

Spens took his place in their midst as before, and was conducted from the dungeon. This time, however, they turned to the right, descended a narrow damp staircase, and seemed to be going to some place farther underground than even his cell.

At the end of a long dark passage, upon the grimy walls of which the light of the torches sparkled, they entered an oblong chamber, which was illumined by four torches placed in iron rings upon the walls.

A clerk sat before a small desk at one end of the room with paper, pens, and ink before him. Ranged round the sides were sinister-looking instruments of various forms, which seemed the more ghastly in the red light which shone upon them.

Chains, pincers, mallets, thumbscrews—

some of them covered with blood—ropes, vices, and other tools lay scattered about in a horrible confusion.

Beside the clerk stood the Governor of the Castle, quiet, and apparently grieved by the work he had before him. Behind him stood a man dressed in black, whom Spens easily guessed to be a surgeon.

“The last hour has come,” he thought ; “sweet Mother of Heaven, to you I commend my poor wife and bairn.”

The Governor bowed to him gravely.

“You heard, Sir Walter Spens,” he said slowly, “what my Lord Angus desired you to do. Are you still bent upon refusing to comply with his terms?”

“I told the Lord of Angus I would not comply with them,” he answered firmly.

“I wish to warn you, sir, that I have received directions to put you to the severest test the law allows if you persist in your silence.”

“You will do your duty, sir ; I will try to do mine.”

“ You have nothing further, then, to declare ? ”

“ Nothing.”

“ I am very sorry that I must proceed to the test.”

The clerk had written down the questions and responses.

The Governor raised his hand, and at the signal two men, masked, and with bare brawny arms, started out from a dark corner of the chamber in which they had been standing unobserved and seized their victim.

He offered no resistance, and they speedily removed his light coat of mail. They laid his neck and his left foot bare. Then an iron chair was wheeled into the middle of the chamber and Spens was placed in it. Stout cords were drawn across his breast and secured to the back of the chair ; then his arms and legs were bound to the sides, so that he was unable to move a limb. The chair was finally screwed to the floor.

The surgeon approached the patient and felt his pulse ; it beat with firmness and regularity.

“ Are you still resolved to keep silence ? ” said the Governor, apparently unwilling to proceed to extremity.

“ You would not have me desert when in front of the enemy,” answered Spens with a pale smile.

“ Then the order must be executed.”

One of the two torturers brought two large pails full of water to the side of the victim, with a measure which might hold about a gallon, and a steel tube about a foot long with a wide mouth.

“ It is the water test ? ” exclaimed Spens.

“ Yes,” answered the surgeon under his breath ; “ it kills generally by suffocation ; but if the patient have strength enough to recover he escapes without mutilation.”

With a hasty glance Spens thanked the Governor for this consideration.

The measure filled with water was held to his lips and he drank. A second time the

measure was filled, but he could not empty it. One of the men pressed his head back against the bar of the chair while the other forced the water down his throat to the last drop.

The whole frame of the victim quivered spasmodically. Every vein seemed to be cracking and bursting. His brain seemed to swell till his eyes became dazed and his lungs seemed to be water-logged.

“We are ready to accept your confession,” said the Governor, anxious to spare him farther pain.

“No—no—no,” gasped the knight feebly, but with inflexible resolve.

A third measure was raised to his lips. He took a few mouthfuls, and then his teeth closed with a convulsive jerk, and he seemed incapable of opening them.

“Do you persist still in your silence?” interrupted the Governor.

“Still, and always,” was the answer in a suffocated voice.

One of the executioners with a sharp

instrument like a chisel forced his teeth open, thrust the steel tube between them and forced it down his throat.

The third measureful of water, and a fourth, were emptied into the mouth of the tube.

The colour of the patient changed from a deathly pallor to a bluish tint, his fingers clutched the bars of the chair with a vice-like grip, and his body shook and heaved in convulsive agony.

The Governor repeated the question. Spens heard the voice as if it reached him from afar off; he comprehended the question, but he was unable to speak, and he made a slight motion of the head to signify "No."

Another measureful was forced down the tube. The patient writhed, gave vent to a dull smothered cry of anguish, and burst the rope which bound his right arm. He seized the steel tube and with more than human strength he bent it and broke it in his hand.

Then he sank backward insensible.

The surgeon felt the patient's pulse and placed his ear upon his breast to listen for the beating of the heart.

"Well?" queried the Governor.

"He is a man of much vigour," replied the surgeon, gravely; "and you might force him to swallow one or two measurefuls yet; but the second will kill him."

The first executioner raised another tube, and the second stood ready with the water.

"Is the man in a condition to hear me?" proceeded the Governor.

"Hear you? Mons Meg might be fired in his ear and he would know nothing of it. There are, however, means of recalling his senses."

"What means?"

"Burn him under the ear with the red irons and put on the boot."

"The irons are in the fire," said the first torturer, "and the boot is yonder, and his foot is bared for it."

The man made a movement as if to procure the instruments, when the Governor stopped him by an impatient gesture. An expression of horror and pity was on his countenance.

“Enough, enough, for the present,” he cried. “I will acquaint his lordship with the result of this test, and we will see what is to be done after. Carry him to his cell, and prythee, Master Surgeon, attend to him for my sake.”

Spens was carried back to his dungeon by the men-at-arms, and the surgeon, who had been struck by the fortitude of the victim, set about reviving him with interest in the task.

He at first began to entertain doubts of effecting a cure; but at the end of several hours he had succeeded in drawing off the greater part of the water which had been forced into the patient's stomach, and he trusted to the profuse perspiration which overspread the body to prevent suffusion on the lungs.

“I predicted how it would be,” muttered the Governor as he proceeded to seek Angus; “that man is one of those who die and speak not.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW LORD OF BINRAM.

“ Still worse than apathy had place
On his swart brow and callous face ;
For evil passions cherished long
Had plough'd them with impression strong.
All that gives gloss to sin, all gay
Light folly, pass'd with youth away,
But rooted stood in manhood's hour,
The weeds of vice without their flower.”

ROKEBY.

ANGUS was in the Council Chamber waiting the issue of the test. He paced the floor moodily, and his only companion, the sallow-faced man who had recently become his prime agent and counsellor, sat near the table watching him cunningly.

“ If we fail to bring this conspiracy home to Arran,” muttered the Earl, “ you

may bid good-bye to Binram; for I shall have no power to obtain it for you."

The man smiled coldly.

"I do not despair of winning the game, even if his lordship pass through the fire scatheless."

"You are sanguine," replied the other with a sneer.

"Because I know your position, and I know that the simplest stratagem will give you the hand of——"

"Stop; here is our friend."

The Governor entered the chamber at the words and acquainted his lordship with what had taken place.

"Humph! I would that the obstinate churl had been on my side instead of Arran's," muttered Angus, dissatisfied.

"You have discovered all, then?" said the Governor, venturing the question in the hope of avoiding a repetition of the unpleasant duty he had just performed.

"Yes, all, without being able to prove anything."

“You do not desire, then, that the test should be applied again.”

“I will tell you six days hence how her Majesty may desire to dispose of him. Come, Barras.”

The Earl and his dark agent withdrew from the chamber to another part of the Castle.

Since the attempt to carry off the King their Majesties had removed from Holyrood to the Castle as a place of greater security against attack or conspiracy than the Palace.

The Queen Regent had been for some time aware that the preference she had shown Douglas, however carefully guarded, was observed by her nobles, and filled them with alarm. The dislike which was general amongst them in their regard of Angus became strengthened by the favour he obtained in her eyes, and the distrust stretched even to herself.

She felt that her position was critical; but whether the attempt to remove her

royal son from her guardianship frightened her out of that calmness of judgment which she had displayed on ordinary occasions, and rendered her so anxious to obtain a protector who would be bound to her by closer ties than those of loyalty or interest, or whether she was blinded by her liking for the man, in the moment of greatest peril she took the step she should have most avoided.

Four days after the attempt upon the King, and just eleven months after the presumed death or murder of James IV. at Flodden, the Queen Regent gave her hand in marriage to Douglas, Earl of Angus.

Many of the nobles instantly withdrew from the capital, disgusted by the turn affairs had taken and not quite sure how Angus might act towards them. Those who remained united themselves to the factions of either Arran or Angus.

Conspiracies were rife, and Arran's party at first held in secret and afterwards boldly

proclaimed that the Queen by her marriage had forfeited the Regency and the right of guardianship over the King.

Angus surrounded himself with astute men who were bound to him by the strongest ties of self-interest; and chief amongst them was Heron Barras, Lord of Binram. The title and estates had been conferred upon him as the nephew of the late lord, and in acknowledgment of secret service to the Government.

Angus, whose bearing had been always as haughty as his ambition was great, now carried himself with so much of the dictatorial air that all who were not bound to him by ties of interest or necessity hated him.

The new Lord of Binram, who wore the mask of boon companion on his sallow face, was a puzzle to both factions. One thing only was certain—that he exercised much influence upon the proud Douglas.

On the day succeeding the marriage the Lords of Council were summoned together.

Barely one-half of them answered the summons, and several of those who did answer it rose and quitted the chamber, in spite of the fierce looks of Angus, when they were informed that the Queen Regent had already deputed her new-made husband to act for her in the Council.

The Council was broken up abruptly, and Douglas, indignant at the slight cast upon him, retired. Lord Binram—or Barras, as we had better continue to call him—had followed Angus, and when they had reached a private apartment the Earl turned upon him sharply.

“Well, what think you of these curs who would fain bite if they dared?” he said, grinding his teeth.

“Why, that so long as they dare not, you need not mind whether they would or no,” responded Barras coolly.

“Ay, but they will try it.”

“Let them: you can bite, too, I suppose.”

“By the sacred rood, they shall find I can.”

“I am pleased your lordship sees it in that light; and so we will change the subject. Have you decided how you are to dispose of Spens?”

“Hang him and quarter him for an obstinate churl.”

“He deserves it, certainly, but you will not do it for all that.”

“And wherefore not?”

“Because you must do it publicly; by doing so you will revive memories of the late King which may be detrimental to your affairs at present. No, no, that will not do.”

“Then let him lie where he is till he rot.”

“That will not do either; but if your lordship will give me your written order I think I can remove him quietly and effectually out of the way.”

“By what means?”

“I will hand him over to Scott of Tushielaw; and if he escape him—why, then let him live, in the saints’ name, say I.”

Angus hesitated ; then hastily wrote the order ; and with it in his possession, Barras, feeling assured of his triumph, proceeded to put it in force.

In the court he crossed the path of Mistress Douglas, who, attended by a page, was hastening toward the eastern wing of the quadrangle as if she were going to the King's chamber.

“ A proud wench, soothely, and a bonnie one,” he muttered ; “ a rare prize, too, for the man who hath wit to win her. 'Sdeath, that man shall be none other than myself.”

As if gratified by the resolution he had come to he continued his way in search of the Governor. He found him at length, and showed the order he had obtained from the Regent's consort.

“ What do you purpose doing with him ? ” said the Governor, at once acknowledging the authority of his visitor.

“ I will see him first, and tell you the rest after.”

Barras was conducted to the dungeon.

At the door he dismissed the attendants and entered alone.

The knight, although out of danger, was still feeble from the effects of the torture he had undergone. When he heard some one enter the dungeon he concluded that it was the warder, and did not look round.

Barras placed the cruzie he carried in a niche in the wall, and then stood for several minutes eyeing the prostrate form of the man he hated and had so wronged.

“I’ faith you treat your guests coolly, Sir Knight,” he said at length with a dry laugh.

Spens did not appear to hear him.

“Zounds, man, have you lost your tongue?” exclaimed Barras, impatiently. “I come to you as a friend and with a friend’s intent, and you turn your back upon me as if I were an enemy whom you feared.”

“Feared!” cried Spens, starting.

“Aha, I thought you would speak,” said Barras, sneering; and, folding his arms, he

stood in the light of the lamp like a fiend gloating in his triumph over the weak and helpless.

“Yes, I will speak,” said Spens sternly, rising to his feet with an effort. “Heron Barras, you are here for some ill purpose; perform it at once, then, and rid me of your presence; for by my troth your bastard kinship with my wife shall no longer shield you from my wrath.”

“Why, look ye now, what a fool distemper may make a man. Well, well, I am your lady’s brother, and for her sake I will forego the slight you put upon me.”

Spens clenched his hands fiercely; he was stifling with rage.

“You dare not speak of kindred with her—you who sold her to a villain not one whit less black than yourself—you who would have poisoned me against her and turned my hand against my friend. By the mass, weak as I am, I have a mind to strangle you where you stand.”

“I sell her!—I poison your mind—fie, my master, that is an unkindly charge.”

The callous self-possession of the villain, and his mocking affectation of innocence, exasperated Spens beyond bounds, and obtaining strength from his passion he sprang upon Barras and griped him by the throat.

Barras thrust his hand into the breast of his doublet and grasped a poignard. But Spens suddenly changed his mind and flung him aside contemptuously.

“Live, wolf, live; I will not cheat the hangman of his due.”

He sank down upon the couch exhausted.

Barras coolly dusted his doublet with his hand, arranged his collar, which had been ruffled by his assailant, and finally rubbed his beardless chin.

“I looked for a kindlier reception,” he said coldly, “seeing that I came to offer you liberty.”

“I will not take it at your hands.”

“ Will you buy it, then? ”

“ Nor buy it.”

“ Ah, well, without doubt, you have your own ideas upon the subject, and I have mine. I’ faith, I should think twice before I declined liberty, no matter who offered it, if I lay waiting for execution, and knowing that I was to leave a lady for whom I cared a little to the mercy of folks I hated.”

Spens winced ; but he said quietly—

“ I listen to your kindly intent, sirrah.”

“ No, it is not a kindly intent since you will not have it so. I am here to sell, and you may buy if it please you ; if not, why good day to you.”

“ I am no merchant and know nothing of the ways of barter. Wherefore, at once say what you would sell and at what price.”

“ Now you are reasonable. Then I have for sale your liberty, with free passage from Scotland with any whom you may care to take with you.”

“ I understand ; proceed,” said Spens, with evident detestation of the salesman.

“ The next thing is the price for which I am willing to dispose of these articles. I offer them to you cheaply—I offer them to you for a scrap of paper, or the knowledge of where that scrap of paper may be found.”

“ Go on.”

“ You can guess what paper it is I mean.”

“ I am dull of wit.”

“ Then I must help your dull wit. I mean a worthless piece of paper professing to certify that a marriage had been solemnized between my good uncle Gilbert Ker of Binram and one Mistress Elliot, with whose house ours has been long at feud.”

“ Since the paper is worthless, why are you so eager to possess it ? ”

“ A fancy, that is all. Will you give it ? ”

“ What if I have not got it ? ”

“ You know where it may be found.”

“ And if I refuse to tell? ”

“ Then we can make no bargain.”

“ So stands it, then ; we can make no bargain. I hold the parchment in trust for Gilbert Elliot, the son of Ker, and heir to Binram. I would have proved his title to the land and name before now, had not your treachery and Tushielaw’s made me a fugitive, and compelled me to burrow in the dark till I found means to prove you what you are.”

Barras shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference.

“ As you please, good brother. You decline to bargain with me, and you will be hanged, drawn, and quartered. In your death there will be an end to Master Elliot’s silly claim.”

“ You mistake ; for on the day of my death the present holder of the proofs of Master Gilbert’s birth will step forward in my name, and proclaim his right.”

“ He will find it hard to obtain credit for

his proclamation; and he will find it still more difficult to oust me from possession."

"You will never be in possession."

Barras laughed.

"You have been out of the world some days," he said, chuckling, "else you would have known that my Lord Angus has espoused the Queen Regent, and I, Heron Barras, have been proclaimed Lord of Binram."

Spens gave vent to a half-smothered groan, and covered his face with his hands.

"Lost," he muttered; "quite lost."

"Right; everything is lost to you," said Barras, quickly, "unless you accept me as a friend."

"Away, knave, away. Do you know so little of me as to think these arguments will move me?"

"You refuse?"

"I do; and would if my refusal involved twenty lives."

Barras frowned, and nodded his head slowly.

“It involves more lives than you wot of: and on you be the blame.”

He quitted the dungeon, barred and locked the door, and took the key with him.

Two hours afterward a small body of horsemen, with steel breastplates and leather caps, and armed with the Jeddart axe, rode from the Castle southward.

In their midst was a man bound hand and foot upon a stout black horse.

In another hour the Governor was informed that a Gentleman of the Queen's Guard desired to see him, and would not be denied.

Gilbert Elliot was admitted.

“Pardon my impatience, sir,” he said, eagerly; “but I have found it so hard to obtain this order to see the prisoner Walter Spens, that I feared lest some caprice or accident might have it cancelled if I did not use it at once.”

The Governor shook his head sadly.

“It is useless now, sir; and those who gave it you must have known that.”

“How? What is it you mean?” cried Gilbert, alarmed and agitated.

“Sir Walter Spens was taken away from the Castle about an hour ago.”

“By whom, and whence?”

“He was removed under the command of the Earl of Angus. I know nothing of those who have charge of him, or of his destination. I fear it will be a sorry journey to him.”

Without pausing to express thanks for the information which his agitation had elicited from the kindly old man, he rushed from the place, full of a vague terror and a vague hope.

CHAPTER XV.

A GAME FOR A LIFE.

IN the ante-chamber of the King's room Captain Lindsay, with twelve Gentlemen of the Guard, attended his Majesty's pleasure.

The boy-King had been in an ill-temper for the past two days. He understood little about marriage; but he had an undefined idea that the marriage of his Royal mother with Douglas was somehow to interfere with his freedom of action. So he was petulant, angry, and had retired to his room in the sulks.

On one of the side tables of the ante-chamber were writing materials and a variety of books; and scattered about were

balls, bats, and other toys which his Majesty had neglected for two days.

The Gentlemen of the Guard were singularly silent, and moved about as if they had been afraid of disturbing a sick person. Captain Lindsay, with knit brow and hands clasped behind him, paced the floor. He, like the rest, looked uncomfortable ; and, indeed, an uncomfortable feeling prevailed everywhere, for none could guess what issue the sudden marriage of the Queen with the powerful Angus was likely to bring about.

They were thinking of this when they were almost startled by the appearance of Angus himself, accompanied by the new Lord of Binram, Heron Barras.

“ Will you acquaint the King that I crave an audience,” said the Earl, respectful enough in words, but with a slight curl on his lip which indicated how little he relished the necessity of comportsing himself thus humbly toward a boy of whom he was now the stepfather.

Captain Lindsay bowed.

“Your lordship will pardon me, but his Majesty desired that he should not be disturbed by any one.”

“Is he alone?”

“His tutor is with him, my lord.”

“Then if he admits his tutor the order you have received cannot apply to me,” said Angus.

“I will acquaint his Majesty that your lordship attends.”

Lindsay passed into the King's chamber quietly.

Angus and Barras retired to the farther end of the ante-room and spoke in subdued voices.

“I doubt that you have dealt too promptly with that troublesome varlet, Spens,” muttered the Earl, gloomily.

“If I have done wrong,” returned Barras, deprecatingly, “your lordship's will and zeal for his Majesty's safety must bear the brunt of it. But is not this varlet whom we have disposed of a condemned traitor, and did we not capture him in the very act

of attempting to carry off, perhaps to assassinate, his Majesty ? ”

“ Um—I am not sure that under the present state of affairs his Majesty might not have preferred a sojourn at Stirling with Arran and the rest, to his residence here with his Royal mother and myself.”

Captain Lindsay re-entered the chamber from the King’s apartment.

“ His Majesty desires me to present his apologies to your lordship—— ”

Angus interrupted the Captain with a gesture of the hand.

“ Enough, enough ; I will return in an hour, when his Majesty may be more at leisure.”

The Gentlemen of the Guard saluted his lordship as he retired with his satellite.

“ We must see that your haste does not involve us in any difficulty,” said Angus, as he passed with impatient steps along the corridor.

“ Close the doors, gentlemen,” said Captain Lindsay, brusquely ; “ the King will see no one to-night.”

They had scarcely resumed their positions when the door of the main corridor was thrown violently open, and a gentleman, wearing their own gay uniform, rushed in wildly.

“Master Elliot,” exclaimed Captain Lindsay, amazed by the abrupt entrance and evident distress of his young friend.

“Captain, I want to see the King,” cried Gilbert, agitatedly.

“It is impossible.”

“I must see him, Captain—I must see him.”

“Do not speak so loud, sir, if you please,” said the Captain, sternly.

“I will speak in any way you would have me,” exclaimed Gilbert, alternately passionate and humbly imploring. “I feel my brain on fire and I cannot answer for myself. Captain Lindsay, will you let me see the King?”

The Captain shook his head as if sorry, but he spoke firmly—

“Master Elliot, I can guess what it is

you wish to see the King for ; and I would like to help you, for I, too, respect the Knight of Halstane. But the King has only a few minutes since refused to see the Earl of Angus.”

Gilbert passed his trembling hands over his heated brow.

“But Angus has time to wait,” he cried, raising his voice hotly ; “but I—I have no time to wait. No, no, no, a thousand times no, I cannot wait.”

“You forget where you are, sir,” said the Captain, sternly.

Gilbert’s frenzy overcame him.

“Can I help that? I have appealed to everybody for help, and everybody repulses me. I have only one hope left. I come here to see the King, and I will see the King. Perdition, you do not know me or you would not stay me. I arrested Spens. —I risked my life for the King’s pleasure— I shall save Spens. The King is in there, and I will enter there. Must I pass over your body?”

“Draw, gentlemen, and defend your post.”

Twelve swords leapt from their scabbards and were held on guard.

“Strike, strike,” cried Gilbert, madly, “strike at head and heart; but before you have killed me I will cry so loud that the King shall hear me and aid me.”

He threw himself upon the swords, and beat them aside with his hands. None of the gentlemen were willing to take advantage of his blind frenzy, else any one of them might have run him through. But when he had forced his way to the door, hands were roughly laid upon him, and the end would have been fatal to him had not the door been thrown open, and the boy-King himself appeared.

Gilbert fell upon his knees before him with clasped hands, and moaning, in tremulous excitement, “The King, the King.”

There was an instant secession of hostilities, and swords were sheathed.

“What does all this noise mean?” de-

manded his Majesty, looking bewilderedly at the man kneeling before him and the flushed faces of the guard.

“Sire, it is a madman,” responded Lindsay, with his sternest expression.

“Sire, it is I, your servant,” said Gilbert, looking up, and thrusting his long hair back from his face.

“Master Elliot! Why, gentlemen, have you drawn swords against him? Master Elliot is my friend. Rise. I am glad you have come, for I am weary and want somebody to play with me.”

“Ah, sire, and I would have spent every drop of blood in my body to reach your Majesty.”

The King regarded him with a quick old-fashioned look of cunning.

“Then you have got something to ask from me? You are like all the rest.”

“Not for myself, sire, not for myself.”

“What does that matter? I am weary; make me laugh, and you shall have your wish. Come, let us have a game at bat and ball. Can you play?”

“Anything, sire, anything to please you, if you will only listen to me,” answered Gilbert, wringing his hands.

“Catch,” cried the King, striking the ball he had picked up with a bat.

Gilbert caught the ball, and threw it back, moaning—

“And the life of the bravest, noblest man in Scotland hangs on the balance of a game with a child.”

“Catch,” cried the King again.

Gilbert was too late this time. The ball struck him on the side of the head, and rebounded, hitting the brave Captain Lindsay on the nose.

The King dropped the bat, laughing with childish hilarity at the Captain’s expression of confusion.

“You are laughing, sire; you will hear me now, for you are laughing,” exclaimed Gilbert, piteously.

“And you!” exclaimed the King, amazed, “you are crying. I don’t like to see a big man like you crying.”

“I am sad no more, sire, for I have won.”

“You were gambling, then?”

“Yes, sire, I gambled with your Majesty for the life of a comrade—a brother. It was a cruel game.”

“Well, you have won, Master Elliot. What is it you wish?”

“Your Majesty’s pardon for my friend.”

“Is he guilty?”

“I do not know; but he loves your Majesty; and if he has erred in aught it is because he loves you, sire.”

“Then I do not wish him to die. Who is he?”

“Sir Walter Spens,” answered Gilbert joyfully; “you have said that you do not wish him to die, and you, sire (with deep reverence), are the King.”

“Yes, I am the King, and he shall not die. My mother has married Douglas, and Douglas thinks he can do as he pleases with me; he has sent away everybody I like and left me here as if I were nobody. But he

shall find that I am the King and that there are dungeons in the Castle."

And his Majesty looked quite big as he thus delivered his determination.

"Holy Mother bless you, good little King," ejaculated Gilbert.

"I am not little, and I am the King; and if everybody does not obey me everybody shall go to the dungeons."

"The Earl of Angus attends your Majesty," said an ordinary, entering the ante-chamber, "accompanied by Lord Binram."

The King's countenance fell and his air of authority faded.

"The Douglas," he muttered, as if somewhat afraid; then speaking aloud, "Admit them, Captain."

"Your Majesty will remember," said Gilbert, again trembling for the fate of his friend.

The King nodded as he climbed upon a raised seat beside the table.

"I have a better idea than the dungeon, Master Elliot, you will see."

The Gentlemen of the Guard ranged themselves round the back of the King's chair, and Gilbert took his place amongst them as Angus, followed by Barras, entered.

“Sire, I bring you good news,” said Angus, affecting an ease and pleasure which he did not feel; “you will be able to ride out to-morrow.”

“And I will not be shut up indoors like a prisoner any more?”

“Never again will it be necessary, I trust.”

“Ah, that is good news. Thank you, Cousin Angus.”

“We are a long way from the dungeons,” moaned Gilbert to himself; “and Spens is forgotten.”

“I should like to get my boar brought up here,” proceeded the little King, naively; “and I should like to have Abbot Thomas here; but I suppose he was one of those who deceived me, for he told me that I was the King and the master of the land. But he was wrong there, was he not?—for it is

you, Cousin Angus, and my mother, who are the masters."

"Nay, sire, we are only the first of your Majesty's subjects."

Angus bit his lip slightly as he made answer to the next question.

"Then, as subjects, you owe me obedience—eh, cousin?"

"We would be rebellious subjects if we refused."

"We will see about that," thought the King; and then simply, "Well, cousin, I have been gambling with Master Elliot here, and I have lost. When a gentleman loses he ought to pay, and I am a gentleman, cousin, am I not?"

"Certainly; who dare gainsay it?"

Gilbert understood the King now.

"Well, cousin," proceeded the boy, as if distressed, "I have lost and I am not able to pay Master Elliot."

"Indeed; then your Majesty must have staked high."

"Yes, I staked the life of a man; and

it is necessary that that man should live or the King will not have paid his debt."

There was not one amongst the Gentlemen of the Guard who did not give a silent blessing to the cunning little King. Gilbert barely refrained from uttering it aloud.

"It affects the life of some State prisoner, then," said Angus, quietly; "tell me his name, and the Regent will not refuse my plea to pay your Majesty's debt."

"I am sure of that. His name is Walter Spens of Halstane."

Angus and Barras could not conceal a start of surprise. The former spoke coldly—

"A man guilty of high treason; of an attempt upon your Majesty's life, and one who betrayed the late King—you would not surely wish him to live?" said Barras.

"I don't know what he has been guilty of and I don't care," cried the King, impatiently; "and I did not speak to

you, sir. Grace is accorded—is it not, cousin ? ”

“ No, sire, ” replied Angus firmly.

“ No ! ” ejaculated the King, half crying with vexation.

Gilbert’s head sank upon his breast.

“ It pains me deeply, ” said the Earl, in measured accents, “ to refuse any request of your Majesty ; but for your own safety it is necessary that we should be firm in this matter. ”

His Majesty looked boldly into the face of Douglas as he spoke slowly—

“ Cousin, there are people who have told me that you do not care for me. I would not have believed it yesterday—but to-day—— ”

“ To-day, your Majesty is in a passion. ”

“ If you have not deceived me, ” said the little King, resolutely, “ you are my subject, Earl Angus though you be, and I am the master. Well, I, the King, extend grace to the Knight of Halstane ; I desire that he shall go free. I no longer

ask you to do this—I command it to be done.”

“Long live the King,” shouted Gilbert, unable to control himself; and the Gentlemen of the Guard echoed the cry, despite the admonitory frown of Captain Lindsay.

Angus stood for an instant as if chagrined and puzzled, then suddenly he caught the boy up in his arms and embraced him.

“Yes,” he said with emotion, “long live the King. Gentlemen, the first command of his Majesty has been one of clemency, and his will shall have way.”

“Ah, you are a good cousin, and I think you like me after all,” said the King as he was replaced in his seat. “I have beaten him,” he thought to himself proudly.

“My Lord Binram,” said Angus promptly, “will you take a seat at the table and write?”

Barras hesitated.

“I would like to observe to your lordship——”

Gilbert sprang from his place amongst the Guards, took a seat at the table, and snatched up a pen.

“I will write faster than any one, my lord, and I am ready to begin,” cried Gilbert, warmly.

“The pardon first, then,” said Angus; “in the name of his gracious Majesty James V. of Scotland——”

“But Spens has been already removed from the Castle, my lord,” interrupted Barras.

“I will overtake him,” said Gilbert.

He proceeded to write with marvellous speed the pardon dictated by Angus to Walter Spens of Halstane, on condition that he quitted Scotland within twelve hours after receipt of the pardon, and never returned to the land under penalty of death.

“There, my lord,” said Gilbert, presenting the paper.

Angus signed and sealed it.

“Now,” he went on, “write the King’s order to Adam Scott of Tushielaw.”

“Tushielaw!” exclaimed Gilbert, trembling. Then, hastily recollecting himself, “Forgive me, my lord.”

The order directed Tushielaw to deliver his prisoner scatheless to the bearer of this missive in despite of any instructions he might have previously received.

“But if I might observe to your lordship,” interrupted Barras again.

“But hold your tongue, sir,” broke in the King, irritably.

“This order also is written, my lord,” said Gilbert, rising eagerly from the table, and presenting the pen to Angus.

“You are a brave man, Master Elliot,” said the Earl, as he signed and sealed the second order. “There, you have now all that is necessary to set your friend at liberty. The rest depends upon yourself and your horse.”

“Thanks, thanks, my lord. And, sire,” throwing himself down upon his knees, and kissing the King’s hand, “when you need some man to die for you, send for Gilbert Elliot.”

He moved toward the door.

“I have paid my debt—eh, Master Elliot?” shouted the King after him.

“In full, in full, sire.”

“It is time and trouble wasted,” said Barras, scowling; “for he will arrive too late.”

“I shall arrive in time, sire, or die.”

The door closed behind him, and he hastened to obtain his horse.

Angus bowed low to the King.

“Sire, we have obeyed your Majesty, and are loyal subjects.”

“And good friends,” said the King, nodding and laughing, as he retired with the Earl to his private apartment.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

" His smiddie ye'll ken by' the twa trough stanes
 At the auld door cheeks, an' the black batter'd panes—
 By the three iron cleeks whilk he straik in the wa'
 Ta tie up wild yads when heigh customers ca'.
 Up agen the auld gable 'tis like ye may view
 A tramless cart or a couterless plough,
 An' auld toothless harrow, a breechan ring rent,
 Wi' mae broken gear whilk are meant to be ment."

ALEX. M'LAGGAN.

As soon as Barras was relieved of his attendance upon Douglas, he quitted the ante-room, and in a very few minutes afterward he passed out by the postern, across the drawbridge, and down to the Cross.

He was wrapped in a large roquelaire,

and a Spanish hat was drawn well over his brow, so that his face and its passion were hidden from passing observation.

The day was at its close when he entered the hostelry of St. Andrew's Rest. In the common guest-room he found a number of douce citizens talking in undertones about the marriage of the Queen Regent with Douglas, mingled with scared gossip of the plague which was still hovering about the city. The rest of the company was of the usual mixed character, and comprised men-at-arms, travellers, rich and poor.

Busy arguing with four soldiers some knotty question as to the superiority of the Jeddart axe over the broad pike, was a rough-looking fellow, whose dress was neither that of civilian nor soldier, but partly of both.

To him Barras advanced, and, touching him on the shoulder smartly, beckoned him to an unoccupied part of the room. Eddie Craig instantly ceased his discussion and obeyed the summons.

“ Take horse at once,” said Barras in an undertone, “ and ride as if your life hung on your speed. You may overtake Tushielaw before he reaches the Tower.”

“ And syne.”

“ Give him this knife, and bid him from me despatch his prisoner without delay, else he will lose the chance altogether.”

“ I’m awa.”

“ Stop; you must return with half a dozen men and meet me at Peebles. You remember the fellow Elliot who managed to slip through our fingers at the Tower.”

Craig nodded to signify yes.

“ Well, he has been sent from the Castle to release Spens from Tushielaw. He must never reach his destination. Now away.”

When Gilbert sprang into the saddle the groom who had attended him, before releasing his hold of the saddle, said warningly—

“ It’s a kittle beast, maister, an’ she’s

nane the cannier for ha'in' been fast i' the stable twa days."

Gilbert nodded impatiently, and the horse bounded across the yard toward the Portcullis Gate. Whilst the portcullis was being raised and the drawbridge lowered, his horse pawed the earth with as much impatience as its master.

The road clear, the horse dashed over the bridge, and was then suddenly stopped by an old man who griped the bridle stoutly.

Gilbert raised his whip to strike the man, when the latter raised his face, and he recognized Andrew Howie.

"Hands off, Andrew; every instant is precious, for the life of Spens is on my speed."

"Then ye ken Tushielaw has him? The dwarf body Hornie told me that naebody kenned."

"I know all, and I have the King's pardon here. Do not stay me, man——"

"But my leddy wants to speak wi' ye."

"Where is she?"

“In St. Cuthbert’s Abbey.”

“Bid her rest there till I return. Let go, let go.”

Andrew could restrain the horse no longer, as the rider now goaded it with his heels, and it darted along the Esplanade, down the High Street, and through the Netherbow Port.

Andrew gazed after him with a dissatisfied expression.

“The chield’s daft,” he muttered as he stood puzzling his head as to the course he should adopt; “daft to think that my leddy would bide here when she kens the maister is in the hands o’ Tushielaw; and daft to think that single-handed he can rescue the maister frae Tushielaw’s grip on Yarrow braes. He couldna dae’t even if he had the King’s ain order for’t i’ his hand.”

With his grey head bowed in perplexity he took a few steps forward, as if about to return to St. Cuthbert’s, and again halted.

“There’s ane micht help us,” he said,

glancing wistfully back to the Castle, "if I could only win at her. . . . It's a late hour to gang chappin' at the door o' great folks; but they stick i' the bog wha dinna try to get oot, sae I'll gang back an' speer, ony way."

He retraced his steps to the Castle; the drawbridge had not yet been raised since Elliot had passed out, so he reached the postern without difficulty.

He knocked, and was presently answered by the warder asking the watchword of the night.

"I dinna ken the word, frien', but I want to see my Leddy Douglas on a matter o' life an' death."

"You canna pass the-nicht without the word," was the gruff response; "get ower the brig as quick as ye cam, for it's gaun to be raised."

"Saunts save us, man, dae I no tell ye it's a matter o' life and death I come about?"

"Canna help that."

“Would ye no jist speer at Captain Lindsay if he would see Andrew Howie?”

To this there was for several minutes no response. Then the trap of the postern was shoved back and the warder eyed the importunate visitor suspiciously. Satisfied by his inspection, the postern was opened and Andrew was admitted.

He found himself in the presence of Lindsay, who, in going round the guard, happened to arrive at the gate just as his name was pronounced. Recognizing Andrew's voice and name as those of the man who had called daily to inquire for Gilbert Elliot during his illness, he gave orders at once to admit the suitor.

With grateful respect Andrew explained in an undertone the object of his visit, and Lindsay promised to assist him and to endeavour to procure an immediate audience for him with Mistress Douglas. He consented to this the more readily as he had learned that Heron Barras had quitted the Castle a little time before.

Gilbert reached the ancient burgh of barony, Linton-on-the-Lynn, without interruption. But while he was passing through the burgh his horse cast a shoe. The day had already broken, so that he had no difficulty in finding the smithy, which was close to the inn, and on the high road to the South.

He had, however, considerable difficulty in rousing the smith from his slumbers, for the honest man, as was his custom, had taken enough ale before retiring to rest to ensure his sound-sleeping. The traveller experienced a further difficulty in persuading the smith to enter his workshop at that early hour and repair the accident which had occurred.

But at length the sight of a large piece of silver prevailed over the smith's lazy objections, and he drowsily donned his clothes, drowsily opened the smithy, and proceeded to kindle the fire.

All this delay increased Elliot's impatience to an almost unbearable degree ;

and he moved restlessly about until the smith became suspicious, in a drowsy way, that his customer was either out of his mind or his haste boded no good purpose.

“Look you, my man,” said Gilbert, stopping suddenly before the smith as he drowsily blew his bellows, “here is one silver crown for your work, and here is another if you will enable me to start in ten minutes.”

The smith’s cupidity was again powerful, and seemed to wake him up thoroughly. He whipped the red-hot iron from the fire and the silence of the morning was again broken by the busy clank of his hammer on the anvil.

In very few minutes more than the time specified the horse was ready for the road, and Gilbert vaulted into the saddle eagerly.

“Thank you, maister,” said the smith, grinning, as his fingers closed upon the two pieces of silver, “an’ a safe journey to ye; but ye’d better ca’ the beast canny

for a mile or sae; else ye'll maybe lame't a'thegither."

Gilbert noted the advice, but started off at a gallop, and it was not until he was beyond sight of Linton that he thought of giving effect to the smith's observation. He slackened the horse's pace, and chafing at the delay—necessary as it was—proceeded at an easy trot.

The smith watched him till he had descended the hill and disappeared. Then he turned into his smithy chinking the silver crowns in his hand, and testing their genuineness with his teeth.

A man in the garb of a peer's courier—with velvet cap, silver badge of office on his cross belt, to which was suspended a leathern wallet—galloped up to the smithy. A bushy red moustache and beard covered the lower part of his face, the while his brow and eyes were concealed by the manner in which he wore his cap.

"Ho there, my man, ken ye if a fellow on a grey horse has passed here lately?"

“ Aye, twa minutes syne. His horse cast a shoe, an’ I put it on for him.”

“ Which way did he take ? ”

“ South—he’s scarcely a minute oot o’ sicht.”

The courier threw him a piece of silver, touched his horse with his spurs, and the animal bounded away at full speed.

“ Certes, the siller’s plentifu’ this mornin’,” exclaimed the smith, picking up the courier’s gift, and making a mental calculation of the number of days this harvest would enable him to spend comfortably at the inn hard by.

Gilbert heard the clatter of horses’ hoofs behind him, and turning his head descried the courier within fifty yards of him, and rapidly decreasing the distance. The silver badge glancing in the rays of the morning sun assured him of the character of the man, and dispelled any suspicion he might otherwise have entertained.

“ A fair morning, master,” said the courier, slackening his pace as he came abreast with Gilbert.

The latter assented, but showed that he had no desire to continue the conversation.

“Do you travel far southward?” persisted the courier, without appearing to observe the disposition of his companion.

“Not much farther than Peebles; and, as I have no wish to haste at present, do not delay your journey on my account.”

“I have ridden the first stage hard, and can take my own pace for a dozen miles or so.”

“Then take your own pace, for I must speed forward,” said Gilbert, becoming somewhat testy under the persistence of the fellow.

“Nay, then, I am with you, for I would be loth to lose good company, it is so hard to find on the road,” rejoined the courier coolly, and with as much condescension as if he had been pressed to keep up with him.

Gilbert had urged his horse into a gallop; his companion kept pace with him. Gilbert remained silent and frowning; the

courier continued to talk with the fluency and *bonhommie* of a man who had seen much of the world and who had encountered a congenial gossip.

Gilbert was compelled to resign all hope of getting rid of his troublesome acquaintance until they reached Peebles. Arrived at the town, they passed the Red Friars' Church of the Holy Cross, and Gilbert pulled up in front of the ancient hostelry at the corner of High Street and Portbrae.

Much to his surprise and chagrin, the courier also pulled up there. He, however, concealed his annoyance, followed his horse to the stable, and saw it provided with a feed of corn. He was resolved to escape from his persistent companion—of whose character and motives unpleasant suspicions were beginning to force themselves upon him—as soon as he could get beyond his sight.

But it seemed as if his escape were not to be easily managed, for wherever he went the

courier was at his elbow, gossiping and laughing as if they had been friends from boyhood.

“Look you, master,” said Gilbert, at length exasperated, “I have a mind to bear myself company, and your chatter frets me.”

“Say you?” exclaimed the courier, as if greatly surprised. “Well, well, every man to his humour, say I; wherefore I will hold my peace. Hoy there, host, fetch me a stoup of wine.”

The host accordingly brought in a pint of Burgundy, and Gilbert immediately ordered him to bring in another.

He thought he had discovered the way to escape from his gossip at last. Before the host returned he rose and walked carelessly towards the door.

“Here’s the wine, maister,” said the landlord, meeting him.

“Leave it there on the table. I will be back in a minute. I am just going to look at my horse.”

“The fellow will never suspect that I do

not intend to return while the wine stoup is there waiting me," he muttered, as he marched off to the stable.

"I'm thinking yon billie has been sleeping on his wrang side," observed the landlord, with a grin, as he set down the stoup.

"Like enough," rejoined the courier; "but he's a surly dog anyway. What think ye, I've been with him for two hours, and, as is my custom on the road, I tried to make the time pass lightly; but all the thanks he gave me for my pains was to bid me hold my tongue."

"My certes, that was a pair acknowledgment o' your kindness."

"Faugh! let him go. Fetch me another stoup, and have a draught with me."

"Jist tak' this ane, an' I'll fetch another when the chiel comes back."

"That? No, burn me if I do. Fetch me another, or I'll have none."

"Aweel, aweel, I'll do your bidding; but the ane is as gude as the ither, an' maybe a grain better."

As the landlord quitted the room the courier smiled grimly; and, leaping to his feet, stepped over to Gilbert's stoup. He took a small packet from the breast of his doublet, and dropped a few grains of some powder into the wine.

"He did not intend to come back," he muttered, sneeringly; "but he'll come for all that."

He hastily resumed his seat as the host re-entered. They had barely tasted the second stoup when the prophecy of the courier was fulfilled, and Master Elliot returned.

His brow was knit with impatience and chagrin, and he spoke sharply—

"My horse has been tampered with, or that blundering smith has done his work ill. There's a nail driven through the hoof into the flesh, and the poor brute can't move."

"Weel, maister, though ye look as if ye were blaming my house for a misfortune that it has naething to do wi'," said the

landlord, somewhat nettled by the angry manner of his guest, and prepared to treat him as an ill-humoured fellow on the showing of the courier, "I'll help ye as far I can. We'll get the smith till't directly."

"Can you not let me have another horse?"

"No, I haena ane."

Gilbert turned abruptly to the courier.

"It is a matter of life or death that depends on my speed. Will you, master, exchange horses with me, and name what sum you please to take for making the change?"

The courier grinned as if gratified by the request, and he cast a careless glance upon the anxious face of the guardsman.

"Thank you, master, and I might have been willing to favour you, had you been a little more civil with me. As it is, I have no mind to swap."

"Speed you for the smith, host, and you shall have a gold piece for your trouble," said Gilbert, turning away contemptuously from the courier.

The latter rose as if to depart as soon as the landlord had gone.

Gilbert, without looking toward him, again drank a portion of his wine, and moved restlessly between the window and the table.

The courier stretched himself, drained his stoup, and with an air of blustering good-fellowship, bade his late companion adieu. Gilbert answered curtly, and the man went away. In a few minutes Gilbert saw him riding out of the inn yard.

He emptied his flagon, and thanked his stars that the troublesome fellow was out of the way at last. But as the minutes fled, and still the smith had not arrived, his impatience increased, although his movements gradually became slower.

He began to yawn occasionally, and before long he seated himself on the bench by the window. He rested his elbow on the sill, his chin on his hands, and stared out upon the street.

His eyes gradually began to look dull, and

then his head nodded as if with sleep. He started and attempted to rouse himself; but in spite of every effort his eyes closed, his head drooped, and he fell into a species of stupor just as he fancied he heard the courier's voice at the door.

“I forgot my whip, confound it, and have had to come back.”

He stopped abruptly. He was walking over to the seat he had occupied, and where his whip was lying to confirm his words, when he noticed that Gilbert was asleep.

He glanced quickly round with an ugly smile of triumph. He closed the door cautiously, and then advanced to the sleeper.

“The drug has taken effect sooner than I expected,” he muttered; “why could I not have poisoned him as easily? Ay, but there would be inquiry, which might be more dangerous to the Lord of Binram than a few weeks of this whelp's life can be. Bah! enough to take the pardon from him; Tushielaw will do the rest.”

Quickly and stealthily he opened the breast of Gilbert's doublet, and took out a sealed packet. He closed the doublet again, and passed to the hearth, where a few logs of wood were burning slowly. He stirred them into a blaze, and dropped the packet in the flame. He watched the parchment burn to a thin white film.

Then he picked up his whip, and swaggered carelessly from the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOSTELRY AT PEEBLES.

“ Good ale for the peasant,
 Ripe wine for the lord,
 And everything pleasant
 That’s set on the board.
 Ye may cross the whole country
 And span every shire—
 But the deil may content ye
 If mair ye desire.”

Old Sign.

THE worthy master of the Portbrae hostelry was sorely perplexed, on returning with the intelligence that he had found the smith after spending the better part of an hour in pursuing him from house to house, to discover his guest, who had displayed so much impatience for the road, fast asleep.

“ Body o’ me, but I thocht your honour

was in a hurry," he exclaimed, shaking Gilbert by the arm.

The sleeper breathed heavily, but showed no sign of awaking. The landlord scratched his head and looked increasingly puzzled. He examined the wine stoup and saw that it was not quite empty.

"Hie, dame, come ye ben here and speak wi' me."

There was no answer, and the good man, whilst waiting the arrival of his better half to solve the riddle which he found beyond his power, smoothed his chin and stared meditatively at his drowsy guest. His first call remaining unanswered, he raised his voice again—

"Jean Stott, ye——"

Whatever the character he had intended to endow her with, he was not permitted to express it, for Jean Stott presented herself at the door and the goodman was humbled.

She was indeed a woman whose appearance would have made a strong man think twice before giving her cause of offence.

She was tall, stout, with muscular arms and rubicund visage that denoted a temper of the sharpest, and an affection for strong ale and other beverages.

“Weel, Jock Stott, and what were ye about till remark?” she queried in a masculine voice, that in the dark might have been associated with the person of a gruff trooper.

“Ye needna glower as if ye were gaun till eat a body, Jean,” said the guidman, meekly. “I was only gaun till ask ye gin this chiel here has been getting mair drink?”

“No a drap frae me, but he looks as gin he’d had mair nor eneuch frae you.”

“He jist had ae stoup, and if that’s ower muckle for ony Christian it’s time we were oot o’ this.”

“Weel, ye needna fash your thumb about him; he’ll dae nae ill lying there, and maybe he’ll be a guid when the better o’t. Come awa’ but.”

The law being thus laid down, the liege host submitted to it, and retired.

So Gilbert, upon whose mission hung life and death, was left to sleep until the afternoon shadows began to darken the chamber. A few of the most notable of the burgesses, including the smith and the souter, and two or three travellers, had entered, taken their refreshment, stared at the sleeper, and gone away.

His head throbbed and his thoughts were confused when he awoke. He rubbed his eyes, started to his feet, and gazed in puzzled astonishment about him. For a few minutes he failed to remember how he had come to this place, but when the circumstances recurred to him he called loudly for the landlord, who speedily answered the summons.

“Have you got the smith yet?”

“Lang syne,” was the dry response.

“How—what do you mean?”

“Jist that Smiddie Tam has been here an’ taken the nail oot o’ the puir beast’s foot, an’ a gay muckle ane it was tae, an’ nae wonner the puir brute——”

“Why in the devil’s name did you not tell me the horse was ready?”

And Gilbert, indignant at what seemed to be the neglect of the taverner, moved hastily to the door.

“Losh be here,” exclaimed the host, following him, “what way could I tell ye when ye were fast asleep?”

Gilbert halted and proceeded to question the host. After learning that he had been asleep during the day, and so soundly that no shaking could rouse him, he began to comprehend that some trick had been played him. He examined the wine stoup and discovered the sediments of some powder. He understood at once that the wine had been drugged, and his suspicion fell upon the courier, the remembrance of whose singular conduct warranted, and even confirmed, the suspicion. The simplicity and promptitude with which the landlord answered all queries exonerated him from any complicity in the matter.

“If you were again to see the man who

came here with me," proceeded Gilbert, "would you know him?"

"Ay, brawly; though he didna take aff his bonnet and ay kept his chin covered when ye were in the room, I would ken him by a blue mark he had on the side o' his left e'e."

"You know nothing of where he came from or where he was going to?"

"I ken he came frae Edinburgh, an' he said he was going south; but that's a' I ken, for like yoursel' he didna gie ony name."

"Mine is Gilbert Elliot, and I am travelling with a message from the King to Scott of Tushielaw. Holy Mother grant that this accursed knavery has not made my journey bootless! But since it has happ'd, I see plainly that there are knaves about who would fain foil the King's merciful intent. Yet, with our good lady's help, I will baffle them. Fetch me pen and ink."

The host had grown somewhat paler than

it was his habit to be when he learned that his guest was an emissary of the King.

“ That will I, maister, right speedily ; but I crave your mercy, sir, and hope you will not blame my poor house for any ill that has come to ye. I gie ye my aith—— ”

“ So far I hold you blameless, but I shall charge you with a mission, and upon its fulfilment will depend my satisfaction of your innocence. Fetch me the pen.”

“ I’ll dae onything ye wish, maister, but dinna blame—— ”

“ There, there, bring me the things,” interrupted Gilbert, impatiently.

John Stott bustled out of the room and returned speedily with writing materials. Gilbert sat down, briefly narrated what had occurred, and gave a description of the courier. He folded up the document and addressed it to Captain Lindsay, of the Queen’s Guard at the Castle, Edinburgh.

“ Now, mark well what I tell you,” he said, delivering the packet to Stott.

“ Should I fail to return here by to-morrow at even, take you the swiftest horse you can find in all the town and bear this despatch to Edinburgh. Tell Captain Lindsay all you know, and fear nothing for yourself. Mind, my life will depend on your fidelity.”

“ I’ll dae your bidding, maister, in every particular, and gin ye’re no back here by the morn’s even I’ll be in Edinbro’ by midnight.”

The man spoke with evident sincerity, and Gilbert, after thanking him, was hurrying away. He was arrested by the masculine voice of Jean Stott, and the protrusion of her huge person in his way. Not all the winks and nods of her guidman could make her understand that something more than ordinary civility was required on this occasion.

“ Bide a wee, bide a wee, maister—what are ye makin’ a fule o’ yoursel’ for, John Stott?—there’s the lawing to pay afore ye gang—I’ll heave a stoup at your head, John Stott, gin ye mak’ anither face at me.”

With some little difficulty discovering how much of this parenthetical address referred to him, Gilbert settled his score so much to Jean's satisfaction that she designated him a "decent chiel;" which was high praise coming from her lips, for amongst her other characteristics a principal one was a supreme contempt for male creatures in general and her guidman in particular.

The horse was at the door. Gilbert mounted and quitted Peebles at full gallop.

He forded the Tweed near Horsburgh Castle, passed through Glensax, and held on by Glengaber to Yarrow. The road he had chosen was far from the best; but he was in no humour to spare either his horse or himself, if by any exertion he could gain an hour in reaching his destination.

He skirted Eldinhope and Gilmanscleuch, and by the time he had reached Altrive the day had deepened into a dark gloaming. He took the bridle path through the forest for Tushielaw Tower, following closely the

course which afterwards became known as the King's Highway, in consequence of its being the route taken by King James V. on his memorable incursion upon the Border freebooters.

Elliot's teeth were firmly set, but his heart throbbed quickly, for he dreaded to think of what might be the result of his delay. Bitterly he reproached himself for his lack of caution in drinking the wine which had been served him in the presence of a man whose conduct had been so suspicious; bitterly he reproached himself for thinking of bite or sup before he had executed his mission and released his friend.

He hoped, and yet he feared to hope, that some whim or some happy chance had made Tushielaw pause in the completion of his vengeance. But when he remembered the character of the Borderer and the objects which quickened his passion, he felt as if hope were vain. He ground his teeth and spurred the wearied horse forward.

At length Crosslie was left behind him, and the gloomy tower of the riever loomed above him like a black shadow on the landscape. Impatiently he urged the horse up the hill, and hailed the warder whilst he was still approaching the gateway.

Lights gleaming from loophole and window indicated that there was life within, although the echo of his halloo died upon the night unanswered.

He reined up and repeated his summons, accompanying it with a clatter upon the gate with the hilt of his sword. Still no one responded, but the rapid movement of lights within denoted that he had been heard, and that—whether caused by his arrival or not—some confusion prevailed. Persisting in his clamour he succeeded in bringing forth no less a personage than Pate Scott the giant.

“What are ye deavin’ us for, an’ wha the deil are ye?” growled Ding-a’-doon, who was in his surliest humour.

“I bear a message to your master from

the King, and I charge you in his name to give me instant entrance.”

“Gin ye were the King himsel’ I wouldna open until it was the master’s will. What’s your errand?”

“That Tushielaw shall know.”

“By what token am I to ken that ye come frae Edinbro’ and are nae a spy o’ the Johnstones or Maxwells?”

“By the token that I, unattended, am willing to trust myself within your den. I will satisfy your chief that I have good warrant for seeking him; so, if ye be not afraid of a single man, I charge you in the King’s name open.”

“Afeard!” was the scornful exclamation of Pate; “gin ye were doubled a hunner times there’s nane in Tushielaw would care a bodle for your pith. But I wat ye’s hae to satisfy the chief or ye’s no win oot sae ready as ye hae win in.”

The gates were opened and Gilbert rode into the Court. Armed men were hurrying about with torches in their hands as if

preparing for some event; and a number of horses harnessed and ready for the road stood on the west side waiting the riders. Other horses were being led to the stables, and there was an appearance of bustle and hurry as if one party had just returned from a raid and another was about to start on one.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LION AND THE FOX.

“What can man speak that I would shrink to hear,
And where the danger I would deign to shun?
What should appal a man inured to perils?
Like the bold climber on the crags of Ailsa,
Winds whistle past him, billows rage below,
The sea-fowl sweep around with shriek and clang :
One single slip, one unadvisèd pace,
One qualm of giddiness—and peace be with him !
But he whose grasp is sure, whose step is firm,
Whose brain is constant—he makes one proud rock
The means to scale another till he stand
Triumphant on the peak.”

SCOTT'S *Auchindrane*.

ABOUT an hour previous to the arrival of Gilbert at the Tower, Tushielaw, with half a dozen men straggling somewhat behind him, galloped up to the gateway. His own

appearance and that of his followers indicated that they had been riding far and unsuccessfully, for their clothes and horses were bespattered with mud. The chief's visage was dark with anger, and the gloomy silence in which he rode had infected the others so, that they looked as glum as if they expected to lose their heads or their supper.

His imperative and impatient summons—well known to the warder—rang loudly from his hunting horn, and was echoed and re-echoed down the glen. As if the horn had possessed some magic power, the gates flew open on the instant.

The chief found waiting for him there one whose humour seemed not a whit more pleasant than his own. Its expression, however, was different. Whereas a thunder-cloud hung upon the brow of the Borderer, warning all who might approach him to pass on, the brow of the other was placid, and only a sneering curl of the lip and a quickness of accent betrayed that chagrin he

felt. His garb was that of a courier; his face was that of Heron Barras, now Lord of Binram, in right of succession to his late uncle.

He was alone in the great hall. A fire blazed upon the hearth, and illumed the huge black rafters above, whilst the farther corners looked like ghostly shadows frowning upon him. Wine was on the bench, and Barras appeared to have used it freely, although it had not robbed him of any of his wicked wits.

“’Sdeath,” he cried, upon the entrance of Tushielaw. “I thought the foul fiend had laid hold of you before our work was done.”

“That would have been your loss,” growled the chief, darkly.

“So ho! comrade, there’s an ill wind somewhere. Mayhap it blows one of us good,” said Barras, in a lighter tone than before, and scanning his companion’s face curiously. “Where is your prisoner?”

“Gone to the devil.”

“Glad to hear that. I’ve been waiting

here for you all day, fretting mightily at the tardiness of your pace from the city hither. I've had some of the lads seeking you right and left, and I've been cursing Craig for missing you on the road, when I had sent him after you with special tidings to finish our plague at once. But, by my sooth, I would have waited with right good will had I guessed that your delay was to so much purpose."

"You would have guessed wrong, then."

"How? Is he not dead?"

"Maybe."

As he made this laconic response, Tushielaw filled a bumper of wine, and quaffed it thirstily.

Barras examined him more curiously than before, his eyes twinkling with dissatisfaction.

"Maybe? Now what, in the name of our master the fiend, can that answer mean?" he said sharply.

"This—that he has escaped——"

"Perdition! Are you mad?"

“No; I say he escaped, closely as he was guarded, and fast as he was bound. But that’s not the end of the story.”

“If the end be not better than the beginning, you’ve made a blunder that may cost the head of one of us.”

“Humph! we’ll see about that. We had him fast as hemp could bind him, and there were eight of us to guard him.”

“Yet he escaped,” sneered Barras.

“We got on safe enough with him till we came to the Esk at Roseberry. It was dark there, as if the clouds had dropped down in a body on us: even me, who can see farther than most folk in the night, could barely see my horse’s head. But I was riding on, fearing no treachery, when I heard a bit of a scuffle, and souse gaed somebody into the water. I wheeled round, and as I did that there was another splash in the water, and this time I knew it was a horse.

“‘It’s Yetholm Will,’ shouted Pate, ‘an’ the chiel’s loose.’

“I swore: by some infernal trick Spens

had loosened every cord that tied him, tumbled Will into the water, syne gart the horse spang in with himself and cross to the other side. I was at his heels in a minute and the lads after me. He jinked us about the hills till nearly morning, but we kept close to him, and two or three times I nearly gript him. But the jade of a beast he had gotten had learned too well that a follower meant no favour to its rider and managed to keep ahead of us. When we began to get a glint o' morning I expected to trap him, but he cut across the country for the coast. A hard ride, and it was daylight when he got to the shore near some fisher-folk's huts. The horse tripped on the beach and fell. But, as if he had the lives and strength of half a dozen men, Spens was on his feet in a minute and louped down to the water's edge. There was a small boat lying half in and half out of the water—for the tide was up—and he launched it with one shove.

“He put off to sea, and rowed as never I saw man row before. But he had not gone more than twenty or thirty ells out when we were in the water up to the saddle-girths. There was only one chance of reaching him, and we took it.

“Three of us fired at him. He dropped his oar and tumbled back in the boat with a skirl that meant death, if ever I heard the cry of a man who had got a bullet through his heart. We stopped a while watching the boat as it drifted out to sea. We saw no sign of him rising again, and I thought my grudge against him was settled at last.

“But after a while, when the boat was gey far out at sea, we noticed a fishing-smack, as we thought, make up to it. The speck disappeared behind the fisher, and we could not tell whether it was caught or no, or whether, if it was caught, the man in it was living or dead. It was that doubt whilk angered me, and it was that doubt that made me say ‘maybe’ when you asked if he was dead.”

As he finished speaking the Master of Tushielaw refreshed himself with another draught from the wine stoup.

Barras sat with knit brow and arms folded reflecting upon what he had heard. He understood now why the Borderer returned in ill-humour, and why he had delayed. He thought, too, that there was some reason for the doubt which Tushielaw entertained as to the fate of his victim.

“He *should* be dead,” muttered Barras at length, “if you be not a worse marksman than I think you. At twenty ells you could not fail him.”

“Bah! I can split a goose-quill at thirty ells; and think ye I would miss a man at twenty?”

“Why, no; and we can cry gra'mercy to his soul. We are done with him if that be so. But why came you back with so black a face if you were sure of your mark?”

“By my hand, that passes my ken. I'm sure enow of the mark; but who

knows what help yon fisher brought him ? ”

“ Pshaw ! there’s no help for a dead man.”

“ Humph, that’s as may be ; but, whatever the cause, I’m ill at ease. This business seems to grow heavier on hand rather than lighter as we advance. Say the man is done for, the woman is as far off as ever.”

“ Not so far as you deem, mayhap,” said Barras, nodding significantly. “ I have a rare plan to bring her ladyship to submission, as you shall find.”

He had no plan ; but he saw that his comrade was wavering, and that it was necessary to throw in a fresh bait to stimulate him to further action. It was imperative for his own selfish ends that Tushielaw should continue to be his friend and tool.

Throughout their conspiracies he had cunningly contrived to play upon the strong rough nature of the Borderer, so that whilst impressing him with the no-

tion that they were moving forward to a mutual advantage, he was really using him as the instrument to effect simply his own gain. Subtle as a fiend and as callous, he had hitherto succeeded in leading Tushielaw very much as he desired.

Certain concessions he made to him ; but they were concessions which cost nothing. He sold him his sister ; but he was utterly devoid of the least grain of sentiment which could have made that a sacrifice. He had agreed to let him have Halstane ; but he knew there was no chance of his ever obtaining it. So he could easily gift it away when the gift helped him well toward the great object of his ambition—the lordship and lands of Binram.

So far his infernal cunning had been almost completely successful, and so far Tushielaw had no suspicion that he was merely a tool in another's hand. Tushielaw had brute force enough to have felled an ox with one blow of his fist, or to have felled

the man dead had he suspected him of treachery ; he had rare skill in the use of arms ; he knew every step of the Border mosses, and could have crossed the Tarras blindfold ; there was no physical danger that could make him quail ; but he possessed not the least of that quick cunning which suspects and seeks out motives. He had little more skill in reading faces than in reading books. He knew when a man was angry or sad, but no more.

The chances are that under favourable circumstances this renowned riever would have been an honest and industrious yeoman. But, moving under the subtle influence of Barras, he became a great muscular power in evil.

“ Ay, ay,” looking at the fire as if he saw some mystic warning there, “ you may have plans and plans, but I am coming to think that there’s no good luck in the work. Since ever it commenced I have had no rest by day or night ; yet here am I not one jot better for my fash.”

“ What, man, is that the white feather I see where your basnet should be ? ”

“ Damn ! ” growled Tushielaw, bringing his clenched fist down furiously on the board and making it ring again. “ A man who has never shown a foe his back may fairly blanch when he finds himself in the lists with fate—for it is fate we are fighting against, not men.”

“ Spens is dead.”

“ We have not seen the end of him yet mayhap, for all that.”

“ Bah ! you grow timid at shadows.”

“ Shadows ?—look you, master, what the shadows are. The dame, my mother, when she placed the dish wi’ the siller spurs forenent me meant that I should ride, and I went out to harry Halstane. But when the dame heard that I brought the cattle and the lady too, she flew off to Harden, bidding me mind the prophecy.”

“ And you laughed at her. Right ; for it is an old woman’s tale that the doitered creature of Merlin’s Cairn has spread about.”

“ No, I did not laugh at her ; but I did not heed. You mind how the prophecy was repeated that night before I took the lady to Selkirk ? ”

“ Ay, but it was a trick that I’ll fathom ere I die.”

“ Trick or no trick, it had a meaning ; for bad luck followed it, and worse belike is to come after. Again, with the stripling Elliot you would not have me meet him fairly in the lists when my good lance would have carried the day. You smuggled him here ; you buried him in the depths of the keep ; and lo ! stone walls and stanchions are of no avail, for he passes scatheless through them all.”

Barras smoothed his chin and gnawed his lips with evident chagrin.

“ I grant you, there you hit me hard ; but it was mere chance, as we found, when we broke down the door ; he had touched the spring of the trap, the water was high and bore him along till some meddling fool picked him out.”

“ And it was chance, too, you will say, that brought him a free pardon when by your influence with Angus he was condemned to death. It was mere chance, too, that saved him from the bullets that were fired with good aim at his breast by a dozen steady-handed soldiers ? ”

“ All mere chance.”

“ So it may be,” said the Borderer, darkly superstitious. “ You may call it chance, but I call it fate, and so I have a mind to throw up my hand—for it’s ill warring wi’ the wind.”

For a few minutes Barras remained silent, meditatively smoothing his chin with one hand whilst the other played uneasily with his courier’s bugle.

Tushielaw had taken a seat, and, with elbows resting on his knees, his grisly-bearded face upon his hands, he sat staring at the fire. Dour and dark he looked, as if the hand of Fate was already closing upon him. His form and attitude contrasted strangely with the spare sinewy figure and

cunning face of his companion. It was the lion and the fox in conclave.

“ You have a mind to give up ? ” said Barras at length, deliberately. “ Well, you’re a fool.”

Tushielaw started angrily, checked himself, and responded with a growl—

“ To your thinking, maybe.”

“ And you are false to your pledged word,” pursued the tempter calmly.

The chief started to his feet as if with intent to fall foul of his traducer, but as before he checked his passion.

“ Faugh ! ” he growled fretfully ; “ you lie, and you know it ; a Borderer’s word once pledged is sacred to friend or foe.”

“ Then you are forsworn,” persisted Barras with irritating coolness.

“ Say how or where my word has failed and I’ll right it—ay, if it were to hack this right hand from the wrist.”

The fox smiled quietly, for his point was achieved.

“ You shall hear, and say then if I have

wronged you when you tell me that you mean to throw up our work."

"I'll hear first."

"When Wat Spens was prisoner at Newcastle I managed to take from him his left-hand gauntlet. I gave the gauntlet to you and told you the import it would bear when presented to his lady. As you took the gift, you swore to stand firm by me to the end of my venture, were it good or ill. Say I not sooth, then, that you are forsworn—that a Borderer's troth is broken if you desert me at my sorest need?"

"That shall you never say," cried the Borderer, hotly. "Since you put me to't, I'll hold to my word although my head go for it."

"Spoken like Scott of Tushielaw," exclaimed Barras, admiringly. "Now I can open my heart as to my chosen comrade, from whose fortunes mine are inseparable, whose success is my success, and whose failure is mine too. We have work before us."

“What in the fiend’s name is it, then?”

“A light enow matter as it stands at this minute, but it may grow serious if we do not nip our thorn ere it grows. That stripling Elliot is on his way hither.”

“How many followers has he?”

“None.”

“None, and he comes here?”

“Ay; he comes with some silly notion that he can save Spens from your hands,” responded Barras carelessly, for he did not wish his ally to know that Gilbert’s errand was commissioned by the King.

“Save my prisoner from my hands? On what argument?”

“The saints alone can guess. But he is a silly boy who comprehends little of men and their ways.”

“He has a stout arm none the less; so much I’ll say for him.”

“All the more reason why he should never return to Edinburgh to bring further harm on you and me. I marvel much that he has not denounced me before

this; but doubtless he is biding his opportunity."

"But he has some favour at Court, and I do not care to have him poignarded here."

"There is no need. Let him go safely forth. Now, by my faith, yonder signal came from him. I made him tarry on the way against his will, but he has made good use of time."

"What shall I answer him?—that Spens is dead?"

"No, keep that hidden. He must not see me. I'll stand behind the arras and prompt your answers when need is. Call Pate."

When the giant appeared, Barras gave him certain hurried directions. Then had commenced that hurrying to and fro, and those preparations as for a foray, which Gilbert observed in the court.

Neither Barras, Tushielaw, nor Ding-a'-doon noticed the broad face of Hornie, the dwarf, grinning down upon them from the cross-beam above the bulge of the chimney.

He had reached this eyrie by means of a small trap in the wall communicating with the lower staircase, and saw and heard unnoted.

Whatever mischievous purpose he might have in view, the little man seemed to enjoy his position immensely.

“Why, there is that cunning varlet, Barras the bastard,” he said to himself, smothering one of his great guffaws, “thinks he is pulling the strings of the puppet, my master, beautifully; and my master thinks he pulls the strings of the puppets about him, while here am I—poor wee me, deformed and mocked at, yet can make these big fools caper as the humour takes me. There’s a purpose in it, too, though it be rare sport enough.”

He had, in fact, an earnest purpose in his occupation, and he was earnest in fulfilling it; although he grinned as broadly at the sense of the power he wielded as if he had been taking a game at romps. In compensation for a deformed body, he

seemed to be gifted with a rare intelligence and a rare buoyancy of spirits, which enabled him to feel grave things gravely, yet smile as calmly upon them as if he had found the secret of that philosophy which teaches how to make the best of the worst. That is a philosophy of more service than ever the great stone could have been had it been found.

Hornie disposed himself comfortably in his shadow-screened eyrie to note the proceedings below. At the same time Barras took his stand behind the arras, and a score of troopers entered the hall.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEARDING THE LION.

“ His men were a’ clad in the grene,
The knight was armed capapie,
With a bended bow, on a milk-white steed ;
And I wot they ranked richt bonnilie.
Thereby Boyd kenned he was master-man,
And served him in his ain degree.

“ God mot thee save braw outlaw Murray,
Thy ladye and all thy chivalrie.”
“ Marry thou’s welcome, gentleman,
Some King’s messenger thou seemis to be.”

Song of the Outlaw Murray.

UNDER the guidance of Ding-a’-doon, Gilbert was ushered into the hall. He saw Tushielaw standing surrounded by his followers all equipped, from the jack-boots to the leather caps, as if prepared rather for a

raid than the peaceable reception of a single guest. The chief alone was uncovered, and that was apparently by accident, not intent.

This warlike array seemed to promise an ominous issue to his mission; and Gilbert's pulse quickened, not on his own account, but on that of his friend. However hostile their purpose toward himself might be, he never gave a thought to his own peril. He had on a former occasion observed several bodies on what was called the "gallows tree," which stood in front of the tower, and served to execute the victims of the chief's wrath or malice.

He did not even think of that now. His whole mind was occupied with the one question whether or not he was in time to rescue the life of Spens.

Gilbert doffed his hat and saluted the chief — a little haughtily, perhaps, but courteously nevertheless. He did not wish to anger Tushielaw, but it required an effort to be civil.

“ I salute you, Adam Scott ; and in the King’s name demand that the prisoner you brought from the Castle at Edinburgh be delivered safely to me, on peril of his Majesty’s displeasure, and the forfeiture of all that you possess.”

“ I salute you, Gilbert Elliot ; but, by the Rood, you speak somewhat fast for one so young,” said Tushielaw, gruffly. “ Had any spoken so pert to me elsewhere than under my own roof-tree, he had danced for it ere now.”

“ Here is no question of years or courtesy, Tushielaw. I have spoken on the will of my master and yours—the King. I wait your answer.”

“ Before you may receive that, I must first learn what the questions be. Who is the man you seek ? ”

“ Sir Walter Spens of Halstane, as well you know.”

“ What would you have with him ? ”

“ That you resign all charge over him, and deliver him to me.”

“*Ask his authority,*” whispered the voice behind the arras.

“Softly, softly; you are fast again. I have no wish to make your journey hither a barren one; but before I can resign to you a charge intrusted to me by those who represent the King, you must say on what authority you make the demand.”

“I make the demand in the King’s name, from whom I bear the pardon of the good knight Sir Walter Spens.”

Gilbert spoke in a firm authoritative voice; and at mention of the free pardon Tushielaw started uneasily. He had as little desire at that moment to set the Royal authority at defiance as to deny submission to the King’s own mandate.

“*Bid him show it you,*” said the voice, quickly.

The chief recovered himself.

“You have the pardon scribed, surely. Show it me.”

“It is here.”

Gilbert thrust his hand into the breast of

his doublet to produce the precious document. But it was not there; and his face flushed, his lips quivered with dismay. He searched every portion of his garments where he might have stowed it without avail.

He stood speechless and horror-stricken. He had indeed blundered, since he had lost the instrument for which he had striven so hard, and which alone could save the life of Spens.

As Tushielaw observed his movements, and the rapid change of his countenance from red heat to icy pallor, he entirely regained his own gruff self-assurance.

“Well,” he growled, impatiently, “where is the parchment?”

“I have been tricked—robbed,” cried Gilbert, in a choking voice; “the packet has been stolen from me.”

Tushielaw received the intelligence with a loud hoarse laugh.

“Think you, master, that I am a child, to be fooled by so poor a tale as that?”

“ I swear by our Holy Mother—by everything that is sacred in Heaven—a pardon was written for Spens under the special command of the King,” exclaimed Gilbert, excitedly; “ but I was trepanned in the hostelry at Peebles and the packet stolen from me.”

“ That may be and may not. I have no proof, and therefore I shall act as my own instructions direct.”

“ You will not credit my oath ? ”

“ I will not credit twenty oaths.”

“ You lie, Tushielaw: you know that I speak truth,” he cried passionately; then subduing his tone, “ But, I pray you, give me twenty-four hours; I will return within that space, and bring the pardon signed and sealed as was the one I have lost, or place my life at your disposal.”

“ It is so now.”

“ Say you? Then mark me: touch me and you shall find my sword can pierce your Border hides; harm but one hair on the head of Spens and the King himself

shall make your head the forfeit of your treachery."

"The King is King in Edinburgh, but I am King at Tushielaw," retorted the Borderer, proudly.

"If the King has loyal hearts in Scotland you shall find that he is King as much in Ettrick's Vales as in Edinburgh Castle. Make way there, in the King's name, and let me pass."

Half a dozen troopers had stepped between him and the door, and stood with Jeddart axes in rest as if resolute upon preventing his egress. His command made in his Majesty's name had not the least effect upon the moss-troopers, who had, in fact, come to think of the King as King at Edinburgh, and Tushielaw as King of the Borders.

Gilbert plucked his sword from its scabbard, and as it flashed round his head he shouted again, "Make way there, or by St. Andrew some of you will bite the dust. Make way!"

The troopers simply levelled their weapons so as to form a complete barrier.

A serious skirmish was like to ensue ; but whilst Gilbert, furious with indignation and maddened by the sense of his loss, paused an instant to see whether or not the men would give him passage, Ding-a' doon, at a sign from his chief, stole up behind him, pounced upon him and pinioned his arms in a vice-like gripe. Before he could even make an effort to extricate himself four men sprung upon him, and with cords, looped as if ready for the work, secured his wrists and legs.

He was a powerless prisoner in the space of time one might take to draw a long breath.

A moment of bewildered surprise was followed by an impotent attempt to burst his bonds. A few minutes' vain struggling and he stood panting, crimson, and conscious that he was in the power of an enemy.

“I should have foreseen this,” he said,

breathing heavily, his eyes flashing with scorn upon his conqueror; "I should have foreseen that naught but the treachery of the coward and knave was to be found in Tushielaw."

The chief smiled grimly.

"We can bear your silly taunts, for they are harmless as the roast-spit you wield."

"And yet you feared the spit enough to run from an encounter with it in open lists—you feared it enough even here to wrench it from me by a trick."

"By my hand, that lying tongue of yours has need of clipping," growled Tushielaw, smarting under the reference to the unfought trial.

"And that poltroon hide of yours has need of whipping," retorted Gilbert. "By St. Andrew, had I but one hand free, and fair favour, your black heart should know the point of my spit."

Under a word of warning from the arras Tushielaw regained the control of his temper, which he had been fast losing.

With a coarse laugh he said—

“You speak bravely enow, as all brag-garts do.”

“You shall find that there is meaning in the words if you will test me. But I waste words. Do with me as your false heart may purpose. This you may mind, however—my fate will not pass unnoted; for there are those who, failing my return, will know that I have met foul play at your hands. Then look to yourself.”

“Bah! What heed I for empty threats? What heed I if all Edinburgh turned out to seek you? And what would it benefit you if you were hanged before they found you?”

“I can die knowing that you shall not pass scatheless in murdering me.”

“I have a mind to try how far your friends would pass on Yarrow Braes or through Ettrick Vales without a pass from me. But as I have borne your hot words calmly by allowing for your youth and passion, on the same score I'll let them

pass unpunished that you may know me better. Look you now, Master Elliot, how much breath you have wasted; I meant you no harm, and you shall go hence sound as you came hither. I but wished to make you feel that in Tushielaw your life hung on the bend of my finger."

Gilbert was more amazed by this turn of affairs than by the treachery which had captured him so easily. He was still suspicious, however, and remained silent.

"You doubt me," the chief went on. "Well, I make no marvel anent that; but you may doubt me more, mayhap, before I am done. Know, then, I pledge the word of a Borderer to you not to raise a finger against Spens or to let man of mine attempt to hurt him till the second sunrise hence."

"In half that time I shall be back here with the pardon," cried Gilbert eagerly, and thrown entirely off his guard by being released from his bonds and having his sword returned to him.

"That we shall see; but meanwhile I

must be held blameless in this affair," proceeded Tushielaw; "my despatches are distinct, and if I for a time waive fulfilment of their behests you must give me some authority to show for it."

"What token can I give you that will satisfy you?"

"Sit you down there and write me a statement of how you lost the King's despatch, and how I have agreed, in my respect for his Majesty, to wait your return."

Gilbert willingly wrote as he was desired, and rose from the board without suspecting the import of the document he had indited. Of course, Tushielaw would only have to show this to prove that Master Elliot had quitted the tower in safety.

"I can go now?"

"Freely; but you will break bread with us or drain a cup of wine?"

"Neither, till I have redeemed the wrong I have done Spens?"

Ding-a'-doon conducted him from the hall. His horse as in the court, fastened

to the bridle by an iron ring. The bustle and life he had found there on his entrance had disappeared. The court was silent, sad, and deserted.

His guide, with a torch casting a lurid glare around them, was leading the way to the gate when Gilbert, who had mounted, felt something touch his feet. He glanced down and saw the dwarf Hornie, who had apparently something to communicate in secret, as his finger pressed warningly on his lip betokened.

Gilbert bent down to hear; the movement was observed by Ding-a'-doon, and he turned round. The dwarf, however, avoided him by slipping swiftly under the horse. Whether the giant suspected anything or not, he continued to walk beside the horse till they were across the court.

The moment, however, he advanced to open the gate, Gilbert stooped. Hornie darted forward out of the darkness and whispered—

“'Ware the glen at Gilmanscleuch.”

He had no time to say more, for Ding-a'-doon threw the gate open and stood aside to let the rider pass.

“A safe journey to ye, master,” said the giant grimly, “though the night be dark and the road a lonely one.”

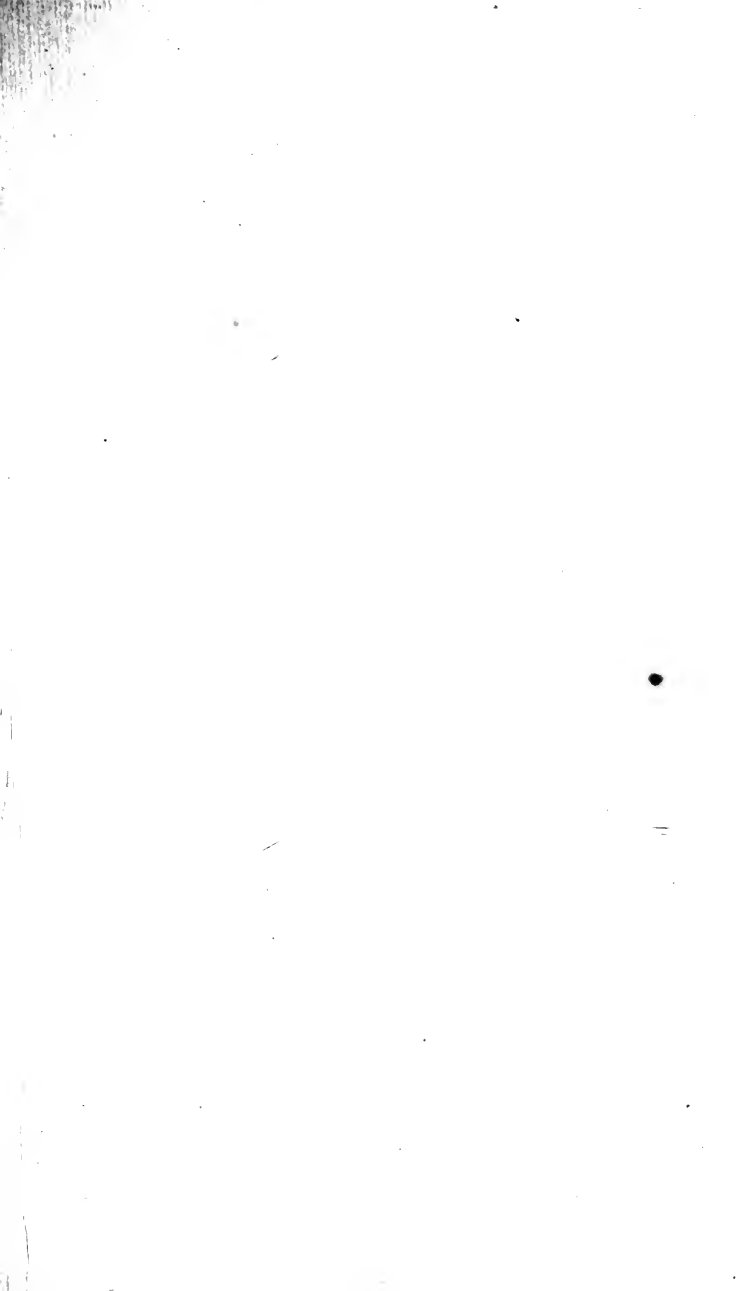
“It shall be a safe one, though, under favour of the Holy Mother; and a gay one in the hope of a profitable issue to my dealings with your master.”

As Gilbert spoke he pricked his horse sharply with his spurs, and proceeded at a gallop down the declivitous path.

END OF VOL. II.







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