GRANT JAMES

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

James Grant

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Содержание

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PREFACE

Many of the scenes and episodes which are delineated in the following story are taken from the annals of Scotland.

Those which belong to romance I leave the reader to discover.

My wish has been to portray the state of the nation and its people during the reign of the second James, without afflicting the reader by obsolete words and obscure dialects, which few now care about, and still fewer would comprehend, but following history as closely as the network of my own narrative would permit.

In some of the proceedings of the Douglas family, and minor details, it has suited my purpose to adhere to other sources of information, rather than the "Peerage," or the folio of Master David Hume, of Godscroft, the quaint old historian of the House of Douglas.

March, 1862.

CHAPTER I
THE FOUR COFFINS

God save the king, and bless the land
In plenty, joy, and peace;
And grant henceforth that foul debate
'Twixt noblemen may cease. —
Chevy Chase.

On the evening of the 22nd November, 1440, the report of a brass carthoun, or cannon-royale, as it pealed from the castle of Edinburgh, made all who were in the thoroughfares below raise their eyes to the grey ramparts, where the white smoke was seen floating away from the summit of King David's Tower, and then people were seen hastening towards the southern side of the city, where the quaint old streets and narrow alleys opened into the fields, or the oakwoods of Bristo and Drumsheugh.

Crowds from all quarters pressed towards the Pleasance, the route by which the great earl of Douglas (duke of Touraine and lord of Longoville), who had been invited to visit the young king, was expected to enter the city. Curiosity was excited, as it was anticipated that his train would be a brilliant one. All in the secluded metropolis of the north were on tiptoe to behold a sight such as they had not been gratified with since the ambassadors of Amadeus VIII., duke of Savoy, had come to ask the hand of the king's little sister, Annabella, for his son, the valiant Louis Count de Maurienne, to whom, however, she preferred a Scottish earl, with a Scottish home, on the bonnie banks of the Clyde.

The boom of the same cannon brought to the bartizan of the great tower whereon it stood four armed men, who immediately turned their eyes towards the south.

Two of these were men well up in years. They wore furred caps of maintenance, denoting their high rank or position, and had long crimson robes, with capes of ermine that fell to their elbows. Beneath these flowing garments there glittered at times their steel habergeons, and the embroidered belts which sustained their swords.

One was a man of a tall figure and noble presence, with a long, grave, and pleasing face.

The other was equally noble in bearing, but his face was less pleasing in expression, for his temples were hollow, his eyes keen, his brows knit, and there played about his thin, cruel lips a crafty but courtly smile.

"Summon Romanno, the constable; bid him display the king's standard – call the garrison to their arms – shut gates and barriers," were the orders given rapidly by both at the same moment.

The first was Sir Alexander Livingstone, of Callendar, Regent of Scotland, and governor of the young king, James II., then in his eleventh year.

The second was Sir William Crichton of that ilk, the Lord Chancellor, appointed by the Parliament, after the murder of the late King James I., in the Black Friary, at Perth.

"Red-haired Achanna, with his Judas-coloured red beard, has played his cards well for us and for the king," said the Chancellor, with a crafty smile.

"Achanna," replied the Regent, grimly; "yes, a wretch born with the stamp of hell on his forehead – a hireling clerk, as well as swashbuckler."

"But a useful man withal, and said to be a go-between of Douglas and Duke Robert of Albany."

James Achanna, the person to whom they referred, was a red-haired and red-bearded gentleman, of Galloway, outwardly a stanch adherent of Douglas, but in the secret pay of his enemies, the Regent and Chancellor. Thus he had conveyed the artful message by which the hostile earl, and the chief members of his family, were *lured* to visit the court of the young king.

"So he is in sight at last," said the Regent through his clenched teeth; "do you see his train, my lord?"

"Aye; on the road by Kirk-liberton. He is coming down the brae in his bravery, with banner and spear, but that pride shall have a fall, for he comes to his doom."

"But, Chancellor, his countess and her sister," whispered the Regent; "they – they – "

"Well; what of them?"

"Must they too perish?"

"Let the whole brood perish at one fell swoop," was the fierce response, in a husky whisper. "Had they but one neck, I tell thee, Livingstone, it should be laid on the block that awaits the Douglas in the hall below us."

"Hush!"

"And wherefore hush?" continued the elder statesman, fiercely.

"Know ye not that Sir Patrick Gray loves the earl's cousin?" said the Regent, glancing hastily at their two companions, who stood a little way from them.

"Murielle Douglas," replied Crichton, grinding his sharp teeth; "well, be it so; but I shall give her a colder gudeman than the king's liege subject, and the Captain of his Guard – will God I shall!"

The Regent waved his gloved hand to impress the caution he wished his colleague to observe, and, as if afraid to trust his discretion further, withdrew to a corner of the rampart enclosing the summit of the great tower, which then formed the donjon or keep of the castle of Edinburgh; but ever and anon, as the gleam of arms flashed in the sunlight, on the green pastoral slopes of Liberton, they exchanged a deep and bitter smile.

Two handsome young men, who had not yet spoken, but who attended them and stood apart, were sheathed in complete armour, and wore the beautiful bascinets of that reign; these had a tube for the plume, and were encircled by a camaile like the old caps of the Templars. They had gorgeous military girdles and long swords, globular corslets, and wide hanging sleeves of scarlet cloth lined with yellow silk (the royal colours), depending from their shoulders; this was a very anomalous fashion with armour, but formed a portion of the military foppery of that day.

He with the short beard and black moustache, in the prime of strength and manhood, is Sir Patrick Gray, a younger son of the lord of Foulis, and *Captain of the King's Guard*; and he, the less in stature, the junior in years, with fair hair and merry eyes, is Sir Thomas MacLellan of Bombie, his cousin and friend, and lieutenant of the same guard, which the Regent had embodied to protect the person of the young king from the perils amid which his father had perished – perils which the house of Douglas seemed about to revive.

"Do you see, gentlemen, how the lances in his train glitter, as they come rank on rank over yonder long green brae?" said the Regent, turning round; "by my soul, Lord Chancellor, he has an escort that might befit a king!"

"A train of cut-throats, swashbucklers, and scrape-trenchers; MacDouals, MacGhies, Achannas, and MacCombies – "

"Chancellor, do not add MacLellans, I pray you," interrupted the lieutenant of the guard.

"The broken men of Galloway," continued the Chancellor, wrathfully; "the bullyrooks of Thrave – outlaws, whose unchristian acts would put to shame the pagans of Argier or Cathay – of the Soldan or Prester John! and I say so, under favour, Sir Thomas," he added, turning with a sudden smile to the lieutenant, who was chief of the MacLellans of Bombie, a powerful family, whose lands were surrounded by those of the Douglases and their adherents.

"Do you include the Lord Abbot of Tongland among those rare fellows?" asked Sir Thomas, who was piqued for the honour of his native province.

"An abbot who acts as the earl's beadsman can be little better," was the sour reply.

The young man bit his moustache impatiently, but the more politic Regent, to soothe the irritation which his colleague's words were inspiring, said hastily to one who had hitherto been silent,

"Sir Patrick Gray, how many followers think you, by your soldier's eye, the earl hath under his banner yonder?"

"At least two thousand men, with horse and spear, if I may judge by the breadth of the road, and the cloud of dust they raise," replied the captain of the guard, with soldier-like brevity and confidence.

"Two thousand!" muttered the Regent; "passing strong for a mere subject."

"Douglas never leaves his castle gates with less," said MacLellan; "and wherefore marvel? They are not so many after all for such an earl as Douglas, when the laird of Roslin's daughter never enters Edinburgh with less than seventy mounted gentlemen in her train, each clad in a velvet jupon, with a chain of gold at his neck."

"Two thousand lances," muttered the Chancellor also, stroking his shaven chin, for beards were only worn by soldiers at that time, and not always by them.

"And you have but three hundred men-at-arms in garrison here – billmen and cannoneers?" whispered the Regent.

"But they are all my own vassals, men bred under my roof-tree since they were boys of the belt; these, with a hundred pikes of the king's guard, are more than enough for our purpose, within a castle so strong as this," replied the Chancellor, whose pale lips quivered with the nervous fury he strove in vain to conceal from the two gentlemen who stood at the other corner of the bartizan; for a plot had been laid to destroy the mighty earl of Douglas, one of those dark, terrible, and sudden plots, which, under the name of *raids*, so frequently convulsed the kingdom of Scotland, and marked its martial annals with blood and crime, the only shadows that tinge a great and glorious past.

The soldiers, pages, and idlers of the castle who had been playing at troy, chess, or shovel-board, for the bonnet pieces and silver pennies of King James, relinquished their sport, and crowded to the ramparts to observe the approach of the now obnoxious and turbulent Douglas.

And now, for a time, these four persons described continued to observe in silence the approaching train of the great feudal peer, the lances of whose vassalage (among them were many knights, barons, and gentlemen of his surname) glinted brightly in the evening sun, as they moved down the northern slope of Liberton, past the old tower built by David Liberton, sergeant of the overward of the constabulary of Edinburgh, in the time of David II., and past the older church, the foundation of which fond tradition unvaryingly ascribed to Macbeth, though, mysteriously enough, on its demolition in 1815, there was found in its base an iron medal of the 13th century, inscribed in Russian characters, "*The Grand Prince St. Alexander Yaroslavitch Neffvskoy*."

On the earl's train disappearing among the wooded hollows which lay between the city and the furzy slope of Braid and Liberton, the captain of the guard and his kinsman the lieutenant, with their esquires, pages, and lacqueys passed forth from the castle, to swell the retinue of the chief magistrate of the city, Sir Thomas Cranston of that ilk, baron of Denholm and Stobs, warden of the marches, and one of the conservators of peace upon the borders, for the steel-gloved provosts of those stirring times were men of a different metal from the men of words, who "twaddle" in the same place in this age of steam and electricity.

As they passed out, the king's master butcher entered the gateway of the fortress, accompanied by a peddie or foot-boy, bearing a covered bundle upon a trencher.

This covered bundle contained a *black bull's head*.

"See you *that*, Sir Alexander?" said the Chancellor, twitching the furred sleeve of his compatriot.

"The black bull's head!" said the other, with an irrepressible shudder.

"Yes; for the banquet to-morrow."

"Holy Dame!"

"It is the fatal signal, to be placed on the table the moment the king rises."

"The king! Oh, Chancellor," said the Regent, in a voice that turned almost to a groan, "after all I have urged, mean you that he, poor boy, shall share the odium of our act – a deed at which one half of Scotland, and perhaps all France, may cry aloud?"

"Let them cry; the *end* shall sanctify the means. With Douglas in his grave, the great seal will be firmer in my hands, the sceptre lighter in yours, and the crown shall shine the brighter on the head of him whose father was wronged and slain by such as Douglas in the Black Friary at Perth."

"I pray God all may end as you predict," said the Regent, doubtfully; "but yet I shudder when contemplating this lure – this snare; the mock banquet, the mock tribunal, and the bloody lykewake of the morrow."

That night, after dusk, four coffins were secretly conveyed up the rock, and through the west postern of the castle, by James Achanna and other "muffled" or masked men, and these were concealed in the chancellor's private closet, the door of which opened off the great hall of David's tower.

These coffins were covered with crimson velvet and had nails, handles, and plates of gold, or at least of richly gilt work.

The first had the name of the most potent prince William, sixth earl of Douglas, third duke of Touraine, lord of Longoville, Galloway, Annandale, and Liddesdale, *qui obit 23rd Nov., 1440*, in his seventeenth year.

The second coffin bore the name of his younger brother, Lord David, *qui obit 23rd Nov., 1440*.

The third bore the name of his countess, Margaret Douglas, so famed for her beauty as the Fair Maid of Galloway, *qui obit 23rd Nov., 1440*, in her eighteenth year.

The fourth bore the name of his sister, Lady Murielle Douglas, two years younger, with the same fatal inscription, *qui obit 23rd Nov., 1440*.

Beyond these four coffins, in the gloom of that vaulted closet, were a grindstone, an axe, and a block.

We have opened our story on the evening of the TWENTY-SECOND November; thus we shall soon see with what intent these terrible objects were provided.

CHAPTER II
WILLIAM, DUKE OF TOURAINE

Vails not to tell each hardy clan,
From the fair middle marches come;
The Bloody Heart blazed in the van,
Announcing Douglas, dreaded name! —
Scott.

At this time the house of Douglas, one which in past ages had ever led the van of battle in the cause of Scottish honour and liberty, had attained the most exorbitant, and in that warlike and feudal epoch, dangerous power – a power that never ceased to menace the freedom of the people on one hand, and the independence of the throne on the other.

William, sixth earl of Douglas, and third duke of Touraine, had just succeeded to the vast possessions of his family by the death of his father, Archibald, who had been Lieutenant-General of Scotland, and Marshal of France, and who died at Restalrig, in 1439.

In his seventeenth year, William found himself master of all the princely heritage his warlike sire had left him, the earldom of Douglas, with the lordships of Bothwell, Annandale, and Liddesdale; the county of Longoville, and the dukedom of Touraine, "the garden of France."

To these he had added the principality of Galloway, the county of Wigton, and the lordship of Balvenie, by marriage with his cousin, Margaret, the Fair Maid of Galloway, a high-born girl of great beauty and spirit, who was one year his senior, and whose proud and fiery temper made her prove his evil mentor in many an act of folly and outrage; while Lady Murielle, the younger and gentler sister, whose loveliness was long embalmed in many a sweet old Galloway song, strove anxiously, but vainly, to avert them.

Even in that age of pride, vain of his lofty ancestry, which he could trace back through a long line of brave and loyal nobles to that Sholto Dhu-glas, the grey and swarthy warrior, who, in the eighth century, slew Donald of the Isles – rendered powerful by the vast number, the unity and rank of his vassalage, by the strength of his fortresses and extent of his territories, which included the richest and most important districts of the kingdom; hourly told by high-born and artful flatterers that he possessed wealth equal, and armed forces superior, to the king, this rash young noble had of late begun to assume all the state of a crowned head.

On the death of his father, he sent into France two ambassadors to Charles VII., to make his oath of fealty for the dukedom of Touraine.

These unwise envoys, Sir Alan Lauder, of the Bass, a knight of Lothian, and Sir Malcolm Fleming, lord of Biggar and Cumbernauld, were received by the French monarch with a degree of state and ceremony on which the Regent and Chancellor of Scotland, as guardians of its young king, could not fail to look with jealous eyes; thus, stifling their secret piques and heart-burnings, they resolved to coalesce for the public weal, and to watch, win, or CRUSH this warlike feudatory, whose power, ambition, and splendour overtopped the throne, and threatened to extinguish themselves.

On the other hand, flattered by the messages of Charles the Victorious, despising the Regent and Chancellor as mere knights of Lothian, the young earl became guilty of outrages, and evinced an arrogance, that made all tremble for the issue.

When he left any of his castles, he never rode with less than one or two thousand knights and horsemen in his train, all brilliantly armed and accoutred; and this haughty retinue frequently carried havoc, and always terror, wherever they appeared. His household was magnificent; he appointed his petty officers of state, and within his castle-halls of Thrave, Bothwell, and Douglas, held courts which rivalled the meetings of Parliament; while, to the many royal summonses sent him, scornful and

insolent answers, dictated by his friends, or rather by those who were the friends of his father, the knights Fleming and Lauder, were returned to the Regent and Chancellor.

Under his banner and name, his followers, many of whom were nobles, thus filled the land with outrage and tumult. The people were without protection and without redress, while the court of the young king was daily crowded by suppliants who cried for vengeance.

"There were," saith Lyndessy, in his Chronicles, "so many widows, bairns, and infants seeking redress for husbands, kindred, and friends, who had been cruelly slain by wicked murderers; siclike, many for hership, theft, and reif, that there was no man but would have had ruth and pity to hear the same. Soon murder, theft, and slaughter were in such common dalliance among the people, and the king's power had fallen into such contempt, that no man *wist* where to seek refuge unless he swore himself a servant to some common murderer or tyrant, to maintain himself against the invasion of others, or else gave largely of his gear to save his life, and afford him peace and rest."

Not content with having produced all this, the young duke, or earl, urged by his ambitious counsellors, dared openly to impugn the king's title to the crown, affecting to prefer the claims of his own uncle, Malise, earl of Strathearn, who was descended from Euphemia Ross, the second queen of Robert II.; and he intrigued with Robert Stuart, the exiled son of the king's uncle, the late Murdoch, duke of Albany, to subvert the Royal succession.

Sir Alexander Livingstone, the Regent, and Sir William Crichton, the Lord Chancellor, saw that a crisis had come in the affairs of the realm; that the throne and their own position must sink together beneath the overweening power of Douglas unless a dreadful blow were struck; and thus, with all the dark ferocity and stern subtlety of the age in which they lived, they prepared to *strike it*!

James Hanna, or Achanna, one of those smooth-tongued political villains, of whom Scotland has in all ages produced a plentiful brood – a wretch who for gold contrived to be a secret adherent and deluder of both parties, was despatched with a royal message to Douglas's castle of Thrave, in the name of the Regent and Chancellor.

In this mandate, which bore the privy seal of the realm, they "professed the highest esteem for the young earl's character, and a profound regret for the petty jealousies which had so long separated them. They anxiously and earnestly solicited his august presence at court that he might cultivate the friendship of his sovereign, now in his eleventh year, and lend his great talents and influence to the administration of affairs – while the presence of the countess and her sister, Lady Murielle, could not fail to shed some rays of splendour on the court, and be a source of joy to the young princesses, the sisters of his majesty."

This document, so fulsome when addressed to an almost untutored boy, added, that on the vigil of St. Catherine, a banquet in celebration of their friendship and the extinction of discord would be royally held in the great hall of the castle at Edinburgh.

The young earl smiled scornfully on hearing this missive read by the wily Achanna on his knees; but he tossed from his wrist a hawk with which he had been playing, and replied —

"My father never yielded to James I., nor will I to James II., and his two cock lairds of Lothian, who pretend to govern Scotland. Nevertheless, we shall mount and go, were it but to flaunt our bravery at court."

Sir Malcolm Fleming, of Cumbernauld, an old and faithful friend of his father, urged him to mistrust Crichton and remain among his followers; but the desire to dazzle his enemies by the splendour of his retinue, and the *arguments* of his kinsman, the earl of Abercorn, outweighed all that the more faithful and wary could advance.

And herein lay a secret which death might reveal to him; but in life he would never discover.

James the Gross, earl of Abercorn, had loved, but in vain, the beautiful Maid of Galloway, who preferred her younger and more handsome cousin, Earl William; but James was the next heir to the latter, if he and Lord David died without children: thus avarice, ambition, and revenge spurred him

on, and caused him to urge the immediate acceptance of the Chancellor's invitation, and *his* energetic advice, with the young earl's vain-glorious wish, bore down all the faithful Fleming could urge.

James Achanna was the villainous tool who worked for him in the dark; and herein was another secret; for Achanna had been a page to the father of the countess, and had loved her too.

This love had expanded suddenly, like a flower that blooms in a night under a tropical moon, and the coquette soon discovered it.

"You love me?" said she imperiously, reining up her horse, as they one day rode side by side near the loch of the Carlinwark.

"Yes," said the page, tremulously, and covered with confusion by the abruptness of the question.

"How old are you, James Achanna?"

"I am four-and-twenty, madam."

"You are but a boy," said she, laughing.

"I am six years *your* senior," he replied, gathering courage.

"And you think me beautiful?"

"Oh, madam!"

"At your age boys think all women beautiful. But, my presuming page, you must cease with this folly and learn to know your place, or it may be changed to one more exalted;" and she pointed with her riding-switch to a stone corbel called the gallows-knob above the gate of Thrave.

The cheek of Achanna grew deadly pale; he ceased the "folly;" but from thenceforth thought only of revenge, and afterwards entered readily into the scheme by which the Douglases were lured to Edinburgh.

Thus, summoning Sir Alan Lauder, his Master of the Horse, the young earl, with all the impetuosity of a pampered boy, ordered his train to be assembled, and set forth for the capital.

Achanna preceded him on the spur, and reached Edinburgh a day or two before him.

The reader will now begin to perceive why those *four* coffins were conveyed by him, under cloud of night, into the vaults of David's Tower; and why a black bull's head, the ancient symbol of sudden death and slaughter among the Celtic Scots, was concealed by the King's master-butcher in the cabinet of the Chancellor.

CHAPTER III
THE ENTRANCE

So many and so good
Of the Douglases have been;
Of one surname in Scotland
Never yet were seen. —
Old Rhyme.

Mounted on fine horses, the bridles and saddles of which were covered by elaborate steel and silver bosses, Sir Patrick Gray, Captain of the King's Guard, with his cousin and Lieutenant, Sir Thomas MacLellan, of Bombie, fully armed and equipped, rode down the steep path from the castle, and, traversing the town, proceeded towards the street by which the earl of Douglas and his train were expected to enter.

For small bonnets of fine blue Flemish cloth, they had relinquished their heavy bascinets, with their large plumes and velvet tippets, which were borne behind them by pages.

The Captain of the Guard was preceded by a mounted esquire, Andrew Gray, of Balgarno, bearing his banner *gules*, a lion rampant, within a border engrailed.

Save the black or grey-robed Dominicans or Franciscans, and priests of other religious orders, all the men of every rank who crowded the thoroughfares that led towards St. Mary's Wynd and the straggling street which ascended from thence to the convent of St. Mary de Placentia (whence to this day it is still named the Pleasance), were well armed with habergeons and caps of steel, swords, daggers, knives, and Jedwood axes – for the paths of life, even for the greatest and noblest in Scotland, were not strewn with roses in those days, but rather with briars in the shape of blades and spears, woes, wars, tumults, and turmoils, such as their descendants cannot realize in these our days of peace and good order.

Parting on all sides before the esquire, who bore the banner, the people made way for the Captain of the Guard, who with his kinsman joined the attendants of the chief magistrate, Sir Thomas Cranstoun, who was sheathed in complete mail – all save the head – and wore at his gorget a massive chain of fine gold, the links of which glittered among the white hair of his flowing beard.

He was bravely mounted on a great Clydesdale battle-horse; he wielded a heavy steel mace and wore a glittering jupon, on which were embroidered the arms of his family quartered with the triple castle of the city.

He was accompanied by all "the honest men" of the city (*honest* men meant tradesmen – but this was in 1440), preceded by the four baillies, the treasurer, the older corporations, such as the fleshers, the furriers, the cordiners, the candlemakers, and others, under their several devices and banners, and all armed to the teeth. These martial craftsmen lined the narrow and crowded wynd, and from thence up the broader High Street, by which the earl was expected to proceed direct to the castle.

And now, to swell the multitude, came several officers of state, accompanied by the heads of all the religious houses and the heralds of the king. Among them were William Lord Hay, the High Constable; Walter Halyburton, the Lord High Treasurer, and William Turnbull, a canon of Glasgow, who was Lord Privy Seal. Amid the buzz of the assembled multitude, on the varied colours of whose costumes the bright evening sunlight fell in flakes between the broken masses of the picturesque old streets, there were occasionally heard half audible expressions of anxiety for the issue of this noble's visit, as his family and vast retinue of military retainers were so dreaded for their petulance and turbulence, that all the booth-holders and craimers had closed their places of business and buckled on their armour to be ready for any emergency. In the same spirit the baillies wore shirts of mail under their velvet gowns, and the alarm increased rather than diminished when the Provost was heard to

say to Sir Patrick Gray – "I am glad the King's Guard are in readiness, for the wild men of Galloway and those scurvy thieves and bullyrooks of Annandale who follow the banner of Douglas, are certain to work mischief in the town."

Such was the state of feeling in Edinburgh when the long, glittering, and steel-clad train of the mighty Douglas was seen descending the slope past the convent of St. Mary, of which no relic now survives save a fine alabaster carving which represents our Saviour brought before the Jewish High Priest; and the excitement reached its height when the Provost put spurs to his horse and courteously rode forward to greet the noble visitor and bid him welcome to the city with fair words of peace, and to place himself upon his right – a condescension at which the surlier burghers murmured under their beards; for the Provost of Edinburgh, when within its boundary, takes precedence of all nobles, and rides on the right hand of a crowned sovereign only.

When the Provost rode forward, Sir Patrick Gray touched his horse involuntarily with his spurs to follow him; but MacLellan, who was chief of a Galloway clan at variance with the Douglases, arrested the impulse by grasping his bridle and saying hurriedly, – "Stay, kinsman, be wary."

"Wherefore?" asked Gray, with an air of annoyance; "for many months I have not seen Murielle."

"Then the greater reason to stay and make no advance at present."

"The greater reason!" reiterated the other, with increased surprise.

"Bear with me – but women often change their minds."

"Thou art a libeller; she will never change, at all events, and I shall risk – "

"The Regent's displeasure – the Chancellor's suspicions?" interrupted MacLellan, with a smile.

"You are right," replied Gray, checking his horse, while his nether lip quivered with annoyance.

"Listen, kinsman," resumed MacLellan, "this Provost may leave his place, knight and baron though he be, to speak well and fairly this great lord, whose train of lances fill his burgess-wives with fear lest latches be lifted, booths broken, and goods and gear be harried in the night; but *you*, who bear the king's colours on your surcoat, must not make any such advance, especially at such a time as this, when Douglas, like his father before him, hath acted the bullyboy to all Scotland."

"The advice is good, MacLellan," said the captain with a sigh; "but still, will not Murielle expect that I – I should – "

"Approach her?"

"Yes – it is the merest courtesy."

"No; she must be aware that your place is beside the High Constable, who, after our politic Provost here, represents the King."

"Hush! here come the archers – some of your wild Scots of Galloway."

"Wild though you term us," said MacLellan, laughing, "we rough Galwegians lead the line of battle – our privilege long before the field of Northallerton became the grave of ten thousand Scotsmen."

The archers who headed the earl's train were now passing among the crowd, and a band of most picturesque looking desperadoes they were. In number about eighty, they had short bows in their hands, with swords and axes in their broad leather girdles. They were bare-kneed and bare-armed, with long bushy beards and thick matted hair (which had never known a comb) falling in shaggy volumes from under little helmets of steel. In some instances they wore caps of boiled leather, fashioned to the shape of the head, and crossed with a wicker work of iron bands for defence. They wore socks of untanned deerskin, and pourpoints of coarse grey stuffs, with kilts and mantles; and here and there might be seen one, who, by the eagle's wing in his cap, claimed to be of gentle blood; for these hardy and rudely clad warriors were the lineal descendants of those *wild* Celts of Galloway, who, since Corbred Galdus, king of Scotland, was slain by the Romans at Torhouse, had the privilege of leading the van of the Scottish hosts in battle.

After them came the earl's confessor, John Douglas, Abbot of Tongland (accompanied by his crossbearer, his chaunter, and three priests), a learned old churchman who had long favoured a very strange project for the especial behoof of his Satanic majesty; but of this more anon.

Next came James Douglas (by his habits surnamed *the Gross*), earl of Abercorn and Avondale, a powerfully formed but bulky and obese man, with eyes and mouth betokening cruelty, pride, and wickedness. He was in full armour, with his barred visor up. He was surrounded by esquires, pages, and lacqueys, and his horse was led, for in his hands he bore aloft a vast cross-handled sword, with a broad wavy blade.

This was the weapon whilome wielded in the wars of Bruce by the Black Knight of Liddesdale, "The Flower of Chivalry;" and now it was borne as a palladium, or sword of state, before his more aspiring descendant.

Hugh Douglas, earl of Ormond, similarly accoutred, but in black armour engraved with gold, bore the banner of his chief, a wilderness of heraldic blazonry – azure, argent, or, and gules; but above all, over Galloway, Avondale, Longoville, and Touraine, shone the bloody heart of glorious memory – the symbol of that god-like heart which beat in victory at Bannockburn, and lay cold with the "Good Sir James," amid the Moorish host of Teba. It was topped with an imperial crown and the three stars; the paternal coat of Douglas, with the motto – "*Jamais arrière*."

By his side rode Sir Malcolm Fleming of Cumbernauld, and Sir Alan Lauder, of the Bass, who had borne the young earl's vain-glorious and unwise embassy to France.

Eight knights of the surname of Douglas, who had won their spurs where *then* spurs only could be won, in battle, to wit, the Lairds of Glendoning, Strabrock, Pompherston, Pittendreich, Douglasburn, Cairnglas, Braidwood, and Glenbervie, all horsed and armed alike, the sole difference being the heraldic cadence of descent on their splendidly embroidered jupons and horse-trappings, bore on the points of their lances a canopy of blue silk tasselled and fringed with silver.

Under this princely canopy, the earl and countess – so the people preferred to call them, rather than the duke and duchess of Touraine – rode side by side on white horses.

They were very youthful, for the husband was only seventeen, and his wife a year older; but they had a stature and a bearing far beyond their ages.

"The Fair Maid of Galloway," as she was still named, though a wedded wife, was a dark-haired, black-eyed, and beautiful girl of a proud and imperious aspect, nor could the grace of her lovely head and neck be hidden by the grotesque horned head-gear which towered above her young brow and waved upon her shoulders, glittering with gold and spangles. She wore a long dark yellow riding robe, trimmed with black wolf's fur, and having hanging tabard sleeves, under which could be seen the sleeves of her inner dress, which was cloth of silver, for this was the age of profusion.

The boy-earl, her husband, wore a suit of light-tilting armour, which, though polished as bright as new silver, was almost concealed by his jupon, which was cloth of gold. His helmet was borne by the page who led his horse; and his dark curls and swarthy visage glowing with youth, pride, and satisfaction, his dark sparkling eyes and haughty bearing evinced, how, like his cousin and wife, he inherited the blood of the Black Lord of Liddesdale.

When the people saw this handsome young noble and his lovely countess riding thus side by side in all the flush of youth, the pride of rank, and feudal splendour, under that gorgeous canopy upborne by those eight gold-belted and gold-spurred knights of high degree, they forgot and forgave all the wrongs and oppressions they had committed, and prayed aloud "that God and St. Mary might sain them and bless them;" but when young Lord David came, riding beside Lady Murielle, and holding the bridle of her pretty bay palfrey, the hushed applause broke forth, for, as a younger sister and unwedded maid she had no canopy over her charming head, so the sunshine of heaven fell freely on her fair young brow, which had no horned head-dress to conceal it, but only a little blue silken hood and a golden caul to confine her beautiful hair.

Gray and MacLellan bowed low and kissed their ungloved hands to the sisters as they passed.

Both ladies changed colour for a moment, but the youngest most deeply and painfully, for she at first grew very pale. Those who were acute in noting such indications of inward emotion might have discovered nothing save vexation or annoyance in the eyes of the countess, and the flush of tremulous pleasure in the returning blush of Murielle, on suddenly meeting a lover whom she had not seen for many months. But the pallor of one and the flush of the other were keys to greater secrets. "Thank heaven, her companion is only that simpleton, little Lord David," said Gray, as his eyes followed hers; "when I saw by her side a gallant so bravely apparelled, I thought your croak about fickleness was about to prove prophetic, MacLellan."

CHAPTER IV
THE SISTERS

Her lips were a cloven honey cherrie,
So tempting to the sight;
Her locks owre alabaster brows
Fell like the morning light.
And, oh! the breeze it lifted her locks,
As through the dance she flew;
While love laugh'd in her bonny blue ee,
And dwell'd in her comely mou'.

The Lords' Marie.

A long train of nearly two thousand mounted spearmen, drawn from the Douglas estates in Lanarkshire and Galloway made up this splendid "following," as such a retinue was then termed; and as they wound up the long vista of the crowded street, Gray contrived to place his horse close to the bay palfrey of Murielle, and in a moment they exchanged a deep glance and a pressure of the hand, which explained what – in that age of little writing and no post offices – they had hitherto been unable to tell, that both were steadfast and true to the troth they had plighted at the three thorn trees of the Carlinwark on a moonlit St. John's Eve, when the countess thought her little sister was asleep in her lofty turret at Thrave.

"Do you pass forward to the castle to-night?" he asked Lord David, while fixing his glance on Murielle, for the question related to her.

"No!" replied the little lord, with haughty reserve.

"Whither then?" asked Gray, while a shade of annoyance crossed his handsome face.

"To the house of our kinsman, the abbot of Tongland; does that please you?"

"Good, my lord, I shall there pay my respects to the earl – and make all speed."

"Oh pray Sir Patrick, do not hurry yourself," was the jibing reply.

"Till then, God be wi' you," said Sir Patrick, checking his horse.

"Adieu," added Murielle, with another of her quiet glances; but the lord, her cousin, turned bluntly away, as the king's soldier wheeled his horse round, and with mingled love and anger in his heart remained aloof till the brilliant train passed on.

A group of handsome girls, nearly all of the surname of Douglas, Maud of Pompherston, Mariota of Glendoning, and others, accompanied Margaret and Murielle, as *dames d'honneur*, or ladies of the tabourette, to be educated and accomplished for the positions they were destined to fill in the world: "To be reared to gifts and graces, to silk embroidery, to ritual observances," and the courtly art of winning high-born husbands, in the household of the duchess of Touraine.

These girls managed their horses with grace, they were all beautiful and gay, but the two sisters of Thrave far exceeded them, though their loveliness differed like the tints of spring and summer.

Murielle's beauty was in some respects inferior to that of her proud and imperious sister, but it was of a more winning and delicate character. Though there were scarcely two years between them, Margaret seemed quite a woman, while Murielle was still girl-like, and in her merrier moods at times almost childish.

The abbot of Tongland relates in his writings, that when Lady Murielle was born at Thrave, she was so lovely a child that lest the fairies might steal her away, and leave in her cradle a bunch of reeds in her likeness, her mother secretly consecrated her to God; but convents were already on the decline, and old Earl Archibald of Douglas and Touraine, as her tutor, could not brook the idea with patience.

"And what news had Sir Patrick Gray?" asked the countess, coldly, as her horse came close to Murielle's during a stoppage caused by the pressure of the crowd.

"No news; nothing," replied Murielle, timidly, for her sister, from infancy, had insidiously usurped an authority over her, which habit had confirmed.

"Did he not speak?" asked Margaret imperiously.

"He merely made cousin David and me a reverence; little more, and passed on."

"After assuring himself, however, where he might be able to see *you* to-night," added cousin David.

"Are you not happy, Margaret, to find these citizens of the king receive us so well?" said Murielle, to change the subject.

"Dare they receive us otherwise?" asked the countess, while the eight bearded knights who bore her canopy exchanged approving smiles under their uplifted visors.

"Sister!"

"Well, sister! These baillies and deacons in their holiday gaberdines and worsted hosen – these websters and makers of bonnets and daggers – these grimy fourbissers, lorimers, and dalmaskers of iron, with their carlins in curchies and plaids, do well and wisely to cringe and vail their bonnets to-day."

"Wherefore?"

"Have we not two thousand horse marshalled under our banner?" said the young earl, who shared to the full the emotions of the haughty girl, his wife.

"True, my lord and cousin; but they might, like dour carles, bite their thumbs, and scowl at us from under their bonnets, for all our bravery," replied Murielle.

"'Tis a beautiful horse that roan of Sir Patrick Gray," said the earl; "and its housings are – "

"Gules and or," interrupted Murielle, for then all well-bred people knew the science of heraldry.

"His own colours, of course, and *not* the king's," said the countess, with an artful smile; "you laugh lightly, Murielle, because you love that man."

"Is it a sign of love to be merry?" asked Murielle, softly, while her fine eyes dilated with wonder.

"Nay, sister, 'tis more often a sign of love to be sad, and sad enough you were at times in Thrave. But please God and St. Bryde, dear Murielle, even in these stormy times, no cloud shall cast a shadow on any love of yours."

"Even if he be the Captain of the King's Guard," said little Lord David, with the spirit of a mischievous boy. His cousin coloured with an air of annoyance, but said smilingly, while holding up a tiny finger, "Oh fie, Davie, you had almost said – "

"The captain of our enemy's band of hirelings," said the fiery young earl, interrupting her; "and, under the royal favour, he would have said right. I know, sweet cousin, what my brother *thinks*, however he may speak, or not speak."

This unpleasant turn to the conversation caused the timid Murielle to shrink within herself, and the little lord was beginning to laugh maliciously when a sudden brawl ensued in the crowd, and Sir Malcolm Fleming, of Cumbernauld, on finding his horse incommoded by a group of magistrates and deacons, daringly struck one of the former on the head with the shaft of his lance, exclaiming, "Back, sirrah, back! By St. Bryde, I will rend the auld carle's beard frae his jaws!"

"A Douglas! a Douglas!" cried a horseman in a *closed* helmet, pressing briskly forward.

This man was Abercorn's creature, James Achanna, who, with his poleaxe, was ready to strike on *both* sides to ferment a brawl, by which the grand *coup* in the castle on the morrow might be anticipated.

"Armour – rescue!" cried a number of the armed craftsmen, pressing also forward with swords drawn and partizans lowered menacingly, as they were justly indignant at an affront offered to one of their magistrates.

A tumult would undoubtedly have ensued, for Lord David had drawn his little sword, and the young earl only laughed as if it were sport to see his knights maltreat the burghers, but the rising fray was quelled by his confessor, the politic old abbot of Tongland, who pushed his horse between the belligerents, and while waving a benison to the people with his right hand, by his left arrested the threatening lance of the irate laird of Cumbernauld. So thus the matter happily ended, and with this single untoward affair the earl and his train reached the town mansion of the abbot, which stood within spacious gardens on the southern slope of the Canongate, the way that led to the abbey of Holyrood; for as yet, the latter was simply an abbey house and church, and not until sixty-four years after was a royal residence added to the sacred edifice which King David (in honour of the fabled miracle by which his life was saved) founded of old, in the wild part of the forest, which was then nameless, or simply described as "the hollow between two hills."

"You look weary, sister," said the countess, as the earl kindly and gallantly lifted Murielle from her saddle in the court-yard of the abbot's house.

"The long journey of the day has tired me, but after a sound sleep I shall be fresh for morning mass in St. Giles to-morrow; for is not to-morrow the vigil of St. Catharine?"

"And the day of our banquet with the King, the Regent, and Chancellor."

"Alake that such trust should be!" muttered Sir Malcolm Fleming under his long white moustache.

"What, art croaking again, stout Cumbernauld?" said the earl, laughing; "who can say but the young king may fall in love with our Murielle, and make her queen of Scotland?"

The Douglas knights loudly applauded the surmise.

"How bright the sunset falls on yonder hill," said Murielle, colouring with annoyance; "how is it named?"

"Arthur Seat," replied Lord David.

"See how the rays fade upward, from rock to rock and rift to rift, as the sun sinks. It makes me think o our Galloway song," said Murielle, always a creature of impulse, as she kissed her sister and sang: —

"A weary bodies blythe when the sun gaes down,
A weary bodies blythe when the sun gaes down;
To smile wi' his wife and to dawt wi' his weans:
Wha wouldna be blythe when the sun gaes down?"

"Are you crazed, Murielle," said the Countess, with a smile of disdain, "to lilt thus before grooms and lacqueys?"

But the bearded knights of Galloway, who had now relinquished the silk canopy to their pages, laughed gaily and praised Murielle, whose charms and playfulness ever won the hearts of all.

The earl's numerous retainers stowed themselves away in the city, where they filled with noise and tumult all the hostelries which had been established by the late King James I.; while the buffoons, in parti-coloured caps and doublets, the plaided pipers, and bearded harpers, who had followed them, made the streets, which, after vespers, were usually quiet, a scene of continual mumming, with alternate music and discord, as they danced by torchlight before groups of citizens, who loitered at their forestairs, galleries, and arcades; and so the night of the 22nd November closed in, while the Regent's followers kept the gates of the castle securely guarded.

CHAPTER V
THE ABBOT'S HOUSE

Now gleams the moon on Arthur's mighty crest,
That dweller in the air abrupt and lone;
Hush'd is Edina in her nightly rest,
But hark! there comes a sweet and solemn tone,
The lingering strains that welled in ages gone.

The mind of Sir Patrick Gray was oppressed by vague doubts and apprehensions of – he knew not what. That the earl and countess were colder to him than when last they met he was painfully conscious by their absurdly haughty bearing, by the increased timidity of Murielle, and the undisguised petulance of her kinsman, perhaps her lover, the young Lord David.

Gray's love for Murielle was now no secret to the earl's powerful family, but being a poor younger son of the baron of Foulis, it was, as he bitterly knew, a matter of jest among the Douglases; for his whole inheritance were his sword and spurs, which he had won at the battle of Piperden, where the English, under Henry, earl of Northumberland, were defeated by the Scots under William Douglas, earl of Angus.

Moreover, Sir Patrick, by education, habit, and thought, was a staunch and loyal adherent of the young king, James II., as he had been of his father, who was so barbarously murdered at Perth; and thus, inspired by love and doubt, hope and fear, presuming upon the friendship of the abbot of Tongland, with whom he could "count kindred," through the MacLellans of Bombie, he presented himself at his mansion in the dusk, and was immediately ushered into the hall, or chamber of dais, where, as supper was over, a brilliant group, or rather several groups, were assembled.

The house of the abbot of Tongland (a wealthy monastery on the banks of the Dee, founded during the reign of David I., by Fergus, lord of Galloway, on his wedding the daughter of Henry, king of England,) was a quaint edifice, one portion of which had crow-stepped gables, and the other a battlement with singularly grotesque gurgoils, through the gaping mouths of which the rain had been disgorged upon the passers-by for centuries. An arch and great oak gate, furnished with a giant risp or tirling-pin of iron, guarded by six loopholes of warlike aspect, gave access to the house and its gardens, which sloped south towards the craigs of Salisbury.

The usual quiet and seclusion of the abbot's mansion were changed on this night for bustle, noise, and light; a crowd of pages, grooms, lacqueys, and armed men led saddled horses to and fro, or loitered about the entrance, while flakes of ruddy light fell through the deep windows of the chamber of dais upon the green shrubbery and the few flowers which still lingered since the last days of autumn.

This chamber was a veritable hall, such as might have graced a baron's castle. It had many niches or ambres of carved stone, a vast gothic fireplace, to the clustered pillars of which the fire-irons were *chained* in the old Scottish fashion, to prevent their being too readily used in brawls, and on the lintel was inscribed, in antique letters, the legend, —

(Laus et honor Deo.)

On the hearth a fire of coal and oak-roots from the Figgate-muir was blazing cheerily.

In this chamber, the lordly abbot had feasted four years before the papal legate, Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, bishop of Trieste, afterwards Pope Pius II., and it was on that occasion that the latter so wittily remarked, with an irreverent wink to the abbot of Melrose, "that if there was a great reason for prohibiting the marriage of priests, there was a much greater for *permitting* it."

The doors were oak carved with legends and monograms; the floor also was of oak, roughly dressed with the hatchet and secured with broad-headed nails, all the bright heads of which were visible, as it was not carpetted, but only strewn with fresh rushes from the Hunter's Bog. The walls were comfortably wainscotted up to where the vaulted roof rose in the form of an arch, and there the stone-work was covered by distorted figures, representing old legends connected with the abbey of Tongland.

The sleek and portly abbot was seated near the fire in a lofty chair, the back of which bore a carved mitre, and he was conversing easily and pleasantly with all his guests in turn, for he was a benign and amiable old prelate with a bald head, a rubicund and somewhat unmeaning visage, and twinkling eyes half hidden by wrinkles and fat.

Two chairs of state opposite were occupied by the earl and countess of Douglas. On tabourettes near them were seated Murielle and a group of ladies. Several gentlemen all richly dressed were loitering near them, for they were conversing gaily and variously employed – at chess, or the game of Troy; and on the silks, velvets, jewels, and cloth of gold and silver, of which their costumes were composed, the glow of the fire fell brightly, together with the light of twenty great candles, which flared in sconces of brass hung round the walls on tenter-hooks.

The stomacher of the countess-duchess was entirely covered with native pearls, for those found in the Scottish streams were held to be of great value. Among the costly jewels lost by Henry V., when his camp was plundered at Agincourt, Rymer mentions *una perula Scotiæ*; and only a few years before the date of our story, James I presented to Æneas Sylvius, the Roman legate, *one*, which is now in the papal crown.

Before her sweet face, pretty Murielle was manœuvring her fan, quite as skilfully as any of her countrywomen might do at the present day; and through the sticks of it, her merry and soft violet eyes peeped from time to time at a handsome and soldier-like man, who wore a crimson velvet pourpoint, with a steel gorget, a gold belt, and hanging sleeves of yellow silk. He was Sir Patrick Gray, the captain of the guard. While talking gravely of "the growing heresies of John Huss and Paul Crawer," he seemed to be entirely occupied with the countess of Ormond, before whom he knelt on one knee, and for whom he was winding and unwinding several balls of brightly coloured silk and golden thread, which she was using while embroidering a missal cover, for the ladies of those days were never idle; but in his abstraction, or pre-occupation with Murielle, he made many a provoking knot, which the little white fingers of the lovely countess required all their cunning to unravel.

His love for Murielle had brought him hither uninvited; and he felt (like his kinsman, MacLellan) that he was among the enemies of the king his master, and of the government; while the coldness with which the boy-noble and the girl-countess treated him filled his heart with sorrow and anger.

The scraps of conversation he heard all savoured of hostility to James and to his ministers, with dark hints of daring and ulterior political projects, as yet undeveloped and apparently obscure.

He was aware that Earl James of Abercorn, Earl Hugh of Ormond, Sir Malcolm Fleming, Sir Alan Lauder, and other kinsmen of the Douglases viewed him with undisguised aversion; and while he continued to play with the balls of thread, and utter pleasant commonplaces to the ladies near, those four personages were standing aloof in a corner, leaning on their swords, which were somewhere about five feet long, "nursing their wrath to keep it warm," and wishing they had the captain of the king's guard on a solitary hill-side, or even in the street without.

"And this Livingstone – I beg pardon, *Sir* Alexander Livingstone, Laird of Callender – a mere baron," he heard the earl of Douglas say to the abbot; "by what warrant or right is such a man as *he* regent of the realm?"

"I have heard your noble father ask the same question often, with the same tone – ay, and with the same sombre gloom in his eye, my lord," replied the abbot evasively.

"Well – know you by what right?" reiterated the young noble bitterly, giving vent to the hatred his dead father had carefully and unceasingly inspired and fostered.

"Is it hereditary?" asked the abbot gently.

"Assuredly not."

"Then how came Livingstone to have the regency?"

"'Twas given by parliament and the nation."

"Hence his *right*," said the abbot, smiling at obtaining the very reply he wished; but the petulant young earl rasped the rowels of his gold spurs furiously on the hearth, for these quiet answers from the "keeper of his conscience" galled and fretted him.

"Well, the time is come for the nobles, the barons, and others to reconsider that too-hastily given right," said the countess; "for what is he, or what is this Lord Chancellor, that earls and chiefs are to veil their bonnets in their presence?"

The abbot, who dreaded the violence of the young countess more than the temper of her husband (who was not exactly a lamb), was prudently silent; but she was determined to force an answer from him, and said bluntly, "Speak, abbot, you are silent!"

"Pardon me, lady, I was thinking of Plutarch. Know you what he said?"

"How should I know, Lord Abbot," said Margaret, while her black eyes sparkled with annoyance; "was he a heretic like Paul Crawer, or a magician like Michael Scott, with an urchin or prickly hedgehog for a familiar?"

"Why ask you all this?" "Because the name sounds cabalistic to a Scottish ear," said Margaret, crossing and fanning herself.

"He was a scholar – and yet an unfortunate pagan, for he knew not of St. Nicholas, the patron of scholars."

"But *what* said he?"

"That '*love and hatred corrupt the truth of everything*,' and he thought profoundly, madam, for verily they do. Yet if our holy father at Rome will but listen to my prayer, ere long hatred and evil shall exist on earth no more; but all men shall live and die in peace and goodwill one with another – even unto the end of time."

The young earl smiled disdainfully, and relapsed into gloomy silence, for he knew that his father confessor referred to a strange project which he had long cherished, and concerning which he had seriously pestered the late Roman Legate, Æneas Sylvius – that the Pope Eugene IV., as head of the Church and "vicegerent of heaven upon earth," would intercede for the fallen angel, to have him forgiven and received once more into divine favour, to the sublime end that all evil in the world would henceforth cease; for the good old clergyman, in his largeness of heart, like his poetic countryman in after years, felt that he could even forgive the devil, when he thought

> Auld Nickey Ben,
> Maybe ye'll tak a thocht and mend.

But poor Pope Eugene was too much bothered and embroiled by the untractable council of Basle, to attend at that time to the mighty crotchets of the abbot of Tongland.

"Patience yet awhile, my son," said the benevolent abbot, crossing to the young earl and caressing his curly black hair; "when I have the Master of Evil forgiven, and restored to the place from whence he fell, the lusts of the flesh will be effectually prevented from warring against the spirit of grace. *Sit nomen Domini benedictum!*"

But the earl remained obstinately silent, with his dark eyes fixed on the fire, as if the gloomy future might be traced amid its glowing embers.

His kinsman, John of Abercorn, smiled coldly, for by *his* secret connivance many said this visit to the court had been planned; while the grim and turbulent lairds of Biggar and the Bass grasped

their long swords with an air that seemed to say, the peaceful and holy days of the abbot's hopes were yet a long way off, and that the devil was likely, as he has ever done, to poke his nose for a long time in Scottish affairs; but a sad and sombre frown was in their eyes, for this journey of their chief to Edinburgh had been undertaken in direct opposition to all their entreaties, advice, and forebodings.

CHAPTER VI
MURIELLE

Sweet love! sweet lines! sweet life!
Here is her hand, the agent of her heart;
Here is her oath for love, her honour's power:
Oh that our fathers would applaud our loves,
To seal our happiness with their consents.
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

An hour passed without Gray finding an opportunity for addressing more than the merest commonplaces to Murielle, yet his mind, even when conversing with others, was so full of her image, that the very rustle of her dress made his heart beat quicker; and he could see her form, face, and expression as distinctly as he heard her voice in fancy for ever, when she was absent; and the ribbon she had taken from her breast, and given him to wear in his bonnet, was a gift more prized than a royal crown.

Their eyes were eloquent although their tongues were mute, for "their natures had so gradually blended into each other that, like two tints of the rainbow, the lines between them would soon become so extinct, that a separation would be the destruction of both."

But the Countess Margaret had a secret grudge at our captain of the guard, and it arose from this circumstance.

Prior to her marriage, and almost from her childhood, she had been a practised coquette, who had won many a brave and noble heart with a facility which her rank increased – but won only to cast them from her when tired of them, as she had done her dolls and toys when a girl, or her jewels, dresses, flowers, and baubles in riper years. They had served to beguile a day, a week, a month, those human playthings, and that was all she cared for.

Sir Patrick Gray had proved rebelliously insensible to her beauty of form, her gaiety, and brilliance of conversation, for he loved little Murielle, and hence the more gorgeous Margaret had an additional cause to treasure a pique at him; and having *other* views regarding her sister, she now, in revenge, permitted him to fan his love with hope, ere it would be crushed for ever, by her marriage to one as yet unnamed. Hence the malicious smile, which curled her beautiful lip, as she looked at them from time to time, on the night we are describing.

Gray and MacLellan confessed to each other that two sisters more charming could scarcely be met.

Murielle's face was pale, her features were delicate, and her eyes of that deep hue, alternating between hazel and violet, which seemed black at night. Her hands and arms were lovely in their form and delicacy.

Then Margaret was so stately and queen-like, pure and cold as marble, save when excited (which was not unfrequent), distant and proudly reserved at one time – full of fire and passion at another. Tall and beautifully formed, her hair and eyes were of the deepest jet, to which the purity of her complexion formed a singular contrast; while a softness was imparted at times to her otherwise haughty expression by her long and thick eye-lashes, which she could drop with the most skilful coquetry.

The face and eyes of Murielle, though less striking, had a strange charm, as they brightened, deepened, and seemed to *grow* in beauty, one knew not why or how; but it was the indescribable charm of *expression*.

The old abbot, finding his efforts to amuse his fiery and feudal friends a somewhat arduous task (as they were all inspired by jealous, ambitious, or angry thoughts), came in despair to Murielle, who was his favourite, and who loved him as a daughter would have done.

"Your harp is here; sing us something, my lady daughter," said he; "a song of our wild Galloway hills – or a Lowland ballad, if you prefer it; but do so, I pray you, for clouds are gathering in your kinsmen's faces, and I know that your sweet voice can best dispel them."

Murielle assented with a kind smile, and in a moment, Gray, anticipating Lord David Douglas, handed the harp to her, and in doing so, contrived, quick as lightning, to touch and press her hand, which made her colour slightly, as she bent over the instrument, and ran her rapid little fingers among the strings.

It was a clairsach, or harp of the old Scottish form, being only thirty inches or so in height, and furnished with thirty string holes. In front of the upper arm was the crowned heart (the Douglas cognisance), formed of precious stones, and surrounded by minute inlaying of mother-of-pearl.

"I thank you, child, for your readiness," said the abbot, patting her pretty shoulder, "and in my turn, though I may not sing now at my years, I shall tell you a legend of the olden time, which was told me by an aged monk of Tongland, now asleep with his fathers in the abbey kirkyard."

"A bribe, my lord, to make me hasten with my song," said Murielle, smiling in the old man's face.

"And to make it as brief as possible," added the impatient Margaret.

"Say not so, countess," said the abbot, "we will not tire readily of Lady Murielle's voice."

"A churchman turned a gallant in his old age!"

"Your sister is fortunate, lady, in the best gifts of heaven," continued the abbot, "and must have been born – "

"Under a fortunate star, you would say?"

"Yes, countess, if such things exist."

"Nay," said Murielle, laughing, "I had a kind fairy for a godmother, like the good princesses of the old romance."

Then in the chaunting cadence adopted by the singers of those days, she sang the four-and-thirty verses of the old ballad of "Sir Hugh le Blonde," a knight of the Mearns – but with these we will not inflict the reader.

It told of how the subtile Rodinghame made love to a fair coquette, who was queen of Scotland; and how, when she repelled him, in revenge he put a leper man in her bower chamber. Then came the proud and jealous king, who, on finding him in such a place, ordered the queen to be burned at a stake, unless she could find a champion to do battle with Rodinghame, her traducer, but such was the terror of his prowess that none appeared; the day of doom came; the hapless queen was bound to a stake, and the torch was about to be applied, when Sir Hugh le Blonde, in his armour, sprang forward, and lifted the gage of Rodinghame.

They fought long and desperately, but Sir Hugh slew the accuser, after forcing him to confess his treachery. Thus the queen was restored once more to favour and honour, to the joy of her husband and all his court.

In gratitude to her preserver,
Then said the queen unto the king,
"Arbuthnot's near the sea;
Oh yield it to the northern knight
Who fought this day for me!"

"Yes," said our king, "and thou, Sir Knight,
Come, quaff this cann of wine;

Arbuthnot's but a baronie,
We'll to it Fordoun join."

Thus the descendants of Sir Hugh became lords of Arbuthnot and Fordoun; the sword with which he defended the queen was long preserved by the viscounts of his family, and his helmet was hung in the church of Garvoch, which, in 1282, he bestowed upon the monks of Arbroath for the safety of his soul, and in memory of his victory.

"How like you the song?" asked Abercorn of the countess.

"Well," she replied, with a dark smile; "because it acts as bird-lime."

"Bird-lime," said he, with a perplexed smile; "how?"

"For the king's popinjay," replied the countess, waving her fan towards Sir Patrick Gray; but the ballad was suited to the fashion and spirit of the age, and as Murielle's voice was soft and low, it mingled sweetly with the rippling notes of her little harp.

In the olden time, by ballads and stories the nights were usually passed before bed-time; and thus, after some well-bred compliments had been uttered on her performance, Murielle relinquished her harp to Sir Patrick (who achieved one more pressure of a pretty hand), and turned to claim from her venerable friend the fulfilment of *his* promise.

"My story," said the abbot, smoothing his cassock over his ample paunch, "relates to a time when the Spirit of Evil, he whom I hope to turn one day to a spirit of goodness and purity (here the earl gave a sigh of impatience), had more power in the land even than he hath now. Yet he was conquered and put to flight by our blessed apostle St. Andrew; and now I shall proceed to show you how the cross on which the latter was martyred became the symbol of the Scottish nation, and why it has been borne on our breasts and on our banners in many a righteous battle."

"'Tis well, Lord Abbot," said Earl James the Gross, bluntly; "I like your ending better than your beginning, which savoured somewhat of a sermon, and the night waxes apace."

Then the abbot related the following miraculous story, which we give more correctly than it will be found in the Bollandists, in the "History of the Blessed Regulus," which was written at St. Andrew's in 1140, in the "Golden Legend," or even in the old Gothic "Legenda Sanctorum, post Longobardicam Historiam," because we had it from the writings of the abbot himself.

CHAPTER VII
THE LEGEND OF ST. ANDREW'S CROSS

Some seek the Edens of the east,
Some Carrib isles explore;
The forests of the far-off west,
And Afric's savage shore.
Still charms of native speech and spot,
And native springs for aye,
Will band like brothers Scot with Scot
Upon St. Andrew's day! —
Scottish Song.

In the year 370, St. Regulus, or Rule, a holy Greek monk, who dwelt in Petræa, a city of Achaia, and who had preserved in secret the reliques of St. Andrew the apostle and martyr, was strangely warned by a vision, which was repeated three nights in succession, to secure them from the Emperor Constantius, who was coming to deprive him of his charge, and Regulus was commanded to take them elsewhere.

A deep and melodious voice, that seemed to come from afar, desired him to go to the shrine wherein the reliques lay, to take therefrom an arm, three fingers of the right hand, a tooth, and a kneebone; these he was carefully to preserve, and to convey into a distant land in the west, "*a region situated in the uttermost part of the world*."

After the third vision St. Regulus obeyed.

He placed the reliques in a box, and embarked in a small ship, taking with him Damianus a priest, and Gelasius and Tubaculus, two deacons, eight hermits, and three devoted virgins.

After great toil and suffering, and after encountering many storms, they passed Melita, where, as the Scripture tells us, St. Paul had been of old, thence between the Pillars of Hercules, along the coasts of Gaul and Celt-iberia; and, after traversing the sea of Almainie, were cast on a bleak and rocky promontary of Caledonia, near where now the spires of the fair and stately city of St. Andrew form a landmark to the mariner.

Then the coast was wild and desolate, and was named by the painted Picts, who dwelt there, Muick-rhos, or "peninsula of fierce boars."

Wild woods, pathless and dense, covered it, and a stormy sea beat drearily on its rocky shore.

But these pilgrims having now reached, as they thought, "the *uttermost* part of the world," built their cells, and began to preach and baptize, uniting their labours with those who had landed elsewhere on Scottish ground, and so, in the fulness of time, that peninsula became a bishopric.

In the beginning of the ninth century, Adrian, a holy man, became first bishop of this see of St. Andrews, where in days, then long passed away, St. Regulus and his kuldees had founded a cell dedicated to the Holy Virgin, about a bowshot westward from the shore, upon a sea-weedy rock named unto this day, Our Lady's Craig. But no vestige of the edifice remains, and the wild waves of the German Sea sweep over it with every rising tide.

There, in his own chapel, did St. Regulus serve God devoutly for two-and-thirty years, and there also died Constantine III., King of Scotland, after spending the last five years of his life as a kuldee of Kirkrule, for so the place was also named.

In those, the days of Adrian, Hungus, the Pictish king, granted to God and St. Andrew that the place where the bones of the latter lay "should be the mother church of all the churches in his kingdom," which comprehended the entire Lowlands of Scotland, and much of what is now called

England. He laid, in proof of his gift, a *turf* of the ceded territory upon the high altar, and it was the *first* instance of the symbolical transfer of land by enfoffment in Scotland.

Adrian, the bishop, was a man full of goodness and holiness; none excelled him in devotion to St. Andrew, and when not preaching to the people, he usually secluded himself on the little Isle of May, at the mouth of the Forth, and there he always spent the forty days of Lent, living on herbs, pure water, and fish, which he caught from the rocks overhanging the sea.

There he said so many prayers daily, that when he had attained his fortieth year without having committed a single sin, the devil spitefully resolved to work him some mischief, if such were possible; but the entire isle whereon he dwelt had become as it were so holy, that all the powers of hell could not prevail against him.

Ere long the fallen angel had an opportunity, when fires were lighted on the hills of Fife and Lothian, summoning the people to arms, when, in the year 870, Athelstan, king of the western Saxons, a savage warrior, who had cloven the head of his father by a single stroke of his sword, and had committed many other inhuman atrocities, but to whom Alfred the Great had ceded the territory of Northumberland, marched northward with a mighty host of barbarians, intent on conquest.

Athelstan had placed his dagger on the altar of St. John of Beverley, as a pledge that if he conquered in the north he would enrich that church, in testimony of his belief in the saint's patronage; and so, after laying waste the southern portion of the Pictish territories, he halted on the banks of the Tyne, near Haddington.

After long vigils in the Ocean cave, where the humble and rude altar of St. Regulus is still to be seen, the holy Adrian joined the host of King Hungus, which numbered thirty thousand warriors, a thousand of whom wore torques of beaten gold. He came to add the influence of his presence, and by his prayers and ministry to propitiate heaven that these yellow-haired invaders might be repelled.

By a blow of the same sword with which he slew his father, Athelstan cleft a rock near the castle of Dunbar, as a symbol that he would conquer all the northern land; the mark, a yard in width, remains there to this day, and was oddly enough referred to by Edward I. before Pope Boniface, as his *best* claim to the kingdom of Scotland!

For aid, Hungus applied to Achaius, king of the Scots, who sent his son Alpine with ten thousand warriors, to assist in repelling the dangerous invaders who had now possessed themselves of all South Britain, and founded the petty kingdoms of the Heptarchy; and thus, on the 29th of November, the eve before St. Andrew's day, the three armies came in sight of each other, on the banks of a little stream which flows through a narrow, deep, and stony vale, near the pastoral hills of Dirlton.

There, on the eastern slope of these hills, Adrian, the bishop, set up an altar, and said mass solemnly, with supplications for victory, while the wild bands of King Hungus, and the wilder warriors who came from the western mountains of the Dalriadic Scots, all clad in hauberks and byrnes of ringed mail, were hushed in prayer, as they knelt with bare knees on their bucklers or on the green sward, bowing all their helmeted heads when Adrian stretched forth his hand and blessed them in the name of his master who was in heaven.

So night closed in, and, worn with toil, the bishop retired from the tumultuary camp to a lonely house which was near, and there sought repose.

And *now* the master of evil thought his time was come to attempt the good man's downfall.

Assuming the form of a beautiful woman, he appeared at the house of St. Adrian, and sent in a messenger, saying, "there was one without who desired to make confession."

St. Adrian, who was at supper, sent one of the little boys who served at his altar to say that "Killach, the Penitencer, would hear her, having full power from himself to hear all confessions, to loose, or to bind."

But, although Killach was a man of great sanctity, who afterwards succeeded Adrian in his see, she said loudly that she would reveal the secrets of her soul to none but his master.

St. Adrian therefore desired her to be admitted.

On entering she, for so we must style the spirit for the time, fell at his feet, and on being blessed by him trembled in her guilty soul; but, on raising her veil, Adrian could not repress an exclamation of surprise at her marvellous beauty. Her skin had the purity of snow, her eyes were of the deepest blue, and shaded by long dark lashes, though her hair was of a wondrously bright golden tint, and glittered like a halo round her head. Her face and form were faultless, her stature tall, and her motions full of grace.

"Whence come you, daughter?" asked the saint,

"From the land of the western Saxons," replied the spirit, in an accent that was very alluring.

"And *who* are you?"

"I am the daughter of Athelstan," she continued, weeping.

"Of Athelstan the wicked king!"

"Yes," and she bent her lovely face upon her hands.

"He whose host we are to combat on the morrow?" continued the saint with growing surprise.

"The same."

"How and why came you to me?"

"He proposes to bestow me in marriage upon one of his chiefs, who is a Pagan; but I have devoted myself to the service of Heaven, and, escaping from his camp in secret, have cast myself upon you, as a man of holiness and of God, to succour and to protect me against the evils and perils of the world."

She wept bitterly, and as she seemed faint and almost famished, the kind bishop led her to a seat, and pressed her to join him in his frugal supper, to take food and refreshment, and thereafter repose.

Then the evil spirit, perceiving the advantages so rapidly won, cast aside her head-gear, and appeared only in the long flowing weed of a Saxon woman, with loose sleeves, which revealed the singular whiteness of her arms and bosom; and, as supper proceeded, and the conversation became animated, she clasped again and again to her beating heart and her warm lips the wrinkled hand of St. Adrian with a fondness which, with the growing splendour of her beauty, bewildered him; Adrian became troubled, he knew not *why*, his soul seemed to tremble within him in unison with the heart that beat in the snowy bosom beneath his fingers, and he prayed inwardly to God and to St. Andrew, his patron, against this new temptation, but apparently without avail.

He had a silver cup, the gift of King Hungus, and each time, say the legendaries, he signed the cross above it, red wine of Cyprus filled it to the brim, but of this miraculous cup his fair guest declined to drink, affirming that she "preferred pure water."

Incited by her, the saint filled and emptied his cup more frequently than was his wont; till, dazzled alike by her beauty, which seemed strangely to increase in radiance, her wit and helplessness, he felt as if madness were coming over him, for his inward prayers availed him nothing, and ere long he seemed to lose the power of remembering them.

Suddenly a loud knock rang on the door of the house, and Killach, the Penitencer, came hastily to announce that an aged pilgrim, who had come from afar, desired to speak with the bishop of St. Andrew's.

"How far hath he come?" asked the lady, laughing.

"From Bethsaida, a village by the sea of Galilee, where he and his brother Peter were fishermen."

On hearing the birth-place of the apostles named, the evil spirit trembled; but the bewildered bishop said, while turning to his beautiful guest – "Tell the palmer I shall see him at some other time; after so long a journey he must need rest."

But again the pilgrim knocked and became more importunate; then Adrian, fired by the wine he had taken, and dazzled by the beauty at his side, seemed to lose alike his charity and humility amid the snares of the devil, for he commanded the insolent pilgrim to be cast forth upon the highway.

"Nay, nay," said the golden-haired damsel, running her white fingers through his snowy beard, "let us amuse ourselves with him, for these palmers are quaint fellows."

"Is it your pleasure, fair lady," said Adrian, taking her hand in his, "that I should permit him to interrupt us?"

"No – but let us jest with him; for I know well that these palm-bearing pilgrims are sad rogues at times. Ask him some puzzling questions, and if he answers them, admit him."

"Agreed," said the bishop, draining another goblet, and as her laughter seemed very infectious, he joined her in a peal of such merriment, that old Killach, the Penitencer, trembled in his cassock; "propose a question, sweet lady, for you surpass all in wit as well as in beauty."

"Inquire of him what is the greatest marvel in the smallest space made by God."

Killach went forth and propounded this strange question.

"The faces of mankind and the leaves of the trees; for no two of either are alike in the world," replied the poor pilgrim, who stood without the door of the chamber, bending wearily on a knotted staff, and shivering in the night air, though clad in a long blackweed, his cowl hung over his eyes and his white beard flowed over his breast.

"A fair response," replied the beautiful lady, gaily, caressing more tenderly the bishop's hand with her velvet-like fingers, while her bright eyes beamed into his, and the night currents blew her perfumed hair across his face; "pray ask him next, what is higher than heaven."

"He who made it," replied the pilgrim, bowing low. Then the evil spirit trembled, but again asked merrily:

"What is the distance from heaven to the base of the bottomless pit?"

"Ask that question of *thyself*, who hast measured the distance to the full, which *I* never did – thou accursed spirit!" replied the pilgrim furiously, beating thrice on the door with his staff, whereupon, with a shrill shriek, the Devil vanished from the side of the terrified bishop; but his conqueror remained for a time unmoved, and then quietly disappeared, seeming to melt away before the eyes of those who saw him.

Then Adrian fell upon his knees and returned thanks to heaven, and to his patron, St. Andrew, for escaping this last and most subtle snare of the evil one.

But now he found that the morning was far advanced; that already the combined armies of the Northern kings were meeting the hordes of Athelstan in the shock of battle; and so the sainted bishop came forth with a more than usually humble and contrite heart, and, attended by his crossbearer and followers, ascended an eminence in view of the field, and then he knelt down to pray for victory over the Saxons.

There in the hollow, through which the Peffer flowed among groves of oak towards the sea, the roar of battle rang – the tumultuous shouts and yells of triumph or agony, as Scot and Pict, or the yellow-haired Saxon, closed in mortal strife; the twanging of bows, the trampling of horses, the clash of axes, swords, and maces swung on ringing bucklers; or, as the ghisarma of the Saxon, the long tuagh of the Celt, clove hauberk of rings, or helmet of steel; and amid the carnage, wherever death and slaughter were deepest, rode the royal parricide, the terrible Athelstan; "of earls the lord, of heroes the bracelet giver," as the harpers who sang his praises styled him; but he was fated never again to hear their adulous strains, or see his wooden halls of Jorvik, or York as it is named now.

Despite the valour of King Hungus and his auxiliaries, the Saxons, among whom were many thousand southern Britons, forced to military service and slavery, were gradually gaining the victory, and the Scots and Picts were giving way, when lo!

Across the eastern quarter of the blue firmament there suddenly came a thunder cloud, the hues of which alternated between deep black and brilliant purple, though its ragged borders gleamed with golden tints. Lightning was seen to flash behind it, while hoarse thunder hurtled athwart the noonday sky, and sank growling into the estuary of the Forth, beyond the Isle of May.

Then the cloud opened, and amid a blaze of such light as that which dazzled Saul on his way to Damascus, there shone above the Scottish host, with an effulgence that made their serried helmets outshine the rays of the sun, the figure of St. Andrew the Apostle, on his cross, the two trees tied like the letter X, to which he had been bound, when scourged to death at Petræa, in Achaia.

Then St. Adrian lifted up his eyes, and knew in him the pilgrim of the blackweed; the same stranger who on the preceding night had saved him from the snares of the evil one, and falling on his knees, he bowed his silver hairs in the dust.

When he looked again, cloud, figure, and cross had passed away; but inspired by this miraculous omen of victory, the Scots and Picts rushed with new vigour on the Saxons, who were soon defeated, and with dreadful slaughter.

Athelstan was unhorsed by King Hungus, who slew him on the north bank of the Peffer, at a place named unto this day *Athelstansford*. The Picts buried him on the field; but his head was borne upon a spear to an islet of the Forth, where it was fixed for a time, and the place was long named, from that circumstance, Ardchin-nichun, or "the head of the highest."[1]

From that day St. Andrew became the patron of the Scots and Picts, who put his cross upon their banners, and the badges of the former, the *thistle*, and of the latter, the *rue*, were interwoven in the collar of the Knights of the most Ancient Order of the Thistle, instituted in honour of this victory; and in memory of the apostles their number is restricted to the reigning sovereign and twelve companions.

Upon the cathedral of St. Andrew, Hungus bestowed "a case of gold for preserving the reliques of the saint, many chalices and basons, the image of Christ in gold, and those of the apostles in silver," and the bishop Adrian toiled more than ever in the service of God and his patron, until the year 882, when some Danish rovers attacked his hermitage on the Isle of May, and barbarously slew him with all his followers.

His coffin, of stone, is still lying there, and the fishermen of the Forth aver that at times a wondrous light shines from it. He passed away in the odour of sanctity, and Killach the Penitencer succeeded him as second bishop of the see.

Such is the legend of the cross of St. Andrew, and how it became the cognizance of the Scottish nation.

[1] Now Inchgarvie. Athelstan's grave was opened in 1832. His coffin was composed of five large pieces of freestone, and his bones measured six feet in length. The coffin was thirty inches in breadth, but only four in depth. The farm of Miracle, corrupted into *markle*, indicates where the vision is said to have appeared; and, with the adjacent lands, it was assigned to the culdees of St. Andrew's in gratitude for the victory.

CHAPTER VIII
I LOVE YOU

I do not seek to quench your love's hot fire,
But qualify the fire's extreme rage,
Lest it should burn above the bounds of reason.
Shakespeare.

By the time when the garrulous old abbot had concluded his story the night was far advanced. The lights in the sconces and the fire had burned low, while the ladies looked pale and weary, and all who were not in immediate attendance upon the earl and countess of Douglas, prepared to seek their habitations in the city.

As these were paying their several adieux, Sir Patrick Gray came close to Murielle, and tenderly pressed her hand; but she gazed upon him with a sad and foreboding expression.

"Courage, Murielle, courage!" he whispered; "with strength and bravery on my side, with equal love and goodness on yours, our mutual stedfast faith and hope, we may yet overcome everything."

"Even the prejudices of my sister?"

"Ay, even the hatred, for such it is, of your sister, – the sombre pride and wrath of that fierce boy her husband."

"Oh, that it may be so!" she whispered, breathlessly; "but there are times when I have strange fears."

"Murielle, tide what may, remember that while life lasts I love you!"

All they could desire to say was comprised in these three very little words. Little they are, yet how much do they contain! The essence of all the love speeches, love-letters, and sonnets that have been written since the invention of letters, – since Cadmus brought his alphabet from Phœnicia into Greece. When two lovers have said these words they can only repeat them.

"*I love you!*" They have nothing more to say. The countess, ever watchful, had observed this brief conference, and though anger sparkled in her deep, dark eyes, she veiled it under a bright smile, and, closing her fan, gave her pretty hand to Gray, who bowed and kissed it, though the petulant earl coldly turned from him, saying: —

"Sir Patrick, fare you well until to-morrow."

"*Until to-morrow*," added the earl of Abercorn, with one of the strange smiles which curled his thin white lips at times, as Gray and MacLellan retired together, after gaining golden opinions in the ranks of the enemy, – to wit, the ladies of the hostile faction.

The young Captain of the Guard had the art of pleasing all – the ladies especially; and at such a time, when family feuds, pride, and hatred, were rampant passions, the art was one of no small value, though in Scotland few cared to cultivate it, for chivalry was already on the decline.

In society such as that in which we introduce him to the reader, he contrived to be, or appeared to be, friendly with those who were most averse to each other in politics and ambition; yet he neither condescended to flatter nor dissemble, but often was prudently silent, where to differ would have brought swords from their scabbards; and he assented with grace and pleasure wherever he could do so with honour.

By this system, acquired amid the dark intrigues of a turbulent court, rather than in the camp, Sir Patrick Gray was a general favourite, especially of the young king, who was then, as before-mentioned, in his eleventh year, and whose preceptor he became, in all military exercises and the sports of the field. Gray had natural tact, a knowledge of the then limited world, and the great art of occasionally conquering himself.

Murielle was the stake he played for, and he never lost sight of her.

The moon had waned, and not a star was visible in the dark November sky, as he and MacLellan proceeded through the gloomy city towards the fortress.

"A moonless night, but a fine one," said Gray, wrapping his velvet cloak about him.

"For shooting bats or owls," added MacLellan, as he stumbled over the rough and unpaved street. "Ay, and a night to try men's mettle if there be witches abroad."

"Soho!" said Gray, gaily; "we have left the most perilous witches behind us, with old Abbot John, of Tongland; but assuredly one is safer in a gaberlunzie's canvas gaberdine than a velvet pourpoint to-night, when so many Douglas troopers and Annandale thieves in Johnstone grey are abroad; and the sky is so dark that the devil, were he here, could not see his own tail behind him."

Unmolested, however, they reached the castle, where the portcullis was down and all the gates secured; and where the garrison, which was almost entirely composed of the lord chancellor's vassals, kept watch and ward as warily as if a foreign army, and not the Douglases, had been in the sleeping city below.

As they entered a man passed out: he was muffled in a cloak, with an iron salade on his head – a species of helmet, which effectually concealed the face, but had a horizontal slit for the eyes.

Recognizing the voice of Gray, he rubbed his thin hands together, and smiled maliciously; for this nocturnal rambler was James Achanna, who had just been depositing the four coffins in the vault of David's Tower, and who seemed still to see before him, as the unconscious lover passed gaily into the fortress, a gilt plate inscribed: "*Murielle Douglas, qui obit 23 Novembris, A.D. 1440*."

CHAPTER IX
THE TWENTY-THIRD OF NOVEMBER

Now like a maiden-queen she will behold
To her high turrets hourly suitors come;
The East with incense and the West with gold,
Shall stand like suppliants to receive her doom.
The silver Forth her own majestic flood
Shall bear her vessels like a sweeping train;
And often wish, as of their mistress proud,
With longing eyes to see her face again.

In sunny beauty, the 23rd of November, 1440, dawned on the green hills, the old grey city of the Stuarts, and on the distant sea; and, as the morning advanced, a man, who by his pale and anxious face seemed to have passed a sleepless night, walked slowly to and fro on the paved bartizan of King David's Tower.

He was Sir William Crichton of that ilk – the lord chancellor of Scotland – no sinecure office, under James II.

The first object on which his keen eyes rested, was the slated roof of the abbot of Tongland's lofty mansion. There pretty Murielle was doubtless still asleep, and dreaming perhaps of her lover.

As the time drew slowly, but surely on – the time when Crichton's terrible project, the destruction of the leading members of the house of Douglas by a formal yet mock trial, after luring them from their distant stronghold into a royal fortress – his soul, though it felt neither remorse nor wavering, could not fail to be appalled, on a full contemplation of what *might* be the sequel to the banquet of blood, which he and the regent would that day hold in the great hall of the king's principal castle. To him it seemed as if the live long night, the wild shriek of

"The owle eke that dethe and bode bringeth,"

(as old Chaucer has it) had rung about the castle rocks, filling the minds of those who heard it with unpleasant forebodings – and of this emotion Crichton was especially sensible.

A civil war might rage around the throne, and by weakening the nation would lay it open to the aggressive spirit and ambitious designs of the English, who were ever wakeful to take advantage of their neighbour's troubles. Crichton's own power, his old baronial family and numerous kinsmen, might perish in the contest; but still the king's authority and the dignity of the crown, which the overweening power of the earl of Douglas, and the evil advice of his friends, endangered, would be secured, and a final blow might be struck at the terrible Red Heart for ever.

As the chancellor thought of these things, his hands trembled under his furred robe, and crystal-like beads of perspiration gathered on his pale and prematurely-furrowed brow; but the grim preparations had been made, even to the most minute particulars. Douglas, with his formidable train, was already in the capital, and all parties had gone too far in the desperate game to recede now; so Crichton prayed in his heart that the great *end* he had in view might sanctify the awful measures he was about to take; and, seating himself on a stone bench, he seemed to sink into reverie – almost prayer – while, turning to the east, where the sun, through alternate bars of saffron and dun yet shining clouds, was ascending in all his morning glory from the sea.

From time to time the pale chancellor glanced at a piece of green sward called the Butts, where the archers and the king's guard were wont to shoot, and which was inclosed by the cordon of towers and walls which girt the summit of the castle rock.

On that sward a tall lady, wearing a long robe, with tabard sleeves, and a horned head-dress, which added to the effect of her great stature, promenaded to and fro, with her missal and rosary,

while watching a little boy, who was clad in a bright-green velvet pourpoint, laced with gold, and whose yellow hair glittered in the morning sunshine, as he alternately tormented and played with a pretty goshawk, which had silver bells at its head.

Let us, for a time, suppose ourselves there.

That tall lady is Isabelle Ogilvie, of Auchterhouse, wife of Patrick Lord Glammis, master of the royal household, whose son, Alexander, has married Crichton's youngest daughter, and her young charge is James II., king of Scotland, who laughs with boyish glee as he tosses and plumes his pet hawk, and, all unwitting of the dark thoughts which agitate the soul of his faithful but scheming chancellor, trains it to pounce upon and rend a lure – a toy like a stuffed bird – which, ever and anon, he casts into the air with a shout of merriment.

The morning draws on apace; bells ring in spire and tower, and the little city below (for, though a capital, it was a *little* city then) awakens into general life and bustle; but the chancellor still sits there.

Let us look, with him, over the rampart of this great tower, where his eyes survey a scene so different from what is there to-day; and yet Arthur's rocky cone, the hills of Fife, the fertile shores, the sandy bays and green islets of the Forth, are all unchanged as when the first Celtic settlers so truly named the great ridge that overlooks them all, *Scealla-bruach Craig*, or "the rock of the beautiful view," now corrupted into Salisbury Craigs.

The month is November.

The last leaves have fallen from the oak woods of Bristo, of Coates, of Inverleith, and Drumsheugh; but the voice of the antlered stag, "the wild buck bell," is borne at times on the passing wind that whirls the red leaves along the grassy hollows.

In the glen below the castle rock lie the royal gardens, where tournaments are held, and where, in after ages, the railway train shall send up its shriek to the ear of the sentinel five hundred feet above. There comes no sound from it now, save the note of the plover, or amorous coo of the cushat dove. On the long ridge, where a new city shall spring in the eighteenth century, the farmers are finishing their ploughing; the lowing cattle are in their yards; the sheep in their pens, and the pigeons are clustering on the dovecots.

Allhallow mass has been said and sung in the great cruciform church of St. Giles the Abbot, and of St. Cuthbert in the pastoral glen below the castle wall; and in every thatched grange and farmtown, apples have been duly bobbed for and nuts cracked about the blazing ingle; and now it is the vigil of St. Catharine.

Turn with me still eastward; there, the same as ever, is the backbone of old Edina, the High Street, covering the long ridge which terminates at the three square Gothic spires of Holyrood Church – a broad line of fair stone mansions, as yet undisguised by the quaint Flemish fronts and timber galleries which came into fashion about the time of Flodden Field. Southward descends the narrow Bow, and its tall dwellings, with their dovecot gables and clusters of smoky chimney-stacks, many of them bearing the iron cross of the Temple and St. John, its doorways incrusted with legends, dates, and coats armorial of races past and gone; its iron door-risps, with here and there a cloth tied round them, to show that there was illness, or a woman "in travail" within.

That grated and fortified edifice which occupies the centre of the main street is the Prætorium of Edinburgh – a rallying point for the citizens in time of war and tumult; and on its vaults shall arise the grim Tolbooth of future ages.

The bare-headed and bare-legged children that nestle on the steps of the cross are stringing necklaces and rosaries of the red rowan berries (that whilom grew in St. Giles's churchyard), to save them from fairies and elves; and now they all rise in reverence to yonder cowled friar, who hastens down to see the train of Douglas pass from the abbot's house.

That green slope on the south of the great church is the burial-ground of St. Giles's: —

"There lie

Those who in ancient days the kingdom ruled,
The councillors of favourites of kings;
High lords, and courtly dames, and valiant chiefs,
Mingling their dust with those of lowest rank
And basest deeds, and now unknown as they."

There sleep the great, the good, the peaceful and the turbulent, the faithful and the false, all bent together in their quaint old coffins and flannel shrouds, with money in their dead hands, and crosses or chalices on their breasts. Old citizens, who remembered the long-haired King David, passing forth with barking hound and twanging horn, in that Rood-day in harvest, which so nearly cost him his life; and how the fair Queen Margaret daily fed the poor at the castle-gate, "with the tenderness of a mother;" those who had seen Randolph's patriots scale "the steep, the iron-belted rock," – Count Guy of Namur's Flemish lances routed on the Burgh-muir, and wight Wallace mustering his bearded warriors at midnight by the Figgate-burn, ere he marched to storm Dunbar.

That white spot above the gate of the Portsburgh is the bleached skull of Sir Robert Graham, who was the first to plunge his dagger in the heart of James I. It has been there since 1436, when those awful tortures took place before the Roman legate, and filled even him with horror.

The lofty old mansion on the south side of the long street down which we look from the ramparts, is the residence of the princely abbot of Cambus Kenneth; the gilt vanes in the distance are those of a similar edifice where dwells John Fogo, abbot of Melrose, author of a work against the heresy of Paul Crawer, who, in 1432, was sent hither from Bohemia, by John Huss, to preach the gospel, undeterred by the flames to which Fogo had consigned Resby, the Englishman, thirty-two years before.

In the centre of the street are wooden booths, where the country folks, in their canvas gaberdines and hoods of hodden grey, or the burgesses in their pourpoints of good Flemish cloth, may "cheapen" ale at sixteenpence per gallon; otherwise, the brewster or tapster shall have a hole punched in their measures at the market-cross, where now the women of the adjacent villages and farms are arranging their baskets of butter and poultry for sale; and see! there, at this moment, come the town officers, with their halberts and helmets, and the common headsman, in the provost's livery, with a cresset full of blazing coals. Now a crowd gathers: the halberts flash as they are swayed to and fro by the pressure of the people. Then a shriek rises!

They are publicly branding on the cheek a poor woman, a leper, who has rashly ventured within the burgh; though yesterday, by sound of trumpet, at this same old market-cross, the people of the city, and the villages called Leith and Broughton, were forbidden to attend the fairs of Anster and St. Monance, under pain of pit and gallows, as the plague called the *het-sickness*, – the same disease of which Archibald earl of Douglas died at Restalrig, – rages in Fife.

If the reader, in fancy, can realize all this, he will see the quaint old Edinburgh of 1440 clustering on the steep ridge, —

"Piled deep and massy, close and high;"

the same city over which the haggard eyes of Crichton wandered, and through which, preceded by trumpet and banner, the haughty young lord of Douglas and Touraine was passing to his – doom!

Edinburgh, a village then in size and opulence, was, nevertheless, a capital city. *Now*, when in aspect and magnitude it is one of the most magnificent in Europe, by a strange anomaly it is, in reality, when its narrowness of spirit, in religion, politics, and patriotism are considered, the most provincial village in her Majesty's dominions, perhaps in the world.

By the time the trumpets were heard, the sun was at its zenith, and Crichton, with a shirt of mail under his velvet pourpoint, came forth to meet the regent in the court-yard.

Livingstone had assumed a similar steel shirt under his shortcoat, which was of red damask, laced with silver, and over which he wore a long flowing gown with open sleeves, revealing those of

his ringed defence, which, being a man of more open character than his compatriot, he cared not to conceal, especially in these perilous times.

These two statesmen met, sternly and gravely, without a smile or bow.

"Is all prepared?" asked Livingstone of the chancellor, in a low voice.

"All," was the brief and emphatic reply.

"Your men-at-arms?"

"I have a hundred concealed in the tiring-room, which opens off the great hall."

"Only a hundred! Are you not most rash?"

"But they are men whose forefathers for ages have eaten the bread of mine."

"You, then, deem them stedfast?"

"Stedfast and true as Rippon steel; unyielding as flint. They are to rush forth under Achanna, when the signal appears."

"Achanna," said the regent with contempt; "always Achanna. I know not how it is, but that man makes my blood to curdle."

"He is a faithful – "

"Villain," interrupted the regent, with irritation.

"True – but such villains are useful," said the chancellor quietly.

"And the signal is the black bull's head; but does not Achanna dine with us?"

"Dine!" reiterated the chancellor, with a flashing eye and a quivering lip. "He will share the banquet at all events."

"And the four bodies," said Livingstone, gnawing the ends of his grisly moustache, and looking aside, "how mean you to dispose of them?"

"Under that green turf, where even now the king is playing with his goshawk, they will sleep as soundly as if below a ton of marble in Melrose Abbey Kirk, among their lordly kin," replied the chancellor in a low whisper, and with a ghastly smile; "but hark! I hear trumpets in the streets; and here comes Gray, the Captain of the Guard."

Accoutred as we saw him yesterday, in his plumed bassinet, with its camaile and chaplet, and his rich mail with its hanging sleeves of scarlet and yellow silk, Sir Patrick Gray, happily ignorant of the dire preparations of the two statesmen, and the mine they were about to spring, made a low bow to each, with some passing remark on the auspicious beauty of the day – for the weather was as common a topic in the time of James II. as in that of his descendant, Queen Victoria.

"A cloud is coming anon, that may darken its close," said the regent, thoughtfully.

The Captain of the Guard looked upward, but the sky was cloudless, then his eye swept the horizon in vain.

"Yea, Sir Patrick," added the chancellor, who is reported to have used the same figurative language, "have you never observed that there are periods – times of our existence, when past, present, and future hopes seem to culminate in one?"

"Under favour, my lord, I do not comprehend," replied the puzzled soldier, as he played with the buckle of his belt, and thought of Murielle Douglas.

"Yes – when we seem to hold them all – the past, the present, and more especially *the future*, in our grasp, and yet may throw them all away. Now dost comprehend?"

"Do you mean in affairs of love, my lord?"

"Love!" reiterated the chancellor, scornfully, "nay, I think but of *death*," he added in a voice so stern and hollow that the soldier started, "but ere long you may, nay you *shall* know all I mean. Till then, God be wi' you – adieu."

And with his hands behind his back, and his eyes bent thoughtfully on the ground, Crichton slowly followed the regent into David's Tower, while the Captain of the Guard, bewildered by their strange remarks, hurried to join his hundred pikemen, who were drawn up in two ranks at the gateway which opened under the Constable's tower.

Sir John Romanno of that ilk, who commanded the fortress, had now all the king's garrison at their posts, with bills and crossbows, and the cannoneers by their guns, with lintstocks lighted.

CHAPTER X
FOREBODINGS

She was mounted on a milk-white steed,
And he on a dapple grey;
And a bugle-horn hung by his side,
When he lightly rode away.
Lord William looked over his right shoulder,
To see what he could see;
And lo her seven bauld brethren
Came riding owre the lee.
The Douglas Tragedie.

"How often is a straw, wafted by the wind, the turning point in our destiny!" says an author; "a stone cast into the water causes a ripple on the most distant shore; so the most trivial event of our lives, after a thousand ramifications, leads on to some great climax."

When the train of Douglas mounted in the court-yard of the abbot's house, Sir Malcolm Fleming of Cumbernauld came hastily from his chamber, clad in complete mail, with his helmet open; thus it revealed the pallor of his face, with the sombre gloom of his dark grey eyes, whose restless and wandering expression bore evidence of a sleepless night.

"How now, Cumbernauld," said the earl of Abercorn, "is this thy dinner-dress – art going to dine with all this old iron about thee?"

"Yes – when I dine with enemies."

"Soho, man – go to! we have no enemies," said the sneering noble; "we are all friends now, and must drink to-night to the extinction of all feuds."

"Do the countess and Lady Murielle go to this banquet?" asked the old knight, with a voice rendered husky by sorrow and surprise, as Margaret and the ladies of her train came forth with all their gorgeous dresses glittering in the sunshine.

"Of a surety they do. James Achanna bore them each a special message from the Lord Regent in the young King's name; but what in the name of old Mahoun ails thee, Sir Malcolm Fleming – art ill?"

"Ill indeed at heart, lord earl."

"And wherefore?" asked Earl James, angrily.

"Come this way apart," replied the other, drawing Abercorn aside from the throng, while his voice and expression became more sad, his lips more pale, and his manner more excited. "Listen. Last night I was in my chamber disrobing for bed; my mind was full of the doubts and misgivings that have oppressed me since we left the walls and shelter of Thrave; and just as Silver Mary – that great bell which hangs in the tower of St. Giles – tolled the last stroke of the hour of twelve, I heard a deep sigh near me."

"A sigh!" repeated the earl, becoming interested in spite of himself; "was it not the wind in an arrow-hole?"

"A sigh, loud almost as a sob! I turned – there was no one near me; but the old and gloomy arras which covered the walls was violently agitated and shaken, so that the brown moths flew out of it. The sigh was repeated; and though I know myself to be brave as most men, I felt – yet knew not why – the life-blood curdling in my heart, and, as the Scripture hath it, the hair of my flesh stood up. Then an emotion which I could not resist, like the strong power we obey in a dream, led me on. I raised the old mouldy arras – and then – then – oh what a sight saw I there!"

"What?" asked the earl, in a low voice.

The perspiration rolled in bead-like drops from the pale forehead of the old baron upon his white beard and polished cuirass, as he replied in a solemn and husky whisper, "As I live by bread which the blessed God yields, and hope to die in the faith of our fathers, I beheld a decapitated corpse, the head of which rolled past me, with winking eyes, with chattering teeth, and with features livid and convulsed, as when the headsman's axe has just severed the neck! I knew those ghastly features – knew that curly hair – I knew that comely form – "

"And," said Abercorn, growing very pale in spite of himself; "and this head was – "

"Your kinsman's – the earl of Douglas!"

"Pho!" replied Abercorn, seeming suddenly to experience great relief; "by St. Bryde, I thought you were about to say 'twas *mine*. Did this grim vision speak to you!"

"No – but straightway vanished – melted away, and I was left in the chamber to solitude, to fears and prayers, but not to sleep."

"'Tis well you did not see any *more* heads roll past in this odd fashion," said Abercorn, jibingly.

"Lord James of Abercorn," said Fleming, solemnly, "I was long your father's comrade and most trusted friend. For forty long but stirring years there came no jar between us, though ever engaged in war and tumult. Together we were wounded and taken prisoners at Homildon; together we defended this castle of Edinburgh against Henry IV. of England, and repulsed him; together we fought in France, and fell wounded side by side at Verneuil – but he, alas! mortally, when attempting to save *me*, and now he sleeps the sleep of death in St. Gratians of Tournay – for there I closed his eyes, and laid his well-notched sword beside him – "

"All this, and much more, have I heard a hundred times, by the winter fire, at Douglas, at Thrave, and in your own hospitable house of Cumbernauld," said Abercorn haughtily and impatiently.

"Then hear it once again, to fire your lagging zeal, mistaken man!" said Sir Malcolm, with growing excitement in his tone and suspicion in his heart; "hear it once again, to bear witness of my faith, when I feel assured that this day no banquet, no wassail, no honour or hospitality, but death and life are in the balance!"

"What a-God's name seek you?" asked James of Abercorn, through his clenched teeth; for this animated and protracted discussion had drawn about them the abbot, their host; the earl of Douglas; little Lord David, his brother; even the Countess, Murielle, and other ladies, who threw up their veils, and listened with surprise. Sir Malcolm resumed: —

"Ay, ay, young lord; since first I learned to make the sign of the cross at my auld mother's knee in the hall of Cumbernauld, among the wilds of Dunbarton, true have I been, Abercorn, to Douglas and his race; so listen to me, if you can, without that cold sneer in your eye, on your lip, and in your heart! Trust not Crichton, and trust not Livingstone, or dool and woe will come on thee and thine! Oh, if you have one drop of warm blood in your heart, join with me in urging your kinsman and chief to share my doubts of these men."

"What in the name of Mahoun am I to say?" exclaimed Abercorn, whose eyes glared with anger, while he tugged his black beard in his vexation.

"Beware ye all!" resumed the earnest old laird of Cumbernauld! "I know what a city and a court are, with their rakes and high-born harlots; their carpet-knights and fawning cut-throats; their bullies and swashbucklers – with servile bows and smiling faces – their black, bitter, false, and cowardly hearts! So here, at the eleventh hour, as it were, I, Sir Malcolm Fleming, of Biggar and Cumbernauld, the soothfast friend of Douglas, say unto ye all, go not this day to the castle of Edinburgh."

Lord Abercorn listened to all this with rage in his eye, a sneer on his lip, and perplexity on his brow; and these mingling emotions deepened when the usually haughty countess requested the old knight to rehearse the story of the midnight vision. It certainly had a serious impression upon all, for the age was full of superstition, of omens, spectres, and supernatural terrors, when the bravest men would occasionally tremble at their own shadows. Thus for a few minutes even the young earl of Douglas seemed silent and oppressed, while Murielle burst into tears, and drew down her veil.

"It is as great a pity to see a woman weep as a goose go barefoot," said Abercorn, furiously and coarsely, using an old proverb: "by our Lady of Whitekirk! I think you are all demented. Lord abbot, talk to this old ghostseer, and assure him there can be no such thing in nature as the spectre of a living man."

"But there are wraiths," said Sir Alan Lauder; "and who can deny their existence, when Scotland is filled with tales of them."

"Lord abbot," resumed Abercorn, more irritated than ever, "speak and say, I charge you, that no such things can be."

"I can assure him of no such fallacy," replied the pedantic abbot, with displeasure, as he adjusted his long-flapped calotte cap over his thin, white, silvery hair. "History, ancient and modern, teems with tales of terrible appearances. Does not Pliny the younger, in his letters, affirm, as an incontrovertible fact, that Athenodorus the philosopher, the disciple of Zeno and keeper of the royal library at Pergamus, once saw a dreadful spectre?"

"When – how?" asked the countess, impressed by the strange names which the abbot used so glibly.

"Pliny relates that Athenodorus purchased an old house in Athens, which many had refused to occupy, because it was haunted by an unquiet spirit. So Athenodorus waited courageously to see it."

"What – the house?" asked Abercorn.

"No – the spectre. Dragging a massy chain, it came at length in a shapeless and dreadful form, and commanded him to follow it. The philosopher, who, though trembling in his soul, affected to be busy at that moment, said 'Wait a little;' but the spirit rattled its rusty chain furiously, so Athenodorus arose and followed it to the marble court near which his villa stood, and, on reaching a certain spot, the apparition vanished. Athenodorus, saith Pliny, marked the place that he might know it again. On the following day he assembled the magistrates of Athens, and on digging up the soil the bones of a man with a rusty chain were found. They were publicly interred elsewhere, and from that hour his mansion was disturbed no more. Shall we question that which such men as Plutarch and Pliny have asserted to have been? Like the foul heretic Paul Crawar of Bohemia, dare you impugn that which you cannot comprehend and which you know not? Can you deny or doubt the existence of a spirit, when you cannot prove your *own*? In all past times, in all lands, among every kind of people, however highly civilized or however lowly savage, apparitions have been seen as warnings for good or for evil; and such will be permitted until that fell spirit whose hapless state I shall one day lay before our Holy Father be forgiven, and fear and hate and war shall be no more."

Enraged by this pedantic rebuke, the earl of Abercorn twisted his moustache, and spurred and checked his horse till it almost sprang into the air.

"Then what do you advise, my lord abbot?" asked the countess, in evident perplexity.

"That my lord your husband should hearken unto the advice of his counsellors, whom his father never slighted, but ever held with reverence."

"I thank you, lord abbot," said Fleming, pressing the abbot's hand. "Let the earl at least leave behind him the two ladies of his house, his brother Lord David, Earl James of Abercorn, and Hugh of Ormond."

"To what end?" asked the earl of Ormond.

"To gratify the prayer and anxious heart of an old friend, and that the house of Douglas may not be in an evil hour laid open to the stroke of fortune, – your father's last injunction when he lay dying at Restalrig," added Fleming to the young earl.

His marked energy and anxiety, together with the entreaties of Sir Alan Lauder and those of the Douglases of Pompherston, Strabrock, and Glendoning, made the chief pause and waver in his purpose. He said, —

"Shall I return now after having ridden to his very gates, as it were? Impossible! And the young king – what will he, what will the people say? and then the chancellor's letter flattered so suavely."

"The greater reason to distrust him," muttered the bearded knights to each other under their lifted helmets.

"Wherefore, why?" said Abercorn, burning with a rage which he could no longer dissemble, as a long-projected and carefully-developed plot seemed on the point of dissolving into air.

"Take counsel of your own brave heart, and good, my lord, run not your chief and his brother too into the lion's den. Crichton flatters to deceive!" replied Sir Malcolm Fleming.

"It may be wise, when so many seem to think so, that you should remember the last words of your father at Restalrig," said Murielle, softly touching the hand of Douglas.

"True, sweet cousin. My brother David – "

"Will go wheresoever you go," replied the brave boy, with a hand on his jewelled dagger; "neither imaginary nor real danger shall cow me."

"And I too shall go," added the earl of Ormond; "but as policy seems necessary here, let our kinsman, James of Abercorn, remain behind with the countess and Lady Murielle. Then, come what may, we leave a man able and willing to avenge us."

"Ormond speaks well and wisely," said the abbot, while a close observer might have seen the gleam of joy which passed over Abercorn's white, malignant face, on hearing a proposal so exactly to his secret wishes.

"So be it, then; I am weary of this loitering; let us begone, or the chancellor's good cheer will be chilled by the November air," said Douglas.

"'Tis well to jest," began Abercorn —

"But if Crichton wrongs me, woe to him!" cried the fiery young earl, shaking his clenched hand aloft; "he dare not —*he dare not!* If he doth, by my father's grave in Melrose kirk I shall level his castle of Crichton to its ground-stone!"

"William Douglas," said the countess, who had been conferring for a moment with Abercorn, "you speak as your father would have spoken; yet act warily, as he would have acted. We know not what may be the issue of a day which has commenced so ominously, and, if swords are drawn, women would but encumber you. Murielle, Lady Ormond, and I will tarry here until the banquet is over. Make fitting excuses to the regent and chancellor – say we are indisposed by our long journey, or what you will; and now let it be known, gentlemen, kinsmen, and friends, that in this matter I yield neither to the advice of my loving lord and husband, who is ever rash; nor to the advice of Sir Malcolm Fleming, who is so wary; nor to that of our lord abbot, who is ever good and true; but to the wish of Earl James of Abercorn."

Whether these words were spoken heedlessly as a sneer at the ready manner in which that noble agreed to remain behind, or in mere politeness, none could then divine; but there came a *time* when they were remembered by many to the disadvantage of the proud and wilful young beauty.

At that moment a man in armour with a closed helmet rode hurriedly through the archway. He was James Achanna.

"Lord earl," said he, "the chancellor awaits you without the castle gate."

"Enough, then – let us go; we should have been ringing glasses and exchanging kissing-comfits with our *beloved* friend the chancellor an hour since," said Douglas, lifting his plumed bonnet as he courteously kissed the hands of his wife and her sister.

He then put spurs to his horse and rode off, accompanied by his brother David, Sir Malcolm Fleming, Sir Alan Lauder, the abbot, and five hundred men led by the earl of Ormond – all completely armed and horsed.

As the clatter of their hoofs died away, a foreboding sigh came from Margaret's breast; but there was a cold though courteous smile on the lips of Lord Abercorn, as he gave her his ungloved hand and led her, with Murielle, back into the almost deserted house of the abbot.

Why was it that Margaret's heart upbraided her? She seemed still to see before her the face of that proud and handsome, noble-hearted and high-spirited cousin with whom she had shared her heart and the revenues of her princely house!..

Why was it that, as the day passed slowly on and the November sun sank in masses of foggy cloud, the earl of Abercorn, pale, excited, and abstracted, shunned his friends and paced to and fro in the abbot's garden, casting his eyes ever and anon to the summit of the fortress, which was visible above the adjacent streets?

He started! a distant hum became a confused clamour of many voices; then the galloping of horses and a rush of feet were heard.

He looked again to David tower, and from its rampart the national cross had disappeared. A *black* banner was floating there, and only half hoisted on the staff, – a double symbol of death!

CHAPTER XI
THE VIGIL OF ST. CATHARINE

The nobles of our land were much delighted then,
To have at their command a crew of lusty men;
Who by their coats were known of tawny, red, or blue,
With crests their sleeves upon, when this old cap was new.
The Roxburgh Ballads.

At the outer gate of the fortress of Edinburgh (a barrier which then crossed the narrow street of the Castle-hill) the lord chancellor was on horseback, attended by a brilliant retinue of men-at-arms, with many lacqueys and liverymen on foot, wearing cloth hoods of the same fashion then worn in England, buttoned under the chin, and having deep capes, with scolloped edges, falling over the shoulders. These hoods were usually of scarlet cloth, and were worn with a cock's feather, placed jauntily on the left side as indicative of some pretension to gentility.

The gaberdines of these liverymen were of blue Flemish cloth, and all had embroidered on their breasts, on escutcheon, *argent*, charged with a lion rampant *azure*, the arms of Crichton, with his motto "God send grace;" and all were accoutred with swords, daggers, and partisans.

On foot beside the chancellor were his pages; one bore his sword, the other held his horse's bridle, a third his cap of maintenance upon a velvet cushion.

A little way within the barrier were Sir Walter Halyburton, lord of Dirltoun, who was then high treasurer; John Methven, the secretary of state; Sir James Crichton of Frendraught, great chamberlain and third officer of the crown; with Patrick Lord Glammis, master of the household. All these, like their immediate followers, were well armed; but that circumstance excited no notice, as it was always the custom to be so in Scotland; and a gay group they formed, as the noonday sun streamed through the old archway, whose front was blackened by smoke and time, upon their tabard-like jupons and hanging sleeves, the heraldic devices on their breasts, their glittering bassinets, waving feathers, rich sword-hilts, jewelled daggers, and gold neck-chains.

Beyond these were the hundred pikemen of the king's guard, under Sir Patrick Gray and Sir Thomas MacLellan; and high over all this array towered the castle rock, crowned by its old *enceinte*, or wall of defence, and its bastel-houses, in the *three* greatest of which, to wit, the Royal Lodging, King David's Tower, and that of the constable, originated the heraldic triple-towered fortress which, from time immemorial, has formed the arms of the city.

As Douglas and his train approached, bombarde, moyenne, and culverin thundered from the ramparts; loud and shrilly twanged the trumpets and horns, and the great crowd assembled in the narrow street made an immediate and simultaneous movement towards the guarded archway.

When the earl's train came near, the quick eyes of the chancellor, as readily as those of our lover, detected the absence of the countess and Murielle. Gray could scarcely repress his anxiety and natural surprise at a circumstance so unexpected; but the chancellor bit his nether lip with vexation, for Margaret, as heiress of Galloway, was the second head of that mighty house which he had sworn to humble for ever. Then a strange smile flitted over his usually impassible face when next he missed the sardonic visage and stealthy eyes of James Douglas, earl of Abercorn.

"Traitor lordling," he muttered, "thou too, in time, shalt dree thy destiny!"

At the distance of thirty paces from the gate the earl of Douglas alighted from his horse, and relinquishing the bridle to a page, advanced bonnet in hand towards the chancellor, who also dismounted, and approached in the same manner, while all present who were not men-at-arms also quitted their saddles, or as the abbot of Tongland says in his MSS. "*lichted down*."

They greeted each other with a cold formality, over which Crichton, the elder by many years, and the more politic, endeavoured to spread the shallow veil of friendly warmth and courtly dissimulation.

"Welcome, lord earl, most welcome; or shall I say, duke of Touraine?"

"I am prouder of my father's name of Douglas than of any foreign duchy, Sir William," replied the haughty boy as he presented his hand with cold politeness. "Here I am but a Scottish earl."

The chancellor bowed, and stifled his indignation, for in this reply three things offended him; the earl's avowal of family pride, addressing him plainly as Sir William instead of lord chancellor, and then presenting his hand *gloved*– a token of mistrust.

"And this young gentleman," began the chancellor, —

"Is my brother Lord David Douglas," said the earl.

"Most welcome too; but the countess, once the Fair Maid of Galloway," said Crichton, with a bland smile; "will she not grace our young king's board to-day?"

"The king's grace, and you, Sir William Crichton, must hold the countess, her sister, and likewise the Lady Ormond, excused to-day; the ways are rough and the journey long from Thrave to Edinburgh."

"True; but the measure of – of my happiness (he had almost said *vengeance*) will be incomplete without them."

"There are Douglases enough here to supply their places," said the earl, glancing at his mail-clad followers with a significant smile; and Crichton said, —

"Enter, lord earl, the king's grace and the regent await you in the great hall."

After each declining to precede the other, the wily chancellor, while making a sign previously agreed upon and understood by James Achanna and Romanno of that ilk, constable of the garrison, gave a hand to each of the brothers, and led them within the gate.

There was an immediate rush among their rough and tumultuary followers to press in after them, but the king's guard and the chancellor's vassals, with levelled pikes, bore back alike the excited multitude of citizens and the wild Scots of Galloway, bare-kneed and bare-armed, with their habergeons of jangling iron rings, and the strong barrier-gate was closed with haste and difficulty. Lord Ormond, Sir Malcolm Fleming, Sir Alan Lauder, and a few others, in virtue of their rank, being alone permitted to enter.

This *coup* was the more easily effected, as at the moment of the earl's entrance Douglas of Pompherston, his purse-bearer, cried "largesse! largesse!" and to add to the incidental popularity of his lord, scattered several handfuls of silver coin among the people, who scrambled in pursuit of them, and rolled over each other in heaps, while the reckless young earl and his brother laughed and threw more, to increase the uproar and merriment.

Then the portcullis, a massive iron grille, was lowered slowly down in its stony grooves, and when its iron spikes reached the causeway, James Achanna, the double tool of Abercorn and the chancellor, exchanged with the latter one of those deep and rapid smiles by which courtly villains can read each other's hearts and convey a volume of subtle thoughts.

Unheeding, or unobservant of all these circumstances, the earl and his brother accompanied the chancellor into the fortress, and as they slowly proceeded up the steep steps and winding path, which led in a north-westerly direction, to the summit of the rock, Crichton expatiated on the joy this meeting occasioned him, as being the precursor of domestic peace, of good will and unity, between his master the king and the great house of Douglas; but while speaking he could perceive the haughty young peer exchanging secret smiles with his brother; so, nothing daunted, the chancellor continued to flatter, and secretly smiled in his turn.

"Great as the house of Douglas has been – "

"*Is*, my lord," interrupted the earl, haughtily.

"Pardon me," stammered Crichton, reddening with anger to find himself thus addressed by a boy; "I was about to say, that in ages past, its chief glory was ever in its obedience to the crown, from whence its greatness and its honours sprung."

"Well?" observed the boy-noble impatiently.

"Enemies have accused you of treason – "

"Yourself, for instance, Sir William."

"True – as first officer of the crown," continued the chancellor, with a severity that increased with the bitterness that grew in his heart, "I have blamed you deeply and frequently; but this day will free you of all those suspicions which that unwise embassy to France occasioned."

"Sir William Crichton!"

"I am a man four times your age, lord earl," interrupted the chancellor, speaking very fast to avoid explicit or excited answers, "so pray excuse my grey hairs if they permit me to assume a monitory tone and venture to yield advice. I would but pray you to execute justice on your vast estates of Galloway, Annandale, and Balvenie with impartiality and gentleness; and not to protect from the just vengeance of the king, our lord and master, those lawless barons who levy feudal war and destroy each other's towers, villages, and territories, and by so doing impoverish the realm and oppress the people. Disobedience to the king has been the ruin of the most ancient and noble families; thus, I would pray you, my lord, to content yourself with the splendour attained by your house, and the glorious name it has borne for ages in peace and in war, nor seek to raise it above that throne in defence of which so many of the Douglas name have died in battle. *Ave Maria!* If you would surpass your king in anything, let it be in religion, in bounty and charity to your countrymen; surpass him thus, and I, whom you have long deemed your enemy, will pray with my latest breath for the glory and prosperity of the lordly line of Douglas, and that Scotland may long have cause to remember with joy the vigil of St. Catherine."

To all these remarks, which so well became the station and superior years of the chancellor, the petulant young earl disdained to reply, save by a cold and disdainful smile or so forth; and as Crichton concluded, they found themselves in the banquet-hall of the castle, and in presence of the king and the regent of Scotland.

CHAPTER XII
THE BLACK BULL'S HEAD

Edinburgh castle, town, and tower,
God grant ye sinke for sin;
And yat even for ye black dinour
Erle Douglas gat therein. —
Old Rhyme.

The hall in which this banquet was given, was the upper chamber of David's Tower.

Our novel of "Jane Seaton" contains a description of this gigantic edifice, which was the chief of the bastel-houses which crowned

"The height
Where the huge castle holds its state;"

but the MSS. of the abbot of Tongland throw some additional light upon its history.

This tower rose to the height of more than seventy feet above the summit of the steep rock. It contained a great hall and many lesser chambers, and was founded by David II., about 1360, upon the basement of a still older tower, perhaps the same edifice which vulgar tradition ascribes to the painted Picts, who are alleged to have conveyed from hand to hand the stones from the sandy quarry of Craig-mohl-ard (or the rock of the plain),[2] and at the gate of which the first David – the Scottish Justinian – was wont to sit, as his biographer, St. Ælred, tells us, dispensing justice, and hearing the complaints of the poor, even as St. Louis of France sat under an oak in the wood of Vincennes.

All the masons who built this tower died in the year it was completed; as if, says the abbot of Tongland, fate ordained that the secrets of its stairs and construction should die with them; and within it hung a bell, which, when a king of Scotland died, tolled of its own accord, like that great bell of Arragon, which always announced when "fate was nigh" the line of Ramiro.

In this old tower dwelt a brownie, who was believed to come at night to sleep near the embers of the hall fire, after plaiting the frills, pinners, and ruffs of the queen and her ladies. Some alleged that the cannon of the siege in 1573 put this useful household spirit to flight; others, that he was baptized by the priest of St. Cuthbert's Kirk, who concealed himself in the dusk within the hall ingle, where, when the brownie, in the form of a lean and withered little man, wearing a short yellow cloak, and red hosen (the royal livery), came at midnight to resume his nocturnal avocations, a handful of holy water was dashed in his face by the priest, who cried with a loud voice, – "In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti! Amen."

On this, the brownie wept bitterly, and vanished, to return no more.

The hall was hung with banners and trophies. The noonday light of the November sun, varied by many a passing cloud, poured through its arched windows upon the long table, which was spread with all the plenty and massive magnificence of the olden time; upon the rows of high-backed chairs for the guests; upon the throne for the young king, with its steps and purple velvet canopy; on the rich liveries of the trumpeters who were to announce the feast; and on the steel armour of the guards, who stood near the royal seat in honour of the guests; on each and all fell the slant rays of the sun lighting up many a glittering ornament, for the walls of the hall were entirely covered by yellow Spanish leather, stamped by alternate thistles and *fleurs-de-lis* in gold, while in the great fireplace there burned a fire of coals, mingled with pleasantly *perfumed* wood; a curious luxury not uncommon then.

The royal cupbearer, and six soldiers of the guard armed with partisans, were posted near a recess, or ambre, under the carved stone canopy of which glittered the king's service of plate. Amid

[2] Craigmillar.

it was a long slender flask of potters' ware, beautifully fashioned by the fair hands of Jacqueline, countess of Hainault and Flanders, the boldest and loveliest woman of her time, who, after abdicating in 1433, during her seclusion in the castle of Teylingen, near Leyden, employed the weary hours in making flasks of clay, and one of these she sent to the royal minstrel, James I. of Scotland, in care of the Dyck Graf of Bommel.

Now the brass trumpets sent their sharp ringing notes along the vaulted roof; spurs of gold and steel jangled on the tiled floor, while, preceded by all the combined pomp and mummery of ancient royalty, James II., a fair-haired and handsome boy, clad in a glittering doublet, fashioned like a herald's tabard, having the lion *gules* within the double tressure on the back, breast, and sleeves thereof, was led to the throne by the tall and sombre regent, while the crafty Crichton placed the young earl of Douglas on his right-hand. Again the trumpets sounded, and the guests, in succession, were marshalled to their places by Glammis, the master of the household, who executed this delicate matter – for delicate it was in that age of fierce punctilio – with scrupulous exactness, as to rank and precedence.

The boy-earl, with his dark eyes, his swarthy face and black curly hair, his bold bearing and defiant expression, formed so marked a contrast to the boy-king, who was fair-skinned, with fair hair and gentle eyes, that many present remarked the difference of their aspect and character.

On the young king's left cheek there was a small red spot, or fleshmark, which caused the people to name him in after years, "James with the Fiery Face."

"Why tarries the countess?" asked Gray, in a hasty whisper, of Lord David Douglas.

"She is not to be here," said the lad, smiling.

"Nor the Countess of Ormond?"

"No; nor Murielle, either," added David, playing with the gold tassels of his mantle.

"Why?"

"I am not in her secrets."

"But Lady Murielle – "

"Came not, because there were none here whom she *cared* to meet," said the spiteful little lord, with a grimace.

The abbot of Tongland invoked a blessing; and after they had all discussed platters of good Scottish broth, which they supped with massive old spoons, that might have served at the spousal feast of King Robert and Marjorie Bruce, and very probably did so, the clatter of knives began, as the servers, pages, and pantrymen sliced down the chines of beef, the roasted pigs and brawns, or unroofed the huge pasties of pigeons and venison, and rushed here and there with trenchers of stewed hares, roasted ducks, buttered crabs, salads and salmon, manchets of flour, and confections of honey and sweetmeats, all of which were eaten pellmell, without order or course.

Meanwhile the wines of France and Spain flowed freely, and brown ale frothed up in tankards and flagons, in which the long moustaches of the guests floated, as they quaffed to each other's health, and a long continuance of this sudden good fellowship, at which, in many instances, by their eyes and whispers, they seemed to scoff in secret.

Then a band of bearded minstrels and musicians, with harp and pipe, tabor, flute, and trumpet, in the gallery, played "Pastance with Gude Companie," and other old airs, which have been long since forgotten; or, if extant, are now known under new names.

Amid all this the pale chancellor, and the grave, but soldier-like regent, were abstracted and nervous; and the emotion of the former increased as the banquet proceeded, and the *fatal moment* drew near: yet, animated by a sentiment of duty to be performed to their king and country, no thought of pity or remorse found admission in the bosoms of either.

The young king and his young noble spoke of dogs, of hawks, of horses; and archery; of hunting and tilting; but the earl seemed to disdain the puerile conversation of the yet-secluded sovereign,

treating him coldly, and with an air of lofty patronage, amusing enough in one of his junior years, but sufficiently apparent to all.

Sir Patrick Gray felt that on this day the kinsmen of Murielle Douglas treated him more coldly than ever, as they deemed themselves in the zenith of their power and fantastic pride, lording it alike over the king and all his court.

"You see there my Captain of the Guard?" he heard the king say, with a kind smile, to the earl, who knit his brows, and contemptuously asked: —

"*Who* is he?"

"Sir Patrick Gray," replied the little monarch, whose eyes dilated with surprise.

"Of what – or where?"

"Of Foulis."

"Indeed!"

"A brave and noble gentleman," said James II., with an enthusiasm that made the poor soldier's heart expand with the purest joy; "lord earl, do you not know him?"

"Yes," said Douglas, frigidly; "but what of him?"

"He gave me a goshawk as a gift last New Year's-day, and I have killed with it every corbie in the woods of Bristo."

"Indeed!"

"And then at Lady-day he gave me two such noble hounds of St. Hubert's breed!"

"St. Bryde! how came such as *he* by dogs so rare?"

Sir Patrick bit his nether lip with suppressed passion at this continued insolence of tone, while the young king replied: —

"We sent him with a message to Jacqueline of Hainault – at least the Regent Livingstone did so, last year, – an errand of courtesy, for the countess was my father's friend. In passing through the forest of Ardennes, he tarried for a night at the Benedictine abbey of St. Hubert, and bought from the monks these two black hounds, the lineal descendants of those which accompanied the saint when he hunted with St. Eustace. They have silver collars, and despite my lady Glammis, sleep every night at the foot of my bed!"

"Laus Deo!" said the earl, shrugging his shoulders; "doubtless they must have somewhat of the odour of sanctity about them."

At this remark Sir Thomas MacLellan laughed, and the petulant earl turned almost fiercely to him, saying: —

"Sirrah, dare you laugh?"

"Saints and devils, my lord," retorted the Lieutenant of the Guard, "may not a man laugh?"

"No!"

"And why not, my lord earl?"

"Because to laugh is at times to assume a superiority, or a bearing of approval, which I would not permit even in our liege lord the king!"

The eyes of the chancellor met those of the regent, whose pale forehead flushed with anger at this insulting remark, though it illustrated how dangerous was the spirit they were about to crush.

"By St. Jude, Douglas, I laughed not at thee, but at thy saying," exclaimed MacLellan, breaking the momentary silence which had ensued.

"Then beware, lordling," said Douglas, who knew there was an old jealousy between the MacLellans and his people.

"I am no lord or earl either," replied MacLellan, flushing with anger in turn.

"What then?"

"One whom you know well to be a gentleman of Galloway, my lord. The king may gift coronets or titles, and *attaint* them, too; but God alone can make or unmake a loyal Scottish gentleman!"

The little king seemed almost scared by this angry outburst; but the regent and his adherents exchanged glances of approval, and they started involuntarily, for at that instant the great bell of David Tower announced the hour of three.

The fatal time had come!

Then the king's master-butcher entered, bearing aloft a vast covered platter, which, by its size, attracted the attention and excited the surprise of all; and passing deliberately round the great apartment, while many jests were made as to what new fare it contained, he placed it before the young earl of Douglas.

"Remove the cover!" said the regent, whose voice was hollow, as if it came from a coffin.

The master-butcher did so, and there was grimly revealed the old Celtic symbol of death, a black bull's head of great size, with its square nostrils, its grey polished horns, and curly forehead.

CHAPTER XIII
THE BLOCK

I must have
A more potential draught of guilt than this,
With more of wormwood in it. —
Firmilian.

A simultaneous cry burst from all on seeing this sure and terrible forerunner of a sudden death; all sprang from the table, and instinctively did so, sword in hand; for at the same moment the door of the 'tiring room was thrown violently open, and a chosen party of Crichton's vassals, led by Romanno of that ilk, constable of the castle, Andrew Gray of Balgarno, and others, rushed forward, and with levelled partisans, separated the earl of Douglas and his brother David from their more immediate friends.

"To your swords and defend yourselves, my brother and friends; we are lured – tricked to death!" cried the young earl, with prompt bravery, hewing right and left at the partisans; "A Douglas! a Douglas! cut me a passage to the king – to the throne – it is at least a *sanctuary*!"

"Hold, my lord!" exclaimed the chancellor, in a voice of thunder, as he stood with one foot on the lower step of the king's chair, and firmly interposed his drawn sword, "it is no sanctuary for thee or thine! and dare you – "

"Slay a chancellor? Yes, if I can, and this dog regent, too, like false hounds and fell traitors as ye are!" replied the brave youth, with a scornful but heartrending smile; while, by the press of partisans levelled in a dense rank, he and his brother, with Sir Malcolm Fleming, Sir Alan Lauder, and all others disposed to resistance, were thrust close to the wall, yet they shouted resolutely, "a Douglas! a Douglas!" The chairs and banquet-tables were overthrown, and all became a scene of confusion, destruction, and dismay, from which many fled by the doors, not knowing how the brawl would end.

"Guards and gentlemen!" exclaimed the tall grim regent, as he towered above the armed throng, and roughly but firmly grasped the left arm of the bewildered king, who thought he was about to perish, like his father, by the hands of regicides, yet, like a brave boy as he was, had rushed forward to save Douglas; "guards and gentlemen, disarm this traitorous peer and all who have drawn their swords by his side in the royal presence. Put up your blade, I command you, William, earl of Douglas – the king is here, and this is his royal castle!"

"Dishonour blight it for this day's deed," exclaimed old Sir Malcolm Fleming, "and may its roof-tree be the gallows of all thy race, accursed Crichton! thou cogging villain, thou cheat and assassin! And as for *thee*, Lord regent – hah! the sword that knighted thee was never notched in battle!"

"A very carpet squire!" said Lauder, scornfully.

"Liars are both; the blade that knighted me was our Scottish sword of state; a king's hand gave me the accolade – a king murdered by traitors false as you! Now hearken to me, Douglas. Fate has this day placed the destinies of your rebellious and overweening house in the hands of a justly-offended king and his resolute ministers, so prepare for a doom upon which a short but ample career of evil actions has hurried you – that fatal doom which incensed justice is about to mete out to you and the adherents of your father. Disarm them, guards I say; by *my* voice the king commands it!"

Seeing the futility of resistance, the venerable laird of Cumbernauld tossed his sword disdainfully to the Captain of the Guard, and Sir Alan Lauder broke his blade across his knee, and flung the fragments down in sullen silence; but the earl and his brother hacked and hewed at the shafts of the partisans, inflicting many severe wounds on the hands and arms of their assailants, before they were beaten down, disarmed, when mad with fury, and secured by silken cords, torn from the curtains of the hall windows. Achanna, while pretending to save the earl, hung treacherously upon his sword

arm till he was captured, and the sorrowing and bewildered Captain of the Guard had to interpose his own sword between the furious boy Lord David and Romanno, who had drawn his dagger, having been exasperated by a slash across the face. Prior to this the abbot of Tongland, the earl of Ormond, Douglas of Pompherston, and others, had all been dragged from the hall and forcibly expelled into the city, where they spread alarm and consternation through every street and alley.

The poor little king, who, with the six princesses his sisters, had been given up completely to the care of Livingstone and Crichton, since his mother Queen Jane had contracted her foolish marriage with the handsome Sir James Stewart, usually known as the Black Knight of Lorn, surveyed this terrible scene with the bewilderment of a startled boy; but, on beholding the two brothers manacled with cords, bruised, bleeding, and faint, after their brave but futile struggle, he burst into tears, and clutching the robe of the lord chancellor, besought him "to spare them."

Then, according to Balfour, in his "Annals of Scotland," and other writers, the chancellor replied sternly: – "You are but a child, and know not what you demand, for to spare them would be the ruin of you and your whole kingdom!"

"Forgive them; oh, forgive them!" continued the princely boy, wringing his hands, and appealing next to the regent; but he too replied grimly: – "Your grace knows not what you ask."

"I *do* know what I ask, and what I command. Am I not a king?" was the passionate response.

"Well, rather than obey," replied Crichton, through his clenched teeth, "I would walk barefoot over seven burning ploughshares, or over the seven times heated furnace of hell," he added, with terrible energy; "our time for vengeance has come!"

But the little monarch continued to sob and say: – "Lord regent, lord regent, I am a king."

At last he appealed to Sir Patrick Gray, commanding him to draw his dagger and cut the cords which bound the brothers and their two faithful friends; but the unfortunate captain, confounded by the suddenness of the catastrophe, impelled by his love for Murielle on one hand, his duty to the two highest officers of the crown on the other; his regard for the young king, and a remembrance of how insolently these Douglases had ever treated himself, leaned on his sword, and covered his face with his hand, to hide the emotion that warred in his breast.

Suddenly he approached Crichton, to unite his entreaties to those of his young monarch; but was roughly repelled.

"Oh, chancellor," he exclaimed, "is this my meed – this my reward for faithful service as the king's liege man?"

"If such you be, I command you, peace, Sir Patrick – guard the king, and leave the punishment of his rebels to us."

Now the voice of the regent was heard above the throng, as he shook his clenched right hand aloft.

"I arrest you, William, duke of Touraine, earl of Douglas, lord of Annandale, Longueville, and Galloway, on charges of foul treason; and you, Lord David Douglas; you, Sir Malcolm Fleming of Biggar and Cumbernauld; and you, Sir Alan Lauder of the Bass, captain of the castle of Thrave, on the same serious accusation."

"Treason?" reiterated the young earl, as he proudly raised his head; "in what have I been guilty of treason; and who dare accuse me?"

"I – the chancellor of Scotland," replied Crichton.

"Read the charges," said the regent, sternly.

"They are here," replied Crichton, unfolding a document, while all leaned on their unsheathed weapons, and listened breathlessly. "Treason, in the daily oppression of the king's subjects, at the head of two thousand horsemen, most of whom are outlawed moss-troopers and thieves of Annandale, who sorn on the king's lieges, and commit every outrage; and this ye do, though the parliament held at Perth, in 1424, ordained that *no* man should travel abroad with more followers than he could maintain. Treason in dubbing men as knights who are but sorners, limmers, and masterful rogues. Treason,

in holding *cours plénières* after the fashion of parliament; and treason, in sending two gentlemen to France as your ambassadors to Charles VII."

"It is false, as all the rest!" exclaimed the earl. "I did but send them as my father desired me, when he lay dying at Restalrig, to renew his oath of fealty for the duchy of Touraine, the fief of Longueville, and other lands we hold in France; and to fix the yearly rental of the former at ten thousand crowns."

"He speaks most truly," exclaimed Sir Malcolm Fleming and Sir Alan Lauder in the same breath.

"Well, all this, though too little for a king, was too great for a subject," said the regent, haughtily.

"The extent of your power and the misuse thereof," resumed the chancellor, "with the lawless character of your followers, are pretexts enough, without others, on which to arraign you. No religion, no threats, no prayers or pretended reformation, no oaths or promises, can alter the inborn character we inherit with our blood; and what have *you*, Douglas, thus inherited? Pride, treason, contumacy, and the love of open rebellion against the crown; and these evil qualities will remain true to the fount from whence they spring; so, my lord regent, to the block, I say, with this viperous brood. If the boy is thus dangerous, what would the man be?"

"We demand to be tried by our peers," said the earl, firmly; "arraign us before the Estates."

"You have got nearly all the trial and shrift we mean to give you," said the regent, bluntly. "Romanno, away with them to the castle Butts."

The trial, if it can be called so, proceeded rapidly, for the judges had long ago resolved on the sentence, and, as one historian says, "were determined to make no allowance for the youth and inexperience of the parties – for the artifices by which they had been lured within the danger of the law, and for their being totally deprived of constitutional or legal defenders."

So, without counsel, jury, or written documents of any kind, these grim proceedings went on; but never once did the brave boys sue for pity, for mercy, or even for one hour of life.

From the hall, where the king, amid the *débris* of the banquet and combat, sank weeping on his canopied seat, the unfortunate earl and his brother were hurried down the back stair of David's Tower, and dragged to the greensward of the Butts, where the new barracks were built in 1796, and there, in the presence of the regent, the chancellor, Sir Walter Halyburton, the lord high treasurer, and other officers of state, after being barely permitted to embrace each other, they were thrown down on the block in succession, forcibly held there, and beheaded!

This terrible deed was scarcely done ere all the friends of the regent and chancellor, save their garrison, hastily quitted the castle; even as those who *now* witness an execution disperse rapidly as if it were a relief to get rid of emotions so deep as those which are excited by beholding a violent death, however judicially done.

For two days Sir Malcolm Fleming (ancestor of the earls of Wigton) was respited only because he had wedded Elizabeth Stewart, daughter of the old duke of Albany; but ultimately he too was beheaded on the same block that was yet crimsoned with the blood of those he loved so well.

Sir Alan Lauder, through the friendship of Romanno, effected his escape; while Fleming was interred in the coffin which bore the name of Murielle Douglas.

In a wild spot on the north-western slope of the castle rock, where the wall-flower and thistle flourished, and where at times the grass was spotted by the *witch-gowans*, those yellow flowers which are filled by pernicious sap, and are supposed to cause blindness, grew luxuriantly, they were all interred in one deep grave.

In 1753, when the foundations of an arsenal were being dug there, some human remains were exhumed, with several coffin-handles, and three inscription-plates of pure gold. With these relics were found the skull and horns of a bull, thereby identifying them with those victims of misrule who perished on the vigil of St. Catharine, in 1440.

CHAPTER XIV
THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF NOVEMBER

Playing at the tables, he
There was murder'd. At his shrine
Many a noble lady wept;
Many a knight of valiant line:
One mourn'd more than all the rest,
Daughter of the Genovine.
Poetry of Spain.

In the horror and bewilderment which were naturally excited by this terrible and unexpected catastrophe – this double execution which had taken place under his own eyes, and in which he felt himself thereby almost implicated, the unfortunate Captain of the King's Guard knew not what to do.

How would the powerful and hostile Douglases, and how might Murielle view him *now*?

He shrunk from the contemplation, and felt such an abhorrence of the regent and chancellor, that, although his bread and subsistence were derived from his post at court as Captain of the King's Guard, he was tempted to cast the office from him and leave the country. But to pass into exile was to lose all hope of Murielle, to relinquish her for ever; and he lived in an age when love was perhaps a more *concentrated* passion than it may be even in one of greater civilization.

To lure her with him into France, – in those old times the Scotsman's *other* home, – would be fraught with danger; for the Douglases would have interest enough with Charles VII. to procure their separation, and his commitment for life to some obscure bastille, where he would never be heard of again, – if their emissaries did not cut him off in the light of open day.

Then, on the other hand, his patron and friend, the late King James I., had made him promise to be a faithful subject and mentor to his son and heir; and, with one hand on that dead monarch's body as he lay murdered in the Black Friary at Perth, he had recorded the promise again in presence of his mourning widow.

That a terrible vengeance would be planned by the Douglases and their adherents for that *black dinner*, – as it was named, – he felt assured; for all who hated the regent or dreaded the chancellor had for years found security in the numerous strongholds of the slaughtered earl, and had there bid defiance alike to king, law, and parliament. All the lawless moss-troopers; all broken, idle, and mischievous persons, professed themselves vassals of this powerful house, which was rapidly aiming at the erection of a separate and independent principality in the southern and most fertile district of Scotland.

By the stern chancellor's wisdom, and merciless decree, the headsman's axe had struck a fatal blow at this most daring and ambitious scheme: but what might the sequel be to public as well as private interests?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.