

YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

TWO PENNILESS
PRINCESSES

Charlotte Yonge

Two Penniless Princesses

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CHAPTER 1. DUNBAR

“Twas on a night, an evening bright
When the dew began to fa’,
Lady Margaret was walking up and down,
Looking over her castle wa’.

The battlements of a castle were, in disturbed times, the only recreation-ground of the ladies and play-place of the young people. Dunbar Castle, standing on steep rocks above the North Sea, was not only inaccessible on that side, but from its donjon tower commanded a magnificent view, both of the expanse of waves, taking purple tints from the shadows of the clouds, with here and there a sail fleeting before the wind, and of the rugged headlands of the coast, point beyond point, the nearer distinct, and showing the green summits, and below, the tossing waves breaking white against the dark rocks, and the distance becoming more and more hazy, in spite of the bright sun which made a broken path of glory along the tossing, white-crested waters.

The wind was a keen north-east breeze, and might have been thought too severe by any but the ‘hardy, bold, and wild’ children who were merrily playing on the top of the donjon tower, round the staff whence fluttered the double treasured banner with ‘the ruddy lion ramped in gold’ denoting the presence of the King.

Three little boys, almost babies, and a little girl not much older, were presided over by a small elder sister, who held the youngest in her lap, and tried to amuse him with caresses and rhymes, so as to prevent his interference with the castle-building of the others, with their small hoard of pebbles and mussel and cockle shells.

Another maiden, the wind tossing her long chestnut-locks, uncovered, but tied with the Scottish snood, sat on the battlement, gazing far out over the waters, with eyes of the same tint as the hair. Even the sea-breeze failed to give more than a slight touch of colour to her somewhat freckled complexion; and the limbs that rested in a careless attitude on the stone bench were long and languid, though with years and favourable circumstances there might be a development of beauty and dignity. Her lips were crooning at intervals a mournful old Scottish tune, sometimes only humming, sometimes uttering its melancholy burthen, and she now and then touched a small harp that stood by her side on the seat.

She did not turn round when a step approached, till a hand was laid on her shoulder, when she started, and looked up into the face of another girl, on a smaller scale, with a complexion of the lily-and-rose kind, fair hair under her hood, with a hawk upon her wrist, and blue eyes dancing at the surprise of her sister.

‘Eleanor in a creel, as usual!’ she cried.

‘I thought it was only one of the bairns,’ was the answer.

‘They might coup over the walls for aught thou seest,’ returned the new-comer. ‘If it were not for little Mary what would become of the poor weans?’

‘What will become of any of us?’ said Eleanor. ‘I was gazing out over the sea and wishing we could drift away upon it to some land of rest.’

‘The Glenuskie folk are going to try another land,’ said Jean. ‘I was in the bailey-court even now playing at ball with Jamie when in comes a lay-brother, with a letter from Sir Patrick to say that he is coming the night to crave permission from Jamie to go with his wife to France. Annis, as you

know, is betrothed to the son of his French friends, Malcolm is to study at the Paris University, and Davie to be in the Scottish Guards to learn chivalry like his father. And the Leddy of Glenuskie—our Cousin Lilian—is going with them.'

'And she will see Margaret,' said Eleanor. 'Meg the dearie! Dost remember Meg, Jeanie?'

'Well, well do I remember her, and how she used to let us nestle in her lap and sing to us. She sang like thee, Elleen, and was as mother-like as Mary is to the weans, but she was much blithesomer—at least before our father was slain.'

'Sweetest Meg! My whole heart leaps after her,' cried Eleanor, with a fervent gesture.

'I loved her better than Isabel, though she was not so bonnie,' said Jean.

'Jeanie, Jeanie,' cried Eleanor, turning round with a vehemence strangely contrasting with her previous language, 'wherefore should we not go with Glenuskie to be with Meg at Bourges?'

Jeanie opened her blue eyes wide.

'Go to the French King's Court?' she said.

'To the land of chivalry and song,' exclaimed Eleanor, 'where they have courts of love and poetry, and tilts and tourneys and minstrelsy, and the sun shines as it never does in this cold bleak north; and above all there is Margaret, dear tender Margaret, almost a queen, as a queen she will be one day. Oh! I almost feel her embrace.'

'It might be well,' said Jean, in the matter-of-fact tone of a practical young lady; 'mewed up in these dismal castles, we shall never get princely husbands like our sisters. I might be Queen of Beauty, I doubt me whether you are fair enough, Eleanor.'

'Oh, that is not what I think of,' said Eleanor. 'It is to see our own Margaret, and to see and hear the minstrel knights, instead of the rude savages here, scarce one of whom knows what knighthood means!'

'Ay, and they will lay hands on us and wed us one of these days,' returned Jean, 'unless we vow ourselves as nuns, and I have no mind for that.'

'Nor would a convent always guard us,' said Eleanor; 'these reivers do not stick at sanctuary. Now in that happy land ladies meet with courtesy, and there is a minstrel king like our father, Rene is his name, uncle to Margaret's husband. Oh! it would be a very paradise.'

'Let us go, let us go!' exclaimed Jean.

'Go!' said Mary, who had drawn nearer to them while they spoke. 'Whither did ye say?'

'To France—to sister Margaret and peace and sunshine,' said Eleanor.

'Eh!' said the girl, a pale fair child of twelve; 'and what would poor Jamie and the weans do, wanting their titties?'

'Ye are but a bairn, Mary,' was Jean's answer. 'We shall do better for Jamie by wedding some great lords in the far country than by waiting here at home.'

'And James will soon have a queen of his own to guide him,' added Eleanor.

'I'll no quit Jamie or the weans,' said little Mary resolutely, turning back as the three-year-old boy elicited a squall from the eighteen-months one.

'Johnnie! Johnnie! what gars ye tak' away wee Andie's claw? Here, my mannie.'

And she was kneeling on the leads, making peace over the precious crab's claw, which, with a few cockles and mussels, was the choicest toy of these forlorn young Stewarts; for Stewarts they all were, though the three youngest, the weans, as they were called, were only half-brothers to the rest.

Nothing, in point of fact, could have been much more forlorn than the condition of all. The father of the elder ones, James I., the flower of the whole Stewart race, had nine years before fallen a victim to the savage revenge and ferocity of the lawless men whom he had vainly endeavoured to restrain, leaving an only son of six years old and six young daughters. His wife, Joanna, once the Nightingale of Windsor, had wreaked vengeance in so barbarous a manner as to increase the dislike to her as an Englishwoman. Forlorn and in danger, she tried to secure a protector by a marriage with Sir James Stewart, called the Black Knight of Lorn; but he was unable to do much for her, and only

added the feuds of his own family to increase the general danger. The two eldest daughters, Margaret and Isabel, were already contracted to the Dauphin and the Duke of Brittany, and were soon sent to their new homes. The little King, the one darling of his mother, was snatched from her, and violently transferred from one fierce guardian to another; each regarding the possession of his person as a sanction to tyranny. He had been introduced to the two winsome young Douglasses only as a prelude to their murder, and every day brought tidings of some fresh violence; nay, for the second time, a murder was perpetrated in the Queen's own chamber.

The poor woman had never been very tender or affectionate, and had the haughty demeanour with which the house of Somerset had thought fit to assert their claims to royalty. The cruel slaughter of her first husband, perhaps the only person for whom she had ever felt a softening love, had hardened and soured her. She despised and domineered over her second husband, and made no secret that the number of her daughters was oppressive, and that it was hard that while the royal branch had produced, with one exception, only useless pining maidens, her second marriage in too quick succession should bring her sons, who could only be a burthen. No one greatly marvelled when, a few weeks after the birth of little Andrew, his father disappeared, though whether he had perished in some brawl, been lost at sea, or sought foreign service as far as possible from his queenly wife and inconvenient family, no one knew.

Not long after, the Queen, with her four daughters and the infants, had been seized upon by a noted freebooter, Patrick Hepburn of Hailes, and carried to Dunbar Castle, probably to serve as hostages, for they were fairly well treated, though never allowed to go beyond the walls. The Queen's health had, however, been greatly shaken, the cold blasts of the north wind withered her up, and she died in the beginning of the year 1445.

The desolateness of the poor girls had perhaps been greater than their grief. Poor Joanna had been exacting and tyrannical, and with no female attendants but the old, worn-out English nurse, had made them do her all sorts of services, which were requited with scoldings and grumblings instead of the loving thanks which ought to have made them offices of affection as well as duty; while the poor little boys would indeed have fared ill if their half-sister Mary, though only twelve years old, had not been one of those girls who are endowed from the first with tender, motherly instincts.

Beyond providing that there was a supply of some sort of food, and that they were confined within the walls of the Castle, Hepburn did not trouble his head about his prisoners, and for many weeks they had no intercourse with any one save Archie Scott, an old groom of their mother's; Ankaret, nurse to baby Andrew; and the seneschal and his wife, both Hepburns.

Eleanor and Jean, who had been eight and seven years old at the time of the terrible catastrophe which had changed all their lives, had been well taught under their father's influence; and the former, who had inherited much of his talent and poetical nature, had availed herself of every scanty opportunity of feeding her imagination by book or ballad, story-teller or minstrel; and the store of tales, songs, and fancies that she had accumulated were not only her own chief resource but that of her sisters, in the many long and dreary hours that they had to pass, unbrightened save by the inextinguishable buoyancy of young creatures together. When their mother was dying, Hepburn could not help for very shame admitting a priest to her bedside, and allowing the clergy to perform her obsequies in full form. This had led to a more complete perception of the condition of the poor Princesses, just at the time when the two worst tyrants over the young King, Crichton and Livingstone, had fallen out, and he had been able to put himself under the guidance of his first cousin, James Kennedy, Bishop of St. Andrews and now Chancellor of Scotland, one of the wisest, best, and truest-hearted men in Scotland, and imbued with the spirit of the late King.

By his management Hepburn was induced to make submission and deliver up Dunbar Castle to the King with all its captives, and the meeting between the brother and sisters was full of extreme delight on both sides. They had been together very little since their father's death, only meeting enough to make them long for more opportunities; and the boy at fifteen years old was beginning to weary

after the home feeling of rest among kindred, and was so happy amidst his sisters that no attempt at breaking up the party at Dunbar had yet been made, as its situation made it a convenient abode for the Court. Though he had never had such advantages of education as, strangely enough, captivity had afforded to his father, he had not been untaught, and his rapid, eager, intelligent mind had caught at all opportunities afforded by those palace monasteries of Scotland in which he had stayed for various periods of his vexed and stormy minority. Good Bishop Kennedy, with whom he had now spent many months, had studied at Paris and had passed four years at Rome, so as to be well able both to enlarge and stimulate his notions. In Eleanor he had found a companion delighted to share his studies, and full likewise of original fancy and of that vein of poetry almost peculiar to Scottish women; and Jean was equally charming for all the sports in which she could take part, while the little ones, whom, to his credit be it spoken, he always treated as brothers, were pleasant playthings.

His presence, with all that it involved, had made a most happy change in the maidens' lives; and yet there was still great dreariness, much restraint in the presence of constant precaution against violence, much rudeness and barbarism in the surroundings, absolute poverty in the plenishing, a lack of all beauty save in the wild and rugged face of northern nature, and it was hardly to be wondered at that young people, inheritors of the cultivated instincts of James I. and of the Plantagenets, should yearn for something beyond, especially for that sunny southern land which report and youthful imagination made them believe an ideal world of peace, of poetry, and of chivalry, and the loving elder sister who seemed to them a part of that golden age when their noble and tender-hearted father was among them.

The boy's foot was on the turret-stairs, and he was out on the battlements—a tall lad for his age, of the same colouring as Eleanor, and very handsome, except for the blemish of a dark-red mark upon one cheek.

'How now, wee Andie?' he exclaimed, tossing the baby boy up in his arms, and then on the cry of 'Johnnie too!' 'Me too!' performing the same feat with the other two, the last so boisterously that Mary screamed that 'the bairnie would be coupit over the crag.'

'What, looking out over the sea?' he cried to his elder sisters. 'That's the wrang side! Ye should look out on the other, to see Glenuskie coming with Davie and Malcolm, so we'll have no lack of minstrelsy and tales to-night, that is if the doited old council will let me alone. Here, come to the southern tower to watch for them.'

The sisters had worked themselves to the point of eagerness where propitious moments are disregarded, and both broke out—

'Glenuskie is going to Margaret. We want to go with him!'

'Go! Go to Margaret and leave me!' cried James, the red spot on his face spreading.

'Oh, Jamie, it is so dull and dreary, and folks are so fierce and rude.'

'That might be when that loon Hepburn had you, but now you have me, who can take order with them.'

'You cannot do all, Jamie,' persisted Eleanor; 'and we long after that fair smooth land of peace. Lady Glenuskie would take good care of us till we came to Margaret.'

'Ay! And 'tis little you heed how it is with me,' exclaimed James, 'when you are gone to your daffing and singing and dancing—with me that have saved you from that reiver Hepburn.'

'Jamie, dear, I'll never quit ye,' said little Mary's gentle voice.

He laughed.

'You are a leal faithful little lady, Mary; but you are no good as yet, when Angus is speiring for my sister for his heir.'

'And do you trow,' said Jean hotly, 'that when one sister is to be a queen, and the other is next thing to it, we are going to put up with a raw-boned, red-haired, unmannerly Scots earl?'

'And do you forget who is King of Scotland, ye proud peat?' her brother cried in return.

‘A braw sort of king,’ returned Jean, ‘who could not hinder his mother and sisters from being stolen by an outlaw.’

The pride and hot temper of the Beauforts had descended to both brother and sister, and James lifted his hand with ‘Dare to say that again’; and Jean was beginning ‘I dare,’ when little Annaple opportunely called, ‘There’s a plump of spears coming over the hill.’

There was an instant rush to watch them, James saying—

‘The Drummond banner! Ye shall see how Glenuskie mocks at this same fine fancy of yours’; and he ran downstairs at no kingly pace, letting the heavy nail-studded door bang after him.

‘He will never let us go,’ sighed Jean.

‘You worked him into one of his tempers,’ returned Eleanor. ‘You should have broached it to him more by degrees.’

‘And lost the chance of going with Sir Patie and his wife, and got plighted to the red-haired Master of Angus—never see sweet Meg and her braw court, and the tilts and tourneys, but live among murderous caitiffs and reivers all my days,’ sobbed Jean.

‘I would not be such a fule body as to give in for a hasty word or two, specially of Jamie’s,’ said Eleanor composedly.

‘And gin ye bide here,’ added gentle Mary, ‘we shall be all together, and you will have Jamie and the bairnies.’

‘Fine consolation,’ muttered Jean.

‘Eh well,’ said Eleanor, we must go down and meet them.’

‘This fashion!’ exclaimed Jean. ‘Look at your hair, Ellie—blown wild about your ears like a daft woman’s, and your kirtle all over mortar and smut. My certie, you would be a bonnie lady to be Queen of Love and Beauty at a jousting-match.’

‘You are no better, Jeanie,’ responded Eleanor.

‘That I ken full well, but I’d be shamed to show myself to knights and lairds that gate. And see Mary and all the lave have their hands as black as a caird’s.’

‘Come and let Andie’s Mary wash them,’ said that little personage, picking up fat Andrew in her arms, while he retained his beloved crab’s claw. ‘Jeanie, would you carry Johnnie, he’s not sure-footed, over the stair? Annaple, take Lorn’s hand over the kittle turning.’

One chamber was allotted to the entire party and their single nurse. Being far up in the tower, it ventured to have two windows in the massive walls, so thick that five-and-twenty steps from the floor were needed to reach the narrow slips of glass in a frame that could be removed at will, either to admit the air or to be exchanged for solid wooden shutters to exclude storms by sea or arrows and bolts by land. The lower part of the walls was hung with very grim old tapestry, on which Holofernes’ head, going into its bag, could just be detected; there were two great solid box-beds, two more pallets rolled up for the day, a chest or two, a rude table, a cross-legged chair, a few stools, and some deer and seal skins spread on the floor completed the furniture of this ladies’ bower. There was, unusual luxury, a chimney with a hearth and peat fire, and a cauldron on it, with a silver and a copper basin beside it for washing purposes, never discarded by poor Queen Joanna and her old English nurse Ankaret, who had remained beside her through all the troubles of the stormy and barbarous country, and, though crippled by a fall and racked with rheumatism, was the chief comfort of the young children. She crouched at the hearth with her spinning and her beads, and exclaimed at the tossed hair and soiled hands and faces of her charges.

Mary brought the little ones to her to be set to rights, and the elder girls did their best with their toilette. Princesses as they were, the ruddy golden tresses of Eleanor and the flaxen locks of Jean and Mary were the only ornaments that they could boast of as their own; and though there were silken and embroidered garments of their mother’s in one of the chests, their mourning forbade the use of them. The girls only wore the plain black kirtles that had been brought from Haddington at the time of the funeral, and the little boys had such homespun garments as the shepherd lads wore.

Partly scolding, partly caressing, partly bemoaning the condition of her young ladies, so different from the splendours of the house of Somerset, Ankaret saw that Eleanor was as fit to be seen as circumstances would permit; as to Jean and Mary, there was no trouble on that score.

The whole was not accomplished till a horn was sounded as an intimation that supper was ready, at five o'clock, for the entire household, and all made their way down—Jean first, in all the glory of her fair face and beautiful hair; then Eleanor with little Lorn, as he was called, his Christian name being James; then Annapple and Johnnie hand-in-hand, Mary carrying Andrew, and lastly old Ankaret, hobbling along with her stick, and, when out of sight, a hand on Annapple's shoulder. In public, nothing would have made her presume so far. The hall was a huge, vaulted, stone-walled room, with a great fire on the wide hearth, and three long tables—one was cross-wise, on the dais near the fire, the other two ran the length of the hall. The upper one was furnished with tolerably clean napery and a few silver vessels; as to the lower ones, they were in two degrees of comparison, and the less said of the third the better. It was for the men-at-arms and the lowest servants, whereas the second belonged to those of the suite of the King and Chancellor, who were not of rank to be at his table. The Lord Lion King-at-Arms was high-table company, but he was absent, and the inferior royal pursuivant was entertaining two of his fellows, one with the Douglas Bloody Heart, the other with the Lindsay Lion on a black field, besides two messengers of the different clans, who looked askance at one another.

Leaning against the wall near the window stood the young King with two or three youths beside him, laughing and talking over three great deer-hounds, and by the hearth were two elder men—one, a tall dignified figure in the square cap and purple robe of a Bishop, with a face of great wisdom and sweetness; the other, still taller, with slightly grizzled hair and the weather-beaten countenance of a valiant and sagacious warrior, dressed in the leathern garments usually worn under armour.

As Jean emerged from the turret she was met and courteously greeted by Sir Patrick Drummond and his sons, as were also her sisters, with a grace and deference to their rank such as they hardly ever received from the nobles, and whose very rarity made Eleanor shy and uncomfortable, even while she was gratified and accepted it as her due.

The Bishop inclined his head and gave them a kind smile; but they had already seen him in the morning, as he was residing in the castle. He was the most fatherly friend and kinsman the young things knew, and though really their first cousin, they looked to him like an uncle. He insisted on due ceremony with them, though he had much difficulty in enforcing it, except with those Scottish knights and nobles who, like Sir Patrick Drummond, had served in France, and retained their French breeding.

So Jean, hawk and all, had to be handed to her seat by Sir Patrick as the guest, Eleanor by her brother, not without a little fraternal pinch, and Mary by the Bishop, who answered with a paternal caress to her murmured entreaty that she might keep wee Andie on her lap and give him his brose.

It was not a sumptuous repast, the staple being a haggis, also broth with chunks of meat and barleycorns floating in it, the meat in strings by force of boiling. At the high table each person had a bowl, either silver or wood, and each had a private spoon, and a dagger to serve as knife, also a drinking-cup of various materials, from the King's gold goblet downwards to horns, and a bannock to eat with the brose. At the middle table trenchers and bannocks served the purpose of plates; and at the third there was nothing interposed between the boards of the table and the lumps of meat from which the soup had been made.

Jean's quick eyes soon detected more men-at-arms and with different badges from the thyme spray of Drummond, and her brother was evidently bursting with some communication, held back almost forcibly by the Bishop, who had established a considerable influence over the impetuous boy, while Sir Patrick maintained a wise and tedious political conversation about the peace between France and England, which was to be cemented by the marriage of the young King of England to the daughter of King Rene and the cession of Anjou and Maine to her father.

'Solid dukedoms for a lassie!' cried young James. 'What a craven to make such a bargain!'

‘Scarce like his father’s son,’ returned Sir Patrick, ‘who gat the bride with a kingdom for her tocher that these folks have well-nigh lost among them.’

‘The saints be praised if they have.’

‘I cannot forget, my liege, how your own sainted father loved and fought for King Harry of Monmouth. Foe as he was, I own that I shall never look on his like again.’

‘I hold with you in that, Patie,’ said Bishop Kennedy; ‘and frown as you may, my young liege, a few years with such as he would do more for you—as it did with your blessed father—than ever we can.’

‘I can hold mine own, I hope, without lessons from the enemy,’ said James, holding his head high, while his ruddy locks flew back, his eyes glanced, and the red scar on his cheek widened. ‘And is it true that you are for going through false England, Patie?’

‘I made friends there when I spent two years there with your Grace’s blessed father,’ returned Sir Patrick, ‘and so did my good wife. She longs to see the lady who is now Sister Clare at St. Katharine’s in London, and it is well not to let her and Annis brook the long sea voyage.’

‘There, Jean! I’d brook ten sea voyages rather than hold myself beholden to an Englishman!’ quoth James.

‘Nevertheless, there are letters and messages that it is well to confide to so trusty and wise-headed a knight as Glenuskie,’ returned the Bishop.

The meal over, the silver bowls were carried round with water to wash the hands by the two young Drummonds, sons of Glenuskie, and by the King’s pages, youths of about the same age, after which the Bishop and Sir Patrick asked licence of the King to retire for consultation to the Bishop’s apartment, a permission which, as may well be believed, he granted readily, only rejoicing that he was not wanted.

The little ones were carried off by Mary and Nurse Ankaret; and the King, his elder sisters, and the other youths of condition betook themselves, followed by half-a-dozen great dogs, to the court, where the Drummonds wanted to exhibit the horses procured for the journey, and James and Jean to show the hawks that were the pride of their heart.

By and by came an Italian priest, who acted as secretary to the Bishop—a poor little man who grew yellower and yellower, was always shivering, and seemed to be shrivelled into growing smaller and smaller by the Scottish winds, but who had a most keen and intelligent face.

‘How now, Father Romuald,’ called out James. ‘Are ye come to fetch me?’

‘Di grazia, Signor Re’, began the Italian in some fear, as the dogs smelted his lambskin cape. ‘The Lord Bishop entreats your Majesty’s presence.’

His Majesty, who, by the way, never was so called by any one else, uttered some bitter growls and grumbles, but felt forced to obey the call, taking with him, however, his beautiful falcon on his wrist, and the two huge deer-hounds, who he declared should be of the council if he was.

Jean and Eleanor then closed upon David and Malcolm, eagerly demanding of them what they expected in that wonderful land to which they were going, much against the will of young David, who was sure there would be no hunting of deer, nor hawking for grouse, nor riding after an English borderer or Hieland cateran—nothing, in fact, worth living for! It would be all a-wearying with their manners and their courtesies and such like daft woman’s gear! Why could not his father be content to let him grow up like his fellows, rough and free and ready?

‘And knowing nothing better—nothing beyond,’ said Eleanor.

‘What would you have better than the hill and the brae? To tame a horse and fly a hawk, and couch a lance and bend a bow! That’s what a man is made for, without fashing himself with letters and Latin and manners, no better than a monk; but my father would always have it so!’

‘Ye’ll be thankful to him yet, Davie,’ put in his graver brother.

‘Thankful! I shall forget all about it as soon as I am knighted, and make you write all my letters—and few enough there will be.’

‘And you, Malcolm!’ said Eleanor, ‘would you be content to hide within four walls, and know nothing by your own eyes?’

‘No indeed, cousin,’ replied the lad; ‘I long for the fair churches and cloisters and the learned men and books that my father tells of. My mother says that her brother, that I am named for, yearned to make this a land of peace and godliness, and to turn these high spirits to God’s glory instead of man’s strife and feud, and how it might have been done save for the slaying of your noble father—Saints rest him!—which broke mine uncle’s heart, so that he died on his way home from pilgrimage. She hopes to pray at his tomb that I may tread in his steps, and be a blessing and not a curse to the land we love.’

Eleanor was silent, seeing for the first time that there might be higher aims than escaping from dulness, strife, and peril; whilst Jean cried—

‘Tis the titles and jousts, the knights and ladies that I care for—men that know what fair chivalry means, and make knightly vows to dare all sorts of foes for a lady’s sake.’

‘As if any lass was worth it,’ said David contemptuously.

‘Ay, that’s what you are! That’s what it is to live in this savage realm,’ returned Jean.

At this moment, however, Brother Romuald was again seen advancing, and this time with a request for the presence of the ladies Jean and Eleanor.

‘Could James be relenting on better advice?’ they asked one another as they went.

‘More likely,’ said Jean, with a sigh, amounting to a groan, ‘it is only to hear that we are made over, like a couple of kine, to some ruffianly reivers, who will beat a princess as soon as a scullion.’

They reached the chamber in time. Though the Bishop slept there it also served for a council chamber; and as he carried his chapel and household furniture about with him, it was a good deal more civilised-looking than even the princesses’ room. Large folding screens, worked with tapestry, representing the lives of the saints, shut off the part used as an oratory and that which served as a bedchamber, where indeed the good man slept on a rush mat on the floor. There were a table and several chairs and stools, all capable of being folded up for transport. The young King occupied a large chair of state, in which he twisted himself in a very undignified manner; the Bishop-Chancellor sat beside him, with the Great Seal of Scotland and some writing materials, parchments, and letters before him, and Sir Patrick came forward to receive and seat the young ladies, and then remained standing—as few of his rank in Scotland would have done on their account.

‘Well, lassies,’ began the King, ‘here’s lads enow for you. There’s the Master of Angus, as ye ken—(Jean tossed her head)—‘moreover, auld Crawford wants one of you for his son.’

‘The Tyger Earl,’ gasped Eleanor.

‘And with Stirling for your portion, the modest fellow,’ added James. ‘Ay, and that’s not all. There’s the MacAlpin threats me with all his clan if I dinna give you to him; and Mackay is not behindhand, but will come down with pibroch and braidsword and five hundred caterans to pay his court to you, and make short work of all others. My certie, sisters seem but a cause for threats from reivers, though maybe they would not be so uncivil if once they had you.’

‘Oh, Jamie! oh! dear holy Father,’ cried Eleanor, turning from the King to the Bishop, ‘do not, for mercy’s sake, give me over to one of those ruffians.’

‘They are coming, Eleanor,’ said James, with a boy’s love of terrifying; ‘the MacAlpin and Mackay are both coming down after you, and we shall have a fight like the Clan Chattan and Clan Kay. There’s for the demoiselle who craved for knights to break lances for her!’

‘Knights indeed! Highland thieves,’ said Jean; ‘and ‘tis for what tocher they may force from you, James, not for her face.’

‘You are right there, my puir bairn,’ said the Bishop. ‘These men—save perhaps the young Master of Angus—only seek your hands as a pretext for demands from your brother, and for spuilzie and robbery among themselves. And I for my part would never counsel his Grace to yield the lambs to the wolves, even to save himself.’

‘No, indeed,’ broke in the King; we may not have them fighting down here, though it would be rare sport to look on, if you were not to be the prize. So my Lord Bishop here trows, and I am of the same mind, that the only safety is that the birds should be flown, and that you should have your wish and be away the morn, with Patie of Glenuskie here, since he will take the charge of two such silly lasses.’

The sudden granting of their wish took the maidens’ breath away. They looked from one to the other without a word; and the Bishop, in more courtly language, explained that amid all these contending parties he could not but judge it wiser to put the King’s two marriageable sisters out of reach, either of a violent abduction, or of being the cause of a savage contest, in either case ending in demands that would be either impossible or mischievous for the Crown to grant, and moreover in misery for themselves.

Sir Patrick added something courteous about the honour of the charge.

‘So soon!’ gasped Jean; ‘are we really to go the morn?’

‘With morning light, if it be possible, fair ladies,’ said Sir Patrick.

‘Ay,’ said James, ‘then will we take Mary and the weans to the nunnery in St. Mary’s Wynd, where none will dare to molest them, and I shall go on to St. Andrews or Stirling, as may seem fittest; while we leave old Seneschal Peter to keep the castle gates shut. If the Hielanders come, they’ll find the nut too hard for them to crack, and the kernel gone, so you’d best burn no more daylight, maidens, but busk ye, as women will.’

‘Oh, Jamie, to speak so lightly of parting!’ sighed Eleanor.

‘Come—no fule greeting, now you have your will,’ hastily said James, who could hardly bear it himself.

‘Our gear!’ faltered Jeanie, with consternation at their ill-furnished wardrobes.

‘For that,’ said the Bishop, ‘you must leave the supply till you are over the Border, when the Lady Glenuskie will see to your appearing as nigh as may be as befits the daughters of Scotland among your English kin.’

‘But we have not a mark between us,’ said Jean, ‘and all my mother’s jewels are pledged to the Lombards.’

‘There are moneys falling due to the Crown,’ said the Bishop, ‘and I can advance enow to Sir Patrick to provide the gear and horses.’

‘And my gude wife’s royal kin are my guests till they win to their sister,’ added Sir Patrick.

And so it was settled. It was an evening of bustle and a night of wakefulness. There were floods of tears poured out by and over sweet little Mary and good old Ankaret, not to speak of those which James scorned to shed. Had a sudden stop been put to the journey, perhaps, Eleanor would have been relieved but Jean sorely disappointed.

It was further decided that Father Romuald should accompany the party, both to assist in negotiations with Henry VI. and Cardinal Beaufort, and to avail himself of the opportunity of returning to his native land, far north, and to show cause to the Pope for erecting St. Andrews into an archiepiscopal see, instead of leaving Scotland under the primacy of York.

Hawk and harp were all the properties the princesses-errant took with them; but Jean, as her old nurse sometimes declared, loved Skywing better than all the weans, and Elleen’s small travelling-harp was all that she owned of her father’s—except the spirit that loved it.

CHAPTER 2. DEPARTURE

‘I bowed my pride,
A horse-boy in his train to ride.’

—SCOTT.

The Lady of Glenuskie, as she was commonly called, was a near kinswoman of the Royal House, Lillas Stewart, a grand-daughter of King Robert II., and thus first cousin to the late King. Her brother, Malcolm Stewart, had resigned to her the little barony of Glenuskie upon his embracing the life of a priest, and her becoming the wife of Sir Patrick Drummond, the son of his former guardian.

Sir Patrick had served in France in the Scotch troop who came to the assistance of the Dauphin, until he was taken prisoner by his native monarch, James I., then present with the army of Henry V. He had then spent two years at Windsor, in attendance upon that prince, until both were set at liberty by the treaty made by Cardinal Beaufort. In the meantime, his betrothed, Lillas, being in danger at home, had been bestowed in the household of the Countess of Warwick, where she had been much with an admirable and saintly foreign lady, Esclairmonde de Luxembourg, who had taken refuge from the dissensions of her own vexed country among the charitable sisterhood of St. Katharine in the Docks in London.

Sir Patrick and his lady had thus enjoyed far more training in the general European civilisation than usually fell to the lot of their countrymen; and they had moreover imbibed much of the spirit of that admirable King, whose aims at improvement, religious, moral, and political, were so piteously cut short by his assassination. During the nine miserable years that had ensued it had not been possible, even in conjunction with Bishop Kennedy, to afford any efficient support or protection to the young King and his mother, and it had been as much as Sir Patrick could do to protect his own lands and vassals, and do his best to bring up his children to godly, honourable, and chivalrous ways; but amid all the evil around he had decided that it was well-nigh impossible to train them to courage without ruffianism, or to prevent them from being tainted by the prevailing standard. Even among the clergy and monastic orders the type was very low, in spite of the endeavours of Bishop Kennedy, who had not yet been able to found his university at St. Andrews; and it had been agreed between him and Sir Patrick that young Malcolm Drummond, a devout and scholarly lad of earnest aspiration, should be trained at the Paris University, and perhaps visit Padua and Bologna in preparation for that foundation, which, save for that cruel Eastern’s E’en, would have been commenced by the uncle whose name he bore.

The daughter had likewise been promised in her babyhood to the Sire de Terreforte, a knight of Auvergne, who had come on a mission to the Scotch Court in the golden days of the reign of James I., and being an old companion-in-arms of Sir Patrick, had desired to unite the families in the person of his infant son Olivier and of Annis Drummond.

Lady Drummond had ever since been preparing her little daughter and her wardrobe. The whole was in a good state of forwardness; but it must be confessed that she was somewhat taken aback when she beheld two young ladies riding up the glen with her husband, sons, and their escort; and found, on descending to welcome them, that they were neither more nor less than the two eldest unmarried princesses of Scotland.

‘And Dame Lillas,’ proceeded her knight, ‘you must busk and boune you to be in the saddle betimes the morn, and put Tweed between these puir lasses and their foes—or shall I say their ower well wishers?’

The ladies of Scotland lived to receive startling intelligence, and Lady Drummond’s kind heart was moved by the two forlorn, weary-looking figures, with traces of tears on their cheeks. She kissed

them respectfully, conducted them to the guest-chamber, which was many advances beyond their room at Dunbar in comfort, and presently left her own two daughters, Annis and Liliass, and their nurse, to take care of them, since they seemed to have neither mails nor attendants of their own, while she sought out her husband, as he was being disarmed by his sons, to understand what was to be done.

He told her briefly of the danger and perplexity in which the presence of the two poor young princesses might involve themselves, their brother, and the kingdom itself, by exciting the greed, jealousy, and emulation of the untamed nobles and Highland chiefs, who would try to gain them, both as an excuse for exactions from the King and out of jealousy of one another. To take them out of reach was the only ready means of preventing mischief, and the Bishop of St. Andrews had besought Sir Patrick to undertake the charge.

‘We are bound to do all we can for their father’s daughters,’ Dame Liliass owned, ‘alike as our King and the best friend that ever we had, or my dear brother Malcolm, Heaven rest them both! But have they no servants, no plenishing?’

‘That must we provide,’ said Sir Patrick. ‘We must be their servants, Dame. Our lasses must lend them what is fitting, till we come where I can make use of this, which my good Lord of St. Andrews gave me.’

‘What is it, Patie? Not the red gold?’

‘Oh no! I have heard of the like. Ye ken Morini, as they call him, the Lombard goldsmith in the Canongate? Weel, for sums that the Bishop will pay to Morini, sums owing, he says, by himself to the Crown—though I shrewdly suspect ‘tis the other way, gude man!—then the Lombard’s fellows in York, London, or Paris, or Bourges will, on seeing this bit bond, supply us up to the tune of a hundred crowns. Thou look’st mazed, Lily, but I have known the like before. ‘Tis no great sum, but mayhap the maidens’ English kin will do somewhat for them before they win to their sister.’

‘I would not have them beholden to the English,’ said Dame Liliass, not forgetting that she was a Stewart.

Her husband perhaps scarcely understood the change made in the whole aspect of the journey to her. Not only had she to hurry her preparations for the early start, but instead of travelling as the mistress of the party, she and her daughter would, in appearance at least, be the mere appendages of the two princesses, wait upon them, give them the foremost place, supply their present needs from what was provided for themselves, and it was quite possible have likewise to control girlish petulance and inexperience in the strange lands where her charges must appear at their very best, to do honour to their birth and their country.

But the loyal woman made up her mind without a word of complaint after the first shock, and though a busy night was not the best preparation for a day’s journey, she never lay down; nor indeed did her namesake daughter, who was to be left at a Priory on their way, there to decide whether she had a vocation to be a nun.

So effectually did she bestir herself that by six o’clock the next morning the various packages were rolled up for bestowal on the sumpter horses, and the goods to be left at home locked up in chests, and committed to the charge of the trusty seneschal and his wife; a meal, to be taken in haste, was spread on the table in the hall, to be swallowed while the little rough ponies were being laden.

Mass was to be heard at the first halting-place, the Benedictine nunnery of Trefontana on Lammermuir, where Liliass Drummond was to be left, to be passed on, when occasion served, to the Sisterhood at Edinburgh.

The fresh morning breezes over the world of heather brightened the cheeks and the spirits of the two sisters; the first wrench of parting was over with them, and they found themselves treated with much more observance than usual, though they did not know that the horses they were riding had been trained for the special use of the Lady of Glenuskie and her daughter Annis upon the journey.

They rode on gaily, Jean with her inseparable falcon Skywing, Eleanor with her father’s harp bestowed behind her—she would trust it to no one else. They were squired by their two cousins,

David and Malcolm, who, in spite of David's murmurs, felt the exhilaration of the future as much as they did, as they coursed over the heather, David with two great greyhounds with majestic heads at his side, Finn and Finvola, as they were called.

The graver and sadder ones of the party, father, mother, and the two young sisters, rode farther back, the father issuing directions to the seneschal, who accompanied them thus far, and the mother watching over the two fair young girls, whose hearts were heavy in the probability that they would never meet again, for how should a Scottish Benedictine nun and the wife of a French seigneur ever come together? nor would there be any possibility of correspondence to bridge over the gulf.

The nunnery was strong, but not with the strength of secular buildings, for, except when a tempting heiress had taken refuge there, convents were respected even by the rudest men.

Numerous unkempt and barely-clothed figures were coming away from the gates, a pilgrim or two with brown gown, broad hat, and scallop shell, the morning's dole being just over; but a few, some on crutches, some with heads or limbs bound up, were waiting for their turn of the sister-infirmarer's care. The pennon of the Drummond had already been recognised, and the gate-ward readily admitted the party, since the house of Glenuskie were well known as pious benefactors to the Church.

They were just in time for a mass which a pilgrim priest was about to say, and they were all admitted to the small nave of the little chapel, beyond which a screen shut off the choir of nuns. After this the ladies were received into the refectory to break their fast, the men folk being served in an outside building for the purpose. It was not sumptuous fare, chiefly consisting of barley bannocks and very salt and dry fish, with some thin and sour ale; and David's attention was a good deal taken up by a man-at-arms who seemed to have attached himself to the party, but whom he did not know, and who held a little aloof from the rest—keeping his visor down while eating and drinking, in a somewhat suspicious manner, as though to avoid observation.

Just as David had resolved to point this person out to his father, Sir Patrick was summoned to speak to the Lady Prioress. Therefore the youth thought it incumbent upon him to deal with the matter, and advancing towards the stranger, said, 'Good fellow, thou art none of our following. How, now!' for a pair of gray eyes looked up with recognition in them, and a low voice whispered, 'Davie Drummond, keep my secret till we be across the Border.'

'Geordie, what means this?'

'I canna let her gang! I ken that she scorns me.'

'That proud peat Jean?'

'Whist! whist! She scorns me, and the King scarce lent a lug to my father's gude offer, so that he can scarce keep the peace with their pride and upsettingness. But I love her, Davie, the mere sight of her is sunshine, and wha kens but in the stour of this journey I may have the chance of standing by her and defending her, and showing what a leal Scot's heart can do? Or if not, if I may not win her, I shall still be in sight of her blessed blue een!'

David whistled his perplexity. 'The Yerl,' said he, 'doth he ken?'

'I trow not! He thinks me at Tantallon, watching for the raid the Mackays are threatening—little guessing the bird would be flown.'

'How cam' ye to guess that same, which was, so far as I know, only decided two days syne?'

'Our pursuivant was to bear a letter to the King, and I garred him let me bear him company as one of his grooms, so that I might delight mine eyes with the sight of her.'

David laughed. His time was not come, and this love and admiration for his young cousin was absurd in his eyes. 'For a young bit lassie,' he said; 'gin it had been a knight! But what will your father say to mine?'

'I will write to him when I am well over the Border,' said Geordie, 'and gin he kens that your father had no hand in it he will deem no ill-will. Nor could he harm you if he did.'

David did not feel entirely satisfied, on one side of his mind as to his own loyalty to his father, or Geordie's to 'the Yerl,' and yet there was something diverting to the enterprising mind in the stolen

expedition; and the fellow-feeling which results in honour to contemporaries made him promise not to betray the young man and to shield him from notice as best he might. With Geordie's motive he had no sympathy, having had too many childish squabbles with his cousin for her to be in his eyes a sublime Princess Joanna, but only a masterful Jeanie.

Sir Patrick, absorbed in orders to his seneschal, did not observe the addition to his party; and as David acted as his squire, and had been seen talking to the young man, no further demur was made until the time when the home party turned to ride back to Glenuskie, and Sir Patrick made a roll-call of his followers, picked men who could fairly be trusted not to embroil the company by excesses or imprudences in England or France.

Besides himself, his wife, sons and daughters, and the two princesses, the party consisted of Christian, female attendant for the ladies, the wife of Andrew of the Cleugh, an elderly, well-seasoned man-at-arms, to whom the banner was entrusted; Dandie their son, a stalwart youth of two or three-and-twenty, who, under his father, was in charge of the horses; and six lances besides. Sir Patrick following the French fashion, which gave to each lance two grooms, armed likewise, and a horse-boy. For each of the family there was likewise a spare palfrey, with a servant in charge, and one beast of burthen, but these last were to be freshly hired with their attendants at each stage.

Geordie, used to more tumultuous and irregular gatherings, where any man with a good horse and serviceable weapons was welcome to join the raid, had not reckoned on such a review of the party as was made by the old warrior accustomed to more regular warfare, and who made each of his eight lances—namely, the two Andrew Drummonds, Jock of the Glen, Jockie of Braeside, Willie and Norman Armstrong, Wattie Wudspurs, and Tam Telfer—answer to their names, and show up their three followers.

‘And who is yon lad in bright steel?’ Sir Patrick asked.

‘Master Davie kens, sir,’ responded old Andrew. David, being called, explained that he was a leal lad called Geordie, whom he had seen in Edinburgh, and who wished to join them, go to France, and see the world under Sir Patrick's guidance, and that he would be at his own charges. ‘And I'll be answerable for him, sir,’ concluded the lad.

‘Answer! Ha! ha! What for, eh? That he is a long-legged lad like your ain self. What more? Come, call him up!’

The stranger had no choice save to obey, and came up on a strong white mare, which old Andrew scanned, and muttered to his son, ‘The Mearns breed—did he come honestly by it?’

‘Up with your beaver, young man,’ said Sir Patrick peremptorily; ‘no man rides with me whose face I have not seen.’

A face not handsome and thoroughly Scottish was disclosed, with keen intelligence in the gray eyes, and a certain air of offended dignity, yet self-control, in the close-shut mouth. The cheeks were sunburnt and freckled, a tawny down of young manhood was on the long upper lip, and the short-cut hair was red; but there was an intelligent and trustworthy expression in the countenance, and the tall figure sat on horseback with the upright ease of one well trained.

‘Soh!’ said Sir Patrick, looking him over, ‘how ca’ they you, lad?’

‘Geordie o’ the Red Peel,’ he answered.

‘That’s a by-name,’ said the knight sternly; ‘I must have the full name of any man who rides with me.’

‘George Douglas, then, if nothing short of that will content you!’

‘Are ye sib to the Earl?’

‘Ay, sir, and have rid in his company.’

‘Whose word am I to take for that?’

‘Mine, sir, a word that none has ever doubted,’ said the youth boldly. ‘By that your son kens me.’

David here vouched for having seen the young man in the Angus following, when he had accompanied his father in the last riding of the Scots Parliament at Edinburgh; and this so far satisfied

Sir Patrick that he consented to receive the stranger into his company, but only on condition of an oath of absolute obedience so long as he remained in the troop.

David could see that this had not been reckoned on by the high-spirited Master of Angus; and indeed obedience, save to the head of the name, was so little a Scottish virtue that Sir Patrick was by no means unprepared for reluctance.

‘I give thee thy choice, laddie,’ he said, not unkindly; ‘best make up your mind while thou art still in thine own country, and can win back home. In England and France I can have no stragglers nor loons like to help themselves, nor give cause for a fray to bring shame on the haill troop in lands that are none too friendly. A raw carle like thyself, or even these lads of mine, might give offence unwittingly, and then I’d have to give thee up to the laws, or to stand by thee to the peril of all, and of the ladies themselves. So there’s nothing for it but strict keeping to orders of myself and Andrew Drummond of the Cleugh, who kens as well as I do what sorts to be done in these strange lands. Wilt thou so bind thyself, or shall we part while yet there is time?’

‘Sir, I will,’ said the young man, ‘I will plight my word to obey you, and faithfully, so long as I ride under your banner in foreign parts—provided such oath be not binding within this realm of Scotland, nor against my lealty to the head of my name.’

‘Nor do I ask it of thee,’ returned Sir Patrick heartily, but regarding him more attentively; ‘these are the scruples of a true man. Hast thou any following?’

‘Only a boy to lead my horse to grass,’ replied George, giving a peculiar whistle, which brought to his side a shock-headed, barefooted lad, in a shepherd’s tartan and little else, but with limbs as active as a wild deer, and an eye twinkling and alert.

‘He shall be put in better trim ere the English pock-puddings see him,’ said Douglas, looking at him, perhaps for the first time, as something unsuited to that orderly company.

‘That is thine own affair,’ said Sir Patrick. ‘Mine is that he should comport himself as becomes one of my troop. What’s his name?’

‘Ringan Raefoot,’ replied Geordie. Sir Patrick began to put the oath of obedience to him, but the boy cried out—

‘I’ll ne’er swear to any save my lawful lord, the Yerl of Angus, and my lord the Master.’

‘Hist, Ringan,’ interposed Geordie. ‘Sir, I will answer for his faith to me, and so long as he is leal to me he will be the same to thee; but I doubt whether it be expedient to compel him.’

So did Sir Patrick, and he said—

‘Then be it so, I trust to his faith to thee. Only remembering that if he plunder or brawl, I may have to leave him hanging on the next bush.’

‘And if he doth, the Red Douglas will ken the reason why,’ quoth Ringan, with head aloft.

It was thought well to turn a deaf ear to this observation. Indeed, Geordie’s effort was to elude observation, and to keep his uncouth follower from attracting it. Ringan was not singular in running along with bare feet. Other ‘bonnie boys,’ as the ballad has it, trotted along by the side of the horses to which they were attached in the like fashion, though they had hose and shoon slung over their shoulders, to be donned on entering the good town of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Not without sounding of bugle and sending out a pursuivant to examine into the intentions and authorisation of the party, were they admitted, Jean and Eleanor riding first, with the pursuivant proclaiming—‘Place, place for the high and mighty princesses of Scotland.’

It was an inconvenient ceremony for poor Sir Patrick, who had to hand over to the pursuivant, in the name of the princesses, a ring from his own finger. Largesse he could not attempt, but the proud spirit of himself and his train could not but be chafed at the expectant faces of the crowd, and the intuitive certainty that ‘Beggarly Scotch’ was in every disappointed mind.

And this was but a foretaste of what the two royal maidens’ presence would probably entail throughout the journey. His wife added to this care uneasiness as to the deportment of her three maidens. Of Annis she had not much fear, but she suspected Jean and Eleanor of being as wild and

untamed as hares, and she much doubted whether any counsels might not offend their dignity, and drive them into some strange behaviour that the good people of Berwick would never forget.

They rode in, however, very upright and stately, with an air of taking possession of the place on their brother's behalf; and Jean bowed with a certain haughty grace to the deputy-warden who came out to receive them, Eleanor keeping her eye upon Jean and imitating her in everything. For Eleanor, though sometimes the most eager, and most apt to commit herself by hasty words and speeches, seemed now to be daunted by the strangeness of all around, and to commit herself to the leading of her sister, though so little her junior.

She was very silent all through the supper spread for them in the hall of the castle, while Jean exchanged conversation with their host upon Iceland hawks and wolf and deer hounds, as if she had been a young lady keeping a splendid court all her life, instead of a poverty-stricken prisoner in castle after castle.

'Jeanie,' whispered Eleanor, as they lay down on their bed together, 'didst mark the tall laddie that was about to seat himself at the high table and frowned when the steward motioned him down?'

'What's that to me? An ill-nurtured carle,' said Jean; 'I marvel Sir Patie brooks him in his meinie!'

Eleanor was a little in awe of Jeanie in this mood, and said no more, but Annis, who slept on a pallet at their feet, heard all, and guessed more as to the strange young squire.

Fain would she and Eleanor have discussed the situation, but Jean's blue eyes glanced heedfully and defiantly at them, and, moreover, the young gentleman in question, after that one error, effaced himself, and was forgotten for the time in the novelty of the scenes around.

The sub-warden of Berwick, mindful of his charge to obviate all occasions of strife, insisted on sending a knight and half-a-dozen men to escort the Scottish travellers as far as Durham. David Drummond and the young ladies murmured to one another their disgust that the English pock-pudding should not suppose Scots able to keep their heads with their own hands; but, as Jean sagely observed, 'No doubt he would not wish them to have occasion to hurt any of the English, nor Jamie to have to call them to account.'

This same old knight consorted with Sir Patrick, Dame Lillas, and Father Romuald, and kept a sharp eye on the little party, allowing no straggling on any pretence, and as Sir Patrick enforced the command, all were obliged to obey, in spite of chafing; and the scowls of the English Borderers, with the scant courtesy vouchsafed by these sturdy spirits, proved the wisdom of the precaution.

At Durham they were hospitably entertained in the absence of the Bishop. The splendour of the cathedral and its adjuncts much impressed Lady Drummond, as it had done a score of years previously; but, though Malcolm ventured to share her admiration, Jean was far above allowing that she could be astonished at anything in England. In fact, she regarded the stately towers of St. Cuthbert as so much stolen family property which 'Jamie' would one day regain; and all the other young people followed suit. David even made all the observations his own sense of honour and the eyes of his hosts would permit, with a view to a future surprise. The escort of Sir Patrick was asked to York by a Canon who had to journey thither, and was anxious for protection from the outlaws—who had begun to renew the doings of Robin Hood under the laxer rule of the young Henry VI, though things were expected to be better since the young Duke of York had returned from France.

Perhaps this arrangement was again a precaution for the preservation of peace, and at York there was a splendid entertainment by Cardinal Kemp; but all the 'subtleties' and wonders—stags' heads in their horns, peacocks in their pride, jellies with whole romances depicted in them, could not reconcile the young Scots to the presumption of the Archbishop reckoning Scotland into his province. Durham was at once too monastic and too military to have afforded much opportunity for recruiting the princesses' wardrobe; but York was the resort of the merchants of Flanders, and Christie was sent in quest of them and their wares, for truly the black serge kirtles and shepherd's tartan screens that had made the journey from Dunbar were in no condition to do honour to royal damsels.

Jean was in raptures with the graceful veils depending from the horned headgear, worn, she was told, by the Duchess of Burgundy; but Eleanor wept at the idea of obscuring the snood of a Scottish maiden, and would not hear of resigning it.

‘I feel as Elleen no more,’ she said, ‘but a mere Flanders popinjay. It has changed my ain self upon me, as well as the country.’

‘Thou shouldst have been born in a hovel!’ returned Jean, raising her proud little head. ‘I feel more than ever what I am—a true princess!’

And she looked it, with beauty enhanced by the rich attire which only made Eleanor embarrassed and uncomfortable.

Malcolm, the more scrupulous of the Drummond brothers, begged of George Douglas, when at Durham, to write to his father and declare himself to Sir Patrick, but the youth would do neither. He did not think himself sufficiently out of reach, and, besides, the very sight of a pen was abhorrent to him. There was something pleasing to him in the liberty of a kind of volunteer attached to the expedition, and he would not give it up. Nor was he without some wild idea of winning Jean’s notice by some gallant exploit on her behalf before she knew him for the object of her prejudice, the Master of Angus. As to Sir Patrick, he was far too busy trying to compose Border quarrels, and gleaning information about the Gloucester and Beaufort parties at Court, to have any attention to spare for the young man riding in his suite with the barefooted lad ever at his stirrup.

Geordie never attempted to secure better accommodation than the other lances; he groomed his steed himself, with a little assistance from Ringan, and slept in the straw of its bed, with the lad curled up at his feet; the only difference observable between him and the rest being that he always groomed himself every night and morning as carefully as the horse, a ceremony they thought entirely needless.

CHAPTER 3. FALCON AND FETTERLOCK

‘Ours is the sky
Where at what fowl we please our hawk shall fly.’

—*T. Randolph.*

Beyond York that species of convoy, which ranged between protection and supervision, entirely ceased; the Scottish party moved on their own way oftener through heath, rock, and moor, for England was not yet thickly inhabited, though there was no lack of hostels or of convents to receive them on this the great road to the North, and to its many shrines for pilgrimage.

Perhaps Sir Patrick relaxed a little of his vigilance, since the good behaviour of his troop had won his confidence, and they were less likely to be regarded as invaders than by the inhabitants of the district nearer their own frontier.

Hawking and coursing within bounds had been permitted by both the Knight of Berwick and the Canon of Durham on the wide northern moors; but Sir Patrick, on starting in the morning of the day when they were entering Northamptonshire, had given a caution that sport was not free in the more frequented parts of England, and that hound must not be loosed nor hawk flown without special permission from the lord of the manor.

He was, however, riding in the rear of the rest, up a narrow lane leading uphill, anxiously discussing with Father Romuald the expediency of seeking hospitality from any of the great lords whose castles might be within reach before he had full information of the present state of factions at the Court, when suddenly his son Malcolm came riding back, pushing up hastily.

‘Sir! father!’ he cried, ‘there’s wud wark ahead, there’s a flight of unco big birds on before, and Lady Jean’s hawk is awa’ after them, and Jeanie’s awa’ after the hawk, and Geordie Red Peel is awa’ after Jean, and Davie’s awa’ after Geordie; and there’s the blast of an English bugle, and my mither sent me for you to redd the fray!’

‘Time, indeed!’ said Sir Patrick with a sigh, and, setting spurs to his horse, he soon was beyond the end of the lane, on an open heath, where some of his troop were drawn up round his banner, almost forcibly kept back by Dame Liliass and the elder Andrew. He could not stop for explanation from them, indeed his wife only waved him forward towards a confused group some hundred yards farther off, where he could see a number of his own men, and, too plainly, long bows and coats of Lincoln green, and he only hoped, as he galloped onward, that they belonged to outlaws and not to rangers. Too soon he saw that his hope was vain; there were ten or twelve stout archers with the white rosette of York in their bonnets, the falcon and fetterlock on their sleeves, and the Plantagenet quarterings on their breasts. In the midst was a dead bustard, also an Englishman sitting up, with his head bleeding; Jean was on foot, with her dagger-knife in one hand, and holding fast to her breast her beloved hawk, whose jesses were, however, grasped by one of the foresters. Geordie of the Red Peel stood with his sword at his feet, glaring angrily round, while Sir Patrick, pausing, could hear his son David’s voice in loud tones—

‘I tell you this lady is a royal princess! Yes, she is’—as there was a kind of scoff—‘and we are bound on a mission to your King from the King of Scots, and woe to him that touches a feather of ours.’

‘That may be,’ said the one who seemed chief among the English, ‘but that gives no licence to fly at the Duke’s game, nor slay his foresters for doing their duty. If we let the lady go, hawk and man must have their necks wrung, after forest laws.’

‘And I tell thee,’ cried Davie, ‘that this is a noble gentleman of Scotland, and that we will fight for him to the death.’

‘Let it alone, Davie,’ said George. ‘No scathe shall come to the lady through me.’

‘Save him, Davie! save Skywing!’ screamed Jean.

‘To the rescue—a Drummond,’ shouted David; but his father pushed his horse forward, just as the men in green, were in the act of stringing, all at the same moment, their bows, as tall as themselves. They were not so many but that his escort might have overpowered them, but only with heavy loss, and the fact of such a fight would have been most disastrous.

‘What means this, sirs?’ he exclaimed, in a tone of authority, waving back his own men; and his dignified air, as well as the banner with which Andrew followed him, evidently took effect on the foresters, who perhaps had not believed the young men.

‘Sir Patie, my hawk!’ entreated Jean. ‘She did but pounce on yon unco ugsome bird, and these bloodthirsty grasping loons would have wrung her neck.’

‘She took her knife to me,’ growled the wounded man, who had risen to his feet, and showed bleeding fingers.

‘Ay, for meddling with a royal falcon,’ broke in Jean. ‘Tis thou, false loon, whose craig should be raxed.’

Happily this was an unknown tongue to the foresters, and Sir Patrick gravely silenced her.

‘Whist, lady, brawls consort not with your rank. Gang back doucely to my leddy.’

‘But Skywing! he has her jesses,’ said the girl, but in a lower tone, as though rebuked.

‘Sir ranger,’ said Sir Patrick courteously, ‘I trust you will let the young demoiselle have her hawk. It was loosed in ignorance and heedlessness, no doubt, but I trow it is the rule in England, as elsewhere, that ladies of the blood royal are not bound by forest laws.’

‘Sir, if we had known,’ said the ranger, who was evidently of gentle blood, as he took his foot off the jesses, and Jean now allowed David to remount her.

‘But my Lord Duke is very heedful of his bustards, and when Roger there went to seize the bird, my young lady was over-ready with her knife.’

‘Who would not be for thee, my bird?’ murmured Jean.

‘And yonder big fellow came plunging down and up with his sword—so as he was nigh on being the death of poor Roger again for doing his duty. If such be the ways of you Scots, sir, they be not English ways under my Lord Duke, that is to say, and if I let the lady and her hawk go, forest law must have its due on the young man there—I must have him up to Fotheringay to abide the Duke’s pleasure.’

‘Heed me not, Sir Patrick!’ exclaimed Geordie. ‘I would not have those of your meinie brought into jeopardy for my cause.’

David was plucking his father’s mantle to suggest who George was, which in fact Sir Patrick might suspect enough to be conscious of the full awkwardness of the position, and to abandon the youth was impossible. Though it was not likely that the Duke of York would hang him if aware of his rank, he might be detained as a hostage or put to heavy ransom, or he might never be brought to the Duke’s presence at all, but be put to death by some truculent underling, incredulous of a Scotsman’s tale, if indeed he were not too proud to tell it. Anyway, Sir Patrick felt bound to stand by him.

‘Good sir,’ said he to the forester, ‘will it content thee if we all go with thee to thy Duke? The two Scottish princesses are of his kin, and near of blood to King Henry, whom they are about to visit at Windsor. I am on a mission thither on affairs of state, but I shall be willing to make my excuses to him for any misdemeanour committed on his lands by my followers.’

The forester was consenting, when George cried—

‘I’ll have no hindrance to your journey on my account, Sir Patrick. Let me answer for myself.’

‘Foolish laddie,’ said the knight. ‘Father Romuald and I were only now conferring as to paying the Duke a visit on our way. Sir forester, we shall be beholden to you for guiding us.’

He further inquired into the ranger’s hurts, and salved them with a piece of gold, while David thought proper to observe to George—

‘So much for thy devoir to thy princess! It was for Skywing’s craig she cared, never thine.’

George turned a deaf ear to the insinuation. He was allowed free hands and his own horse, which was perhaps well for the Englishmen, for Ringan Raefoot, running by his stirrup, showed him a long knife, and said with a grin—

‘Ready for the first who daurs to lay hands on the Master! Gin I could have come up in time, the loon had never risen from the ground.’

George endeavoured in vain to represent how much worse this would have made their condition.

Sir Patrick, joining the ladies, informed them of the necessity of turning aside to Fotheringay, which he had done not very willingly, being ignorant of the character of the Duke of York, except as one of the war party against France and Scotland, whereas the Beauforts were for peace. As a vigorous governor of Normandy, he had not commended him self to one whose sympathies were French. Lady Drummond, however, remembered that his wife, Cicely Nevil, the Rose of Raby, was younger sister to that Ralf Nevil who had married the friend of her youth, Alice Montagu, now Countess of Salisbury in her own right.

Sir Patrick did not let Jean escape a rebuke.

‘So, lady, you see what perils to brave men you maids can cause by a little heedlessness.’

‘I never asked Geordie to put his finger in,’ returned Jean saucily. ‘I could have brought off Skywing for myself without such a clamjamfrie after me.’

But Eleanor and Annis agreed that it was as good as a ballad, and ought to be sung in one, only Jean would have to figure as the ‘dour lassie.’ For she continued to aver, by turns, that Geordie need never have meddled, and that of course it was his bounden duty to stand by his King’s sister, and that she owed him no thanks. If he were hanged for it he had run his craig into the noose.

So she tossed her proud head, and toyed with her falcon, as all rode on their way to Fotheringay, with Geordie in the midst of the rangers.

It was so many years since there had been serious war in England, that the castles of the interior were far less of fortresses than of magnificent abodes for the baronage, who had just then attained their fullest splendour. It may be observed that the Wars of the Roses were for the most part fought out in battles, not by sieges. Thus Fotheringay had spread out into a huge pile, which crowned the hill above, with a strong inner court and lofty donjon tower indeed, and with mighty walls, but with buildings for retainers all round, reaching down to the beautiful newly-built octagon-towered church; and with a great park stretching for miles, for all kinds of sport.

‘All this enclosed! Yet they make sic a wark about their bustards, as they ca’ them,’ muttered Jean.

The forester had sent a messenger forward to inform the Duke of York of his capture. The consequence was that the cavalcade had no sooner crossed the first drawbridge under the great gateway of the castle, where the banner of Plantagenet was displayed, than before it were seen a goodly company, in the glittering and gorgeous robes of the fifteenth century.

There was no doubt of welcome. Foremost was a graceful, slenderly-made gentleman about thirty years old, in rich azure and gold, who doffed his cap of maintenance, turned up with fur, and with long ends, and, bowing low, declared himself delighted that the princesses of Scotland, his good cousins, should honour his poor dwelling.

He gave his hand to assist Jean to alight, and an equally gorgeous but much younger gentleman in the same manner waited on Eleanor. A tall, grizzled, sunburnt figure received Lady Drummond with recognition on both sides, and the words, ‘My wife is fain to see you, my honoured lady: is this your daughter?’ with a sign to a tall youth, who took Annis from her horse. Dame Liliass heard with joy that the Countess of Salisbury was actually in the castle, and in a few moments more she was in the great hall, in the arms of the sweet Countess Alice of her youth, who, middle-aged as she was, with all her youthful impulsiveness had not waited for the grand and formal greeting bestowed on the princesses by her stately young sister-in-law, the Duchess of York.

There seemed to be a perfect crowd of richly-dressed nobles, ladies, children; and though the Lady Joanna held her head up in full state, and kept her eye on her sister to make her do the same, their bewilderment was great; and when they had been conducted to a splendid chamber, within that allotted to the Drummond ladies, tapestry-hung, and with silver toilette apparatus, to prepare for supper, Jean dropped upon a high-backed chair, and insisted that Dame Liliass should explain to her exactly who each one was.

‘That slight, dark-eyed carle who took me off my horse was the Duke of York, of course,’ said she. ‘My certie, a bonnie Scot would make short work of him, bones and all! And it would scarce be worth while to give a clout to the sickly lad that took Elleen down.’

‘Hush, Jean,’ said Eleanor; ‘some one called him King! Was he King Harry himself?’

‘Oh no,’ said Dame Liliass, smiling; ‘only King Harry of the Isle of Wight—a bit place about the bigness of Arran; but it pleased the English King to crown him and give him a ring, and bestow on him the realm in a kind of sport. He is, in sooth, Harry Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and was bred up as the King’s chief comrade and playfellow.’

‘And what brings him here?’

‘So far as I can yet understand, the family and kin have gathered for the marriage of his sister, the Lady Anne—the red-cheeked maiden in the rose-coloured kirtle—to the young Sir Richard Nevil, the same who gave his hand to thee, Annis—the son of my Lord of Salisbury.’

‘That was the old knight who led thee in, mother,’ said Annis. ‘Did you say he was brother to the Duchess?’

‘Even so. There were fifteen or twenty Nevils of Raby—he was one of the eldest, she one of the youngest. Their mother was a Beaufort, aunt to yours.’

‘Oh, I shall never unravel them!’ exclaimed Eleanor, spreading out her hands in bewilderment.

Lady Drummond laughed, having come to the time of life when ladies enjoy genealogies.

‘It will be enough,’ she said, ‘to remember that almost all are, like yourselves, grandchildren or great-grandchildren to King Edward of Windsor.’

Jean, however, wanted to know which were nearest to herself, and which were noblest. The first question Lady Drummond said she could hardly answer; perhaps the Earl of Salisbury and the Duchess, but the Duke was certainly noblest by birth, having a double descent from King Edward, and in the male line.

‘Was not his father put to death by this King’s father?’ asked Eleanor.

‘Ay, the Earl of Cambridge, for a foul plot. I have heard my Lord of Salisbury speak of it; but this young man was of tender years, and King Harry of Monmouth did not bear malice, but let him succeed to the dukedom when his uncle was killed in the Battle of Agincourt.’

‘They have not spirit here to keep up a feud,’ said Jean.

‘My good brother—ay, and your father, Jeanie—were wont to say they were too Christian to hand on a feud,’ observed Dame Liliass, at which Jean tossed her head, and said—

‘That may suit such a carpet-knight as yonder Duke. He is not so tall as Elleen there, nor as his own Duchess.’

‘I do not like the Duchess,’ said Annis; ‘she looks as if she scorned the very ground she walks on.’

‘She is wondrous bonnie, though,’ said Eleanor; ‘and so was the bairnie by her side.’

In some degree Jean changed her opinion of the Duke, in consequence, perhaps, of the very marked attention that he showed her when the supper was spread. She had never been so made to feel what it was to be at once a king’s daughter and a beauty; and at the most magnificent banquet she had ever known.

Durham had afforded a great advance on Scottish festivities; but in the absence of its Prince Bishop, another Nevil, it had lacked much of what was to be found at Fotheringay in the full blossoming of the splendours of the princely nobility of England, just ere the decimation that they were to perpetrate on one another.

The hall itself was vast, and newly finished in the rich culmination of Gothic work, with a fan tracery-vaulted roof, a triumph of architecture, each stalactite glowing with a shield or a badge of England, France, Mortimer, and Nevil—lion or lily, falcon and fetterlock, white rose and dun cow, all and many others—likewise shining in the stained glass of the great windows.

The high table was loaded with gold and silver plate, and Venice glasses even more precious; there were carpets under the feet of the nobler guests, and even the second and third tables were spread with more richness and refinement than ever the sisters of James II had known in their native land. In a gallery above, the Duke's musicians and the choristers of his chapel were ready to enliven the meal; and as the chief guest, the Lady Joanna of Scotland was handed to her place by the Duke of York, who, as she now perceived, though small in stature, was eminently handsome and graceful, and conversed with her, not as a mere child, but as a fair lady of full years.

Eleanor, who sat on his other hand beside the Earl of Salisbury, was rather provoked with her sister for never asking after the fate of her champion; but was reassured by seeing his red head towering among the numerous squires and other retainers of the second rank. It certainly was not his proper place, but it was plain that he was not in disgrace; and in fact the whole affair had been treated as a mere pardonable blunder of the rangers. The superior one was sitting next to the young Scot, making good cheer with him. Grand as the whole seemed to the travellers, it was not an exceptional banquet; indeed, the Duchess apologised for its simplicity, since she had been taken at unawares, evidently considering it as the ordinary family meal. There was ample provision, served up in by no means an unrefined manner, even to the multitudinous servants and retainers of the various trains; and beyond, on the steps and in the court, were a swarm of pilgrims, friars, poor, and beggars of all kinds, waiting for the fragments.

It was a wet evening, and when the tables were drawn the guests devoted themselves to various amusements. Lord Salisbury challenged Sir Patrick to a game at chess, Lady Salisbury and Dame Lilius wished for nothing better than to converse over old times at Middleham Castle; but the younger people began with dancing, the Duke, who was only thirty years old, leading out the elder Scottish princess, and the young King of the Isle of Wight the stately and beautiful Duchess Cicely. Eleanor, who knew she did not excel in anything that required grace, and was, besides, a good deal fatigued, would fain have excused herself when paired with the young Richard Nevil; but there was a masterful look about him that somewhat daunted her, and she obeyed his summons, though without acquitting herself with anything approaching to the dexterity of her sister, who, with quite as little practice as herself, danced well—by quickness of eye and foot, and that natural elegance of movement which belongs to symmetry.

The dance was a wreathing in and out of the couples, including all of rank to dance together, and growing more and more animated, till excitement took the place of weariness; and Eleanor's pale cheeks were flushed, her eyes glowing, when the Duchess's signal closed the dance.

Music was then called for, and several of the princely company sang to the lute; Jean, pleased to show there was something in which her sister excelled, and gratified at some recollections that floated up of her father's skill in minstrelsy, insisted on sending for Eleanor's harp.

'Oh, Jean, not now; I canna,' murmured Eleanor, who had been sitting with fixed eyes, as though in a dream.

But the Duke and other nobles came and pressed her, and Jean whispered to her not to show herself a fule body, and disgrace herself before the English, setting the harp before her and attending to the strings. Eleanor's fingers then played over them in a dreamy, fitful way, that made the old Earl raise his head and say—

'That twang carries me back to King Harry's tent, and the good old time when an Englishman's sword was respected.'

'Tis the very harp,' said Sir Patrick; 'ay, and the very tune—'

‘Come, Elleen, begin. What gars thee loiter in that doited way?’ insisted Jean. ‘Come, “Up atween.”’

And, led by her sister in spite of herself, almost, as it were, without volition, Eleanor’s sweet pathetic voice sang—

‘Up atween yon twa hill-sides, lass,
Where I and my true love wont to be,
A’ the warld shall never ken, lass,
What my true love said to me.

‘Owre muckle blinking blindeth the ee, lass,
Owre muckle thinking changeth the mind,
Sair is the life I’ve led for thee, lass,
Farewell warld, for it’s a’ at an end.’

Her voice had been giving way through the last verse, and in the final line, with a helpless wail of the harp, she hid her face, and sank back with a strange choked agony.

‘Why, Elleen! Elleen, how now?’ cried Jean. ‘Cousin Lilies, come!’

Lady Drummond was already at her side, and the Duchess and Lady Salisbury proffering essences and cordials, the gentlemen offering support; but in a moment or two Eleanor recovered enough to cling to Lady Drummond, muttering—

‘Oh, take me awa’, take me awa’!’

And hushing the scolding which Jean was commencing by way of bracing, and rejecting all the kind offers of service, Dame Lilies led the girl away, leaving Jean to make excuses and explanations about her sister being but ‘silly’ since they had lost their mother, and the tune minding her of home and of her father.

When, with only Annis following, the chambers had been reached, Eleanor let herself sink on a cushion, hiding her face against her friend, and sobbing hysterically—

‘Oh, take me awa’, take me awa’! It’s all blood and horror!’

‘My bairnie, my dearie! You are over-weary—’tis but a dreamy fancy. Look up! All is safe; none can harm you here.’

With soothings, and with some of the wine on the table, Lady Drummond succeeded in calming the girl, and, with Annis’s assistance, she undressed her and placed her in the bed.

‘Oh, do not gang! Leave me not,’ she entreated. And as the lady sat by her, holding her hand, she spoke, ‘It was all dim before me as the music played, and—’

‘Thou wast sair forefaughten, dearie.’

Eleanor went on—

‘And then as I touched mine harp, all, all seemed to swim in a mist of blood and horror. There was the old Earl and the young bridegroom, and many and many more of them, with gaping wounds and deathly faces—all but the young King of the Isle of Wight and his shroud, his shroud, Cousin Lily, it was up to his breast; and the ladies’ faces that were so blithe, they were all weeping, ghastly, and writhen; and they were whirling round a great sea of blood right in the middle of the hall, and I could—I could bear it no longer.’

Lady Drummond controlled herself, and for the sake both of the sobbing princess and of her own shuddering daughter said that this terrible vision came of the fatigue of the day, and the exhaustion and excitement that had followed. She also knew that on poor Eleanor that fearful Eastern’s Eve had left an indelible impression, recurring in any state of weakness or fever. She scarcely marvelled at the strange and frightful fancies, except that she believed enough in second-sight to be

concerned at the mention of the shroud enfolding the young Beauchamp, who bore the fanciful title of the King of the Isle of Wight.

For the present, however, she applied herself to the comforting of Eleanor with tender words and murmured prayers, and never left her till she had slept and wakened again, her full self, upon Jean coming up to bed at nine o'clock—a very late hour—escorted by sundry of the ladies to inquire for the patient.

Jean was still excited, but she was, with all her faults, very fond of her sister, and obeyed Lady Drummond in being as quiet as possible. She seemed to take it as a matter of course that Elleen should have her strange whims.

'Mother used to beat her for them,' she said, 'but Nurse Ankaret said that made her worse, and we kept them secret as much as we could. To think of her having them before all that English folk! But she will be all right the morn.'

This proved true; after the night's rest Eleanor rose in the morning as if nothing had disturbed her, and met her hosts as if no visions had hung around them. It was well, for Sir Patrick had accepted the invitation courteously given by the Duke of York to join the great cavalcade with which he, with his brothers-in-law, the Earl of Salisbury and Bishop of Durham, and the Earl of Warwick, alias the King of the Isle of Wight, were on their way to the Parliament that was summoned anent the King's marriage. The unwilling knights of the shire and burgesses of Northampton who would have to assist in the money grant had asked his protection; and all were to start early on the Monday—for Sunday was carefully observed as a holiday, and the whole party in all their splendours attended high mass in the beautiful church.

After time had been given for the ensuing meal, all the yeomen and young men of the neighbourhood came up to the great outer court of the castle, where there was ample space for sports and military exercises, shooting with the long and cross bow, riding at the quintain and the like, in competitions with the grooms and men-at-arms attached to the retinue of the various great men; and the wives, daughters, and sweethearts came up to watch them. For the most successful there were prizes of leathern coats, bows, knives, and the like, and refreshments of barley-bread, beef, and very small beer, served round with a liberal hand by the troops of servants bearing the falcon and fetterlock badge, and all was done not merely in sport but very much in earnest, in the hope on the part of the Duke, and all who were esteemed patriotic, that these youths might serve in retaining at least, if not in recovering, the English conquests.

Those of gentle blood abstained from their warlike exercises on this day of the week, but they looked on from the broad walk in the thickness of the massive walls; the Duke with his two beautiful little boys by his side, the young Earls of March and Rutland, handsome fair children, in whom the hereditary blue eyes and fair complexion of the Plantagenets recurred, and who bade fair to surpass their father in stature. Their mother was by right and custom to distribute the prizes, but she always disliked doing so, and either excused herself, or reached them out with the ungracious demeanour that had won for her the muttered name of 'Proud Cis'. On this day she had avoided the task on the plea of the occupations caused by her approaching journey, and the Duke put in her place his elder boy and his little cousin, Lady Anne Beauchamp, the child of the young King of the Isle of Wight—a short-lived little delicate being, but very fair and pretty, so that the two children together upon a stone chair, cushioned with red velvet, were like a fairy king and queen, and there was many a murmur of admiration, and 'Bless their little hearts' or 'their sweet faces,' as Anne's dainty fingers handled the prizes, big bows or knives, arrows or belts, and Edward had a smile and appropriate speech for each, such as 'Shoot at a Frenchman's breast next time, Bob'; 'There's a knife to cut up the deer with, Will,' and the like amenities, at which his father nodded, well pleased to see the arts of popularity coming to him by nature. Sir Patrick watched with grave eyes, as he thought of his beloved sovereign's desire to see his people thus practised in arms without peril of feud and violence to one another.

Jean looked on, eager to see some of the Scots of their own escort excel the English pock-puddings, but though Dandie and two or three more contended, the habits were too unfamiliar for them to win any great distinction, and George Douglas did not come forward; the competition was not for men of gentle blood, and success would have brought him forward in a manner it was desirable to avoid. There was a good deal of merry talk between Jean and the hosts, enemies though she regarded them. The Duke of York was evidently much struck with her beauty and liveliness, and he asked Sir Patrick in private whether there were any betrothal or contract in consequence of which he was taking her to France.

‘None,’ said Sir Patrick, ‘it is merely to be with her sister, the Dauphiness.’

‘Then,’ said young Richard Nevil, who was standing by him, and seemed to have instigated the question, ‘there would be no hindrance supposing she struck the King’s fancy.’

‘The King is contracted,’ said Sir Patrick.

‘Half contracted! but to the beggarly daughter of a Frenchman who calls himself king of half-a-dozen realms without an acre in any of them. It is not gone so far but that it might be thrown over if he had sense and spirit not to be led by the nose by the Cardinal and Suffolk.’

‘Hush-hush, Dick! this is dangerous matter,’ said the Duke, and Sir Patrick added—

‘These ladies are nieces to the Cardinal.’

‘That is well, and it would win the more readily consent—even though Suffolk and his shameful peace were thrown over,’ eagerly said the future king-maker.

‘Gloucester would be willing,’ added the Duke. ‘He loved the damsel’s father, and hateth the French alliance.’

‘I spoke with her,’ added Nevil, ‘and, red-hot little Scot as she is, she only lacks an English wedlock to make her as truly English, which this wench of Anjou can never be.’

‘She would give our meek King just the spring and force he needs,’ said the Duke; ‘but thou wilt hold thy peace, Sir Knight, and let no whisper reach the women-folk.’

This Sir Patrick readily promised. He was considerably tickled by the idea of negotiating such an important affair for his young King and his protegee, feeling that the benefit to Scotland might outweigh any qualms as to the disappointment to the French allies. Besides, if King Henry of Windsor should think proper to fall in love with her, he could not help it; he had not brought her away from home or to England with any such purpose; he had only to stand by and let things take their course, so long as the safety and honour of her, her brother, and the kingdom were secure. So reasoned the canny Scot, but he held his tongue to his Lilies.

CHAPTER 4. ST. HELEN S

‘I thought King Henry had resembled thee,
In courage, courtship, and proportion:
But all his mind is bent to holiness,
To number Ave-Maries on his beads:
His champions are the prophets and apostles;

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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