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GOWRIE:
OR,
THE KING'S PLOT.
BY
G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, AND CO.
STATIONERS' HALL COURT.
MDCCCXLVIII.

THE WORKS
OF
G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

"D'autres auteurs l'ont encore plus avili, (le roman,) en y mêlant les tableaux dégoûtant du vice; et tandis que le premier avantage des fictions est de rassembler autour de l'homme tout ce qui, dans la nature, peut lui servir de leçon ou de modèle, on a imaginé qu'on tirerait une utilité quelconque des peintures odieuses de mauvaises mœurs; comme si elles pouvaient jamais; laisser le cœur qui les repousse, dans une situation aussi pure que le cœur qui les aurait toujours ignorées. Mais un roman tel qu'on peut le concevoir, tel que nous en avons quelques modèles, est une des plus belles productions de l'esprit humain, une des plus influentes sur la morale des individus, qui doit former ensuite les mœurs publiques."--MADAME DE STAËL. *Essai sur les Fictions.*

"Poca favilla gran flamma seconda:
Forse dietro a me, con miglior voci
Si pregherà, perchè Cirra risonda."

DANTE. *Paradiso*, Canto I.

VOL. XVII.

GOWRIE.

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NOTICE.

The Author is aware that the Frontispiece of this Work is very bad; but in justice to the Engraver, he thinks it fair to state, that in consequence of a necessary change in the publishing arrangements, a space of time totally insufficient was all that could be allowed for the device of a subject, and the execution of the plate. Another illustration, for insertion in "Gowrie," will be given in the succeeding volume of this edition.

TO

HER GRACE

THE DUCHESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

MADAM,

Man's mind lives too much upon credit. We borrow our thoughts and opinions, and too often trade with the intellectual property of others, when it would be much better for every man to cultivate his own little field, and bring its original produce to market, if he would but be content with what God has given him.

In the pages which I here present to your Grace, I have plainly and boldly stated my own opinion regarding one of the darkest transactions in history; and after much and various reading upon the subject, I am confirmed in the belief that this opinion is just, though I have conveyed it in the form of fiction. Many, and indeed most, of our best historians, have taken an opposite view of the case; but in putting forth my own, I have not been moved by any ambition of originality, and indeed can here lay claim to that quality, only in a limited degree; for others in various ages have advanced the same opinions in regard to the innocence of the Earl of Gowrie, and the guilt of the king, which I have expressed in the present work. However that may be, my own view was

taken, and my judgment formed, before I was aware that any others had entertained the same. I had only read, in short, the accounts of the Gowrie Conspiracy which had been written by persons who came to a different conclusion. It was from their own statements, and more especially from that of King James himself, that I was led to believe, at an early period, that of which I am convinced now. Nearly four years ago, I found in the correspondence of Henry IV. of France a letter from the King of Scotland, giving his own account of this bloody transaction, and my note upon it at the time was to the following effect:--"This is more than improbable. It is to suppose that the earl, his brother, and the king, were all seized with sudden madness; for nothing else could account for the conduct of either of the three, if this story were true."

I have since read very nearly all that has been written upon the subject, except other works of fiction, of which I have not seen one, though I am told there are several; and every particle of historical evidence which I have met with has tended to impress upon my mind the firm belief that the last Earl of Gowrie was as amiable, as enlightened, and as innocent of all offence against the king as any man in Scotland. His name, his race, his position, and his opinions, rendered him obnoxious to the king; and he died as in these pages I have attempted to show. I find, on reading the letters and memoirs of contemporaries, that very few persons believed him guilty, and that King James had recourse to all the resources of persecution, in order to silence the many voices which too loudly proclaimed him innocent.

It may seem strange that I introduce such topics into a dedication, which is generally reserved for expressions of respect and esteem; but an appeal to the understanding is, I believe, no bad testimony of respect; and I am quite sure that your Grace will receive it as such; for I know that in kindly permitting me to dedicate this work to your name, you neither needed nor desired any public expression of the respect, the esteem, and the gratitude, with which

I have the honour to be,

Madam,

Your Grace's

Most humble servant,

G. P. R. JAMES.

Willey House, near Farnham, Surrey,
27th June, 1848.

ADVERTISEMENT.

In laying before the public in one volume a work of equal extent with those which are usually produced in three volumes, and in placing in the general collection of my romances an entirely new composition, I may be expected to say something of the motives which have induced me to follow such a course.

Some years ago, when a question was agitated amongst Ministers and in Parliament, as to whether it was expedient or not to give British authors increased facilities for maintaining their just rights against foreigners who reprinted their works and used every unscrupulous means to introduce their pirated editions into various parts of the British dominions, Government was induced to decide in the affirmative, not upon the one-sided and partial statement of authors and publishers, but on a general and very extensive view of the subject, as affecting the country at large. While the question was under consideration, many long and important discussions took place, in which I bore a principal share; and while I endeavoured to support, to the best of my abilities, the just claims of British authors, the then President of the Board of Trade, the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone, with consummate ability and great scope of view, maintained the general interests of the public. Although the right of the British author was never contested,

some apprehension was expressed--I believe by Sir Robert Peel--lest the granting of increased means of protecting that right might have a tendency generally to increase the price of books.

When Mr. Gladstone informed me of this fact, I stated my own opinion to be directly the reverse, and that by the extension and security of the market, the price would be rather diminished than increased. I need not here enter into all the arguments I used to show that such must naturally be the case, but I stated, at the same time, my readiness, upon certain acts being passed, to use every means in my power to avert the evil which Government apprehended, by making an effort to diminish the price of books. From various causes since that period, the price has greatly diminished; but I do not mean to assert that the diminution has been caused alone by the facilities that were ultimately granted, although they have operated in that direction to a considerable extent.

For my own part, even before all the measures were taken which had been contemplated, I fulfilled my engagement to Government by diminishing the price of my next work by one third. The result was unfavourable, as, indeed, I had anticipated. The increased sale by no means compensated for the diminution of price. I was a loser to a considerable extent, and the publisher no gainer by the experiment.

I was afterwards told that the diminution was not sufficient to produce any great effect; and I resolved to make another trial, though anticipating but one result. Such is my motive for giving one entire new work of fiction at about one fourth of the sum which is ordinarily charged. My reason for placing it in this edition is, that the collection having already some hold upon the public, and the sale being considerable, the experiment has the better chance of success, while the effect will be favourable rather than otherwise upon the collection itself.

I need only farther say, that I have no doubt whatsoever of the result--namely, that the increase of sale will be in no degree commensurate with the reduction of price; and therefore I shall never make the experiment again.

GOWRIE:

OR

THE KING'S PLOT.

CHAPTER I.

On the 15th of August, 1599, a young man was seen standing on one of the little bridges in the town of Padua. He was plainly dressed in an ordinary riding habit of that period, having a short black cloak over his shoulders, a tawny suit of cloth below, and a high crowned hat with a plume of feathers falling on one side. In most respects his apparel indicated no higher station than that of a respectable citizen, and indeed citizens of his age, for he could not be more than two-and-twenty, very frequently displayed more gaudy feathers, although the bird they covered might be of inferior race. There were, however, one or two marks about him which seemed to point out a superior station. Instead of a large fraise or ruff round his neck, which was then still common, he wore a falling collar of the richest and most delicate lace, tied in front of the throat by a silver cord and tassel; and though the sheath of his long rapier was merely of black leather, the hilt of the weapon, as well as that of the dagger to his girdle, was of silver exquisitely wrought. His large buckskin gloves, too, were edged with a silver fringe, and embroidered upon the back. In person he was tall and finely formed, with a highly intelligent and expressive countenance, somewhat stern and determined, indeed, for one so young, but yet with a strange mingling of lofty thoughtlessness and careless ease. He was perfectly alone, though on that day the citizens of Padua were all in full holiday, the bells of the churches ringing, and the cannon firing from the

ramparts. Every one seemed to have got a companion but himself; and all the streets in the interior of that city of numberless arcades, were thronged with groups celebrating the holiday, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, while he stood alone on the little bridge, as I have said, near the Ferara gate, which was left to comparative solitude by the populace, who were flocking to the churches. He remained in the same spot for more than a quarter of an hour, sometimes leaning his arms on the parapet of the bridge, and gazing down into the shining water, or watching the labours of a stout man, less devout than his neighbours, who still continued his work in one of the boats, with his white shirt and his bright blue breeches reflected in the painted mirror below--sometimes looking up the street which led to the bridge, amongst the arches of which, groups of men and women in gay attire were seen, appearing and disappearing as they crossed from one side to the other. The bright sunshine of Italy was pouring in oblique lines through the openings of the street, and as it caught from time to time upon the brilliant dresses of the passing inhabitants, the effect was strange and pleasing; and a city, the narrow streets and dim arcades of which generally rendered its aspect somewhat gloomy, was now all life and gaiety. The young stranger did not seem to take part in the general merriment: not that he looked sad or even grave, for when he turned his eyes up the street, and caught sight of any of the moving groups which it presented, a smile came upon his lip, somewhat sarcastic it is true, as if he regarded with a certain portion of contempt the rejoicings of the people or the occasion which called them forth, but yet cheerful and free, as of a mind untroubled which could afford to find amusement in the little follies of others.

When he had remained in that same spot for nearly a quarter of an hour, the loiterer was joined by another, a much more gaily habited cavalier. The latter was about the same age, or perhaps a year or two older, not quite so tall as his companion, though still a tall man, darker in complexion, and powerfully though lightly made. His step was free, his look open and sparkling; and though his features were not strikingly handsome, yet his countenance was exceedingly pleasing, and not the less striking from some degree of irregularity.

"Ever exact to time and place, Signor Johannes," said the latter, grasping the hand of him who had been waiting; "and now, I dare say, you have been accusing my tardiness and want of punctuality; but, upon my life, what between folly in the morning, study at mid-day, business in the afternoon, and emotions in the evening, I have had my hands full; so be not angry, good my lord."

"Heaven forbid," replied the other; "he that were angry with want of punctuality in you, Hume, would quarrel with a lark for singing, or an owl for hooting, and might spend his whole time in fretting his spirit at the nature of his friend. Besides, you made no promise to be here. I wrote, fixing my own hour, and taking my chance of its suiting you."

"But why all this mystery, and why this sober suit?" exclaimed the other, taking hold of his cloak, with a gay laugh; "this smells strongly of Geneva; and your brown jerkin is worthy of a true disciple of Beza. In pity, John, do not let him affect the outward man. Be as rigid as you will in resisting the powers of the Babylonian lady on your heart and mind, but do not carry your religion into taffeta, or suffer tenets to interfere with silk and satin. The religion that kills one innocent joy, is not the religion of Him who more than once told us to rejoice; and I cannot help thinking, that those who prescribe particular clothing for particular ceremonies, and those who proscribe it upon all occasions, are equally foolish and wrong."

"And so do I," answered his companion; "you will not find me altered in the least in those things; but the cause of my homely suit, and the mystery of my coming is the same, and very simple. I did not wish to be recognised by any of our good teachers here in this learned university, nor by any of our old companions but yourself. To show you, however, that I am no fanatic, know that I am even now on my way to Rome, to see the wonders of the eternal city and his holiness the Pope, though I shall not certainly ask his blessing, from a very strong doubt of its doing me any good."

"There I agree with you," replied his friend; "though the blessing of a good man can never do one any harm, and there might be worse men than Clement; but what have you done with your retinue? Where are all the servants, where the famous tutor, Dominie Rhind?"

"Gone on to Monselice," replied the other, "there to wait for my coming, if they can find room in the little inn, and if not, to travel farther, to Rovigo. But you have my messenger with you, have you not? I bade him wait my coming."

"Good sooth have I," answered the other, "and the mad knave has kept the whole of Padua in an uproar for the last three days. What between jeering the men, making love to the women, and playing with the children, he has made friends and enemies enough to serve a man a lifetime."

"He is incorrigible!" said his friend, with an air of vexation. "I was forced to send him away from Geneva, for Beza would not tolerate him, and I loved not to see the good old man distressed. But the fellow promised amendment, and he is so attached and faithful, that his virtues and his vices, like a Spanish olla, are blended into a very savoury dish, though of the most opposite ingredients. I laid strict injunctions upon him to be discreet, and above all, never to mention my name."

"That last point of discretion he has most strictly maintained," replied the more gaily dressed

cavalier; "for even to me he has never pronounced the forbidden word, always expressing his meaning by some periphrasis, such as 'the noble gentleman you wot of,' 'the worshipful writer of the letter,' 'him who shall be nameless,' and so forth, ever eking out the sense with a raised eyebrow and thumb jerked back over his shoulder, as if he were speaking of the devil, and owned Beelzebub for his master. But now let us to your inn, where supper and a small room are provided for you according to your behest, and there you shall tell me what has brought you back to this fair Italian land, and I will relate what has occurred to me since last we met."

"My errand in Italy is soon told," said his comrade, with a smile. "I come to buy some pictures to adorn my poor house at Perth. It were a shame to have dwelt so long in Italy, and not to carry back something of the Caracci's handiwork. I will see Annibale, and Ludovick too, and Caravaggio. I have heard, too, of a young painter named Reni--Guido Reni they call him, who is now making some noise at Bologna. One picture said to be his I have seen, full of grace and beauty, and if he so paint he will soon be famous in all the world--why do you laugh?"

"Because I judge pictures alone brought you not to Padua," replied his companion; "for in good sooth there are few worth seeing here, except St. Anthony preaching to the fishes."

"A very unprofitable waste of good doctrine," said the other; "but let us go--yet, we will choose the dull back streets which the students love not, for I do not wish them to see their late Lord Rector coming amongst them in masquerade."

"Come, then, under the walls," answered the other; and, leading the way, he conducted his friend through several of the low and narrow streets which abutted upon the defences, hardly meeting any one but a labourer and an old woman or two in miserable rags, seeking amongst the piles of rubbish, thrown out here and there in the open spaces between the walls and the houses, for anything that poverty could make valuable. At length they were obliged to turn into one of the larger streets; but ten steps therein brought them to a narrow doorway under one of the arcades, where they entered and mounted a long dirty stair. At the first landing was a door on the left, through which they passed into a little ante-room, where at a table was seated a young man dressed as a servant, but without badge or cognizance, as was usual with the domestics of great families at that period. If one might judge from his face, which was ugly enough to be funny, and funny enough to be beautiful--I do not love paradoxes, but I am driven into one--he was not a personage very much given to grave contemplations. Nevertheless, on the present occasion he was so seriously occupied with the piece of work he had in hand, that for an instant he did not observe the entrance of the two gentlemen we have mentioned. That piece of work was indeed a very important and elaborate one, at least in his opinion--namely, the cutting out, in small blocks of soft wood, a variety of grotesque heads, in which his inventive genius displayed itself by producing noses such as never were seen on any human countenance, eyes of every degree of obliquity, and chins, some retreating, as if afraid of the portentous nasal organ which overshadowed them, and some immeasurably protruded, as if to domineer over the mouth that yawned above. In truth he showed no small skill in sculpture, although his genius had taken rather an eccentric turn; and it was evident that he enjoyed his own performance very much, for his first salutation to his master was a loud laugh, as he contemplated the extraordinary physiognomy he had just carved. Then, awakening to the more sober realities of life, he started up, laying down the knife and wood upon the table, and saying, with a low bow, "Welcome to Padua, noble sir; better late than never; nothing's lost that is not at the bottom of the sea. It is a long lane that has never a turning. A man cannot be too late who has time enough."

"Spare your proverbs, good Master Jute," replied his master, the stranger who had been waiting on the bridge; "I find that, notwithstanding all your promises of reformation and sobriety, you have been setting the whole town in an uproar."

"Not so, indeed, my noble lord; with the best intentions I have not had time to get through more than the French quarter. I hurried here as fast as possible, both to do your will and my own, seeing that I have been pent up like a brawn in a sty for the last three months; but still I have not had time enough. As for promises, although, like pie-crusts, they are made to be broken, and he who vows much performs little, yet, from a silly fondness for a whole skin and clear conscience, I never break mine; and I beseech your lordship to recollect that I only promised to behave well by the shores of Lake Lemman."

"Well, well, we will talk more of that hereafter," replied his lord, following the other gentleman towards the inner room. "I find you have obeyed my injunction of not mentioning my name. See that you attend to it still. And now go and order them to bring my supper up, for I have ridden hard and fasted long."

The man made a low bow, and obeyed, while the two gentlemen proceeded into the neighbouring chamber, and the traveller, casting himself into a seat, said, with a sigh, the source of which might be difficult to discover, "So, here I am, once more in Padua."

CHAPTER II.

The room was a little dingy room lined with black oak, carved into panels, with some degree of taste and ornament, the house having formerly belonged to higher personages than those who possessed it at the time; for Padua, even then, like all persons, places, and things, on the face of the earth, had seen its mutations; and Patavium had undergone, since the days of Livy, a thousand different changes, which had rendered fashionable parts of the city unfashionable, turned the houses of nobles into the residences of boors, converted Pagan temples into Christian churches, and, with greater propriety, had converted amphitheatres into slaughter-houses. Amongst later alterations, the house which had formerly been inhabited by one of the mercenary followers of Angelo, had descended to the station of an inn, at first well frequented and in high repute, but gradually sinking lower and lower, till it had now become a sort of lodging-house in ordinary for merchants who visited the town of Padua, and the poorer class of students, on their first arrival. The chamber, however, was lofty; the window which looked into the court, large, and opening all the way down the centre, which was then rare; and the coolness so desirable at that burning season was to be obtained there, which could not be found in many a larger and finer apartment in the city. In this room, with several flasks of fine wine before them, were seated, about half an hour after sunset, John, Earl of Gowrie, and his friend Sir John Hume. There were two wax tapers on the table, some plates of beautiful fruit, perfuming the whole air, and some cakes of a sweet kind of bread, for which Padua was then famous. The rays of the candles were quickly lost in the dark wainscoting around, but they threw sufficient light upon the table and its white cloth, and showed fully the expressions of the two young men's countenances. Both were still gay, and laugh and jest had gone on between them during the meal; but every now and then a look of deep thoughtfulness, almost amounting to melancholy, crossed the face of the earl, passing away again like the shadow of a flying cloud cast momentarily on a fine landscape. They had been speaking of many things while the servant of the earl and some of the people of the inn had been coming and going. The period of Lord Gowrie's sojourn at Padua as a scholar had been referred to, and the high academic honour which had been conferred upon him somewhat more than a year before, by his election to the office of rector, had been commented upon by Hume, who laughingly said, "If I had puzzled my dull brains for seven years, I never could have obtained or merited such a distinction, John."

It was one of Lord Gowrie's graver moments when his friend made this observation, and he replied gloomily, "Those who eat the fruit early, Hume, are left with bare boughs in the autumn. I was elected Lord Provost of Perth before I was fourteen; I fought in a lost battle at fifteen; and I was rector of this university before I was twenty. Blighted hopes, or early death, we often find the fate of those who taste the bitter stream of life so soon."

"Nonsense," replied his friend; "have you studied the sublime art of astrology to so little purpose? It is but that you are born under a fortunate star, and will go on in honour and success until the end."

"Small success at the field of Down," replied the earl; "for a more disastrous rout never befel brave men than there overtook Athol and Montrose."

"But great success to you," answered Hume, laughing; "for you escaped where many a brave man fell, and were pardoned without inquiry, when many were mulcted of half their goods--Still, still your fortunate star was on the ascendant; and the devil, the king, and the popish lords could not get the better of its influence; and now what brings you to Padua?"

"By and by," said the young earl--"we'll talk of that by and by. Tell me, first, all that has happened to you, according to your promise."

"My life, good faith, has been dull enough," replied Sir John Hume, "till within the last week, when I have had a little occupation for my thoughts besides dull problems and hard studies. Do you remember an old man with a gray beard, who used to wander about towards eventide, in a long black gown and a velvet cap? Manucci is his name, a Florentine, who has travelled much in different lands, speaks English like an Englishman, and French like a Frenchman, and used to look like Titian's portrait, only more meagre and somewhat less fresh and lusty."

Lord Gowrie had twice nodded his head in token that he knew the person spoken of; but Hume had still gone on describing, till at length the young earl said, almost impatiently, "Yes, yes, I know him well. What of him?"

"Poor man, he has been in sad trouble," replied his friend; "our reputation for magic here has risen somewhat too high for our security. We have had monitories from the holy office, warning our learned professors against permitting forbidden studies, and enjoining them strictly to seek out and deliver up to justice all those who practise black and damnable arts. Arnesi only laughed, and said that his was a black and white art, for that he dealt in pen and ink, but that he hoped the white would save the black part of the business. A number of the older signors, however, whose wits are rather on the wane, and who still fancy that everything they do not understand themselves is magic, took up the matter far more seriously, and laying their wise heads together

in small conclave, determined they would seek out, and hand over to the tender mercies of those who roast the body to save the soul, every poor creature to whom suspicion could attach. Manucci had a long gray beard, a rusty black gown, but small reverence for the learned professors, paid no fees, kept himself apart in solitary studies, seldom spoke with anybody, and had a keen and spirit-searching eye. Here seemed a sorcerer at once, quite ready to their hand. Still such appearances, without proof, would not justify violence; but they judged that the search for proof would; and as I was passing the old man's door, near the Trevisogate, I saw the college beadle and three or four more officers making their way in against the resistance of the poor old woman who waits upon him, and who was assuring them with tears that her master was dying in his bed."

"Dying!" exclaimed Lord Gowrie, with a start.

"Well, I went in with them," continued Hume, not noticing his friend's exclamation; "and a pitiful sight I soon beheld."

"In the name of Heaven, what?" demanded the Earl of Gowrie, with a pale cheek and an eager eye; and then feeling how completely the whole expression of his countenance must have changed, he added, "I was much interested in that old man. I knew him well, loved him well, and was going on a long promise to see him this very night."

"Indeed!" said Hume, before he proceeded to finish his story, musing, as if some intricate problem was placed before him. "Ha! Well, as I was saying, I went in, following the officers--a few steps behind I might be, and then, when we came into the little back room, I saw a bed with a crucifix at the foot, and the old man lying on it, the image of death. His long beard was stretched upon the decently composed bed-clothes, hard to say which was the whitest; his left hand was folded quietly on his breast, and his right was stretched out over the side of the bed, with tightly pressed upon it the lips of the most beautiful girl I ever beheld in my life--with one sole exception," he added.

Lord Gowrie was evidently very uneasy. He played with the hilt of his rapier, clasping and unclasping his hands upon the sheath; he gazed eagerly in his friend's face, as if he would fain have interrupted him, but yet hesitated to do so.

"Well," continued Hume, "the officers at first seemed a little touched, but they are folks not easily moved, and the waters of pity soon subside with them, when agitated for a moment by the unwonted wind. One of them took him by the shoulder, and said, 'Come, signor, you must get up, and deliver all your papers. We are sent to examine everything, by the council of the university, which has strong reason to believe you guilty of magic and sorcery.'

"My thoughts are there,' said the old man, meekly, pointing towards heaven; but the young girl by his bedside started up, and gazed at the officers with wild and frightened eyes. These men, now, were very zealous Christians; but they thought it a point of piety to interrupt a dying man's preparation to meet his Maker, and to hurry him away to death--for nothing else could have followed--before that preparation was complete."

The Earl of Gowrie bent his head upon his hands, covering his eyes with his fingers; but his friend could see that he shook violently, either with anger, apprehension, or some other strong emotion. He went on, however, saying, "I thought it best now to interfere, John, knowing that I am somewhat a favourite with the good officers of the university, being too dull or too light to be taken for a conjuror, and too free with my purse for a dealer in the things of darkness. I therefore stepped quietly forward, and representing that the old gentleman was evidently too ill to be moved, suggested that it would be better to make a preliminary examination of the papers, in which I offered to assist. I had some difficulty in prevailing; but at length it was agreed that all suspicious documents should be carried at once before the senate, and those that were plain and straightforward left, while one officer remained in the house, to prevent a man from escaping who could not stir a step. The search was somewhat curious, and certainly there were sundry writings of which I understood not one word; but I pressed the old man's hand, and told him in English to make his mind easy, asking for one word of explanation in regard to the strange tongues I had found there written. 'Some are Armenian,' he answered, 'some Syriac, and some Gaelic, which you, at least, should understand.' Happily I did, for one of the first papers examined was an old song of our own Highlands, describing the hunting of a stag. I could have laughed, had the matter not been serious, to see the puzzled faces of the learned doctors. The Armenian and Syriac they knew at least by the characters, and afraid of showing their brief extent of knowledge, they pronounced them all very innocent; but the Gaelic was in the high road to the Holy Inquisition, though written in the Latin character, when I begged to see the paper, and read aloud and laughed, and read and laughed, and read again, with as strong a twang of the old Erse as I could bring my mouth to utter. A dozen voices called for an explanation of the strange sounds I was pouring forth. On which I assured them that the fancied magic was but a poem in one of the languages of my own land, of which I would give a translation if they would lend an ear. You know that some such songs in the mountain tongue are not of the most cleanly. This was one which soon set the reverend doctors grinning, and I returned in triumph with messages of peace to the poor man's bedside."

"Did he die?" demanded the earl, in a tone subdued almost to a whisper by his eagerness.

"Nay, he is better," replied Hume; "for having saved his life in one way, I now bestirred myself to save it in another. I sat with him through that livelong night; I tried to cheer and comfort him, and finding from the beautiful creature who was the companion of my watch, that of late he had denied himself almost necessary sustenance, what with poverty, what with study, I sent for wine to my own house, and forced it upon him, till the flame of life rose up bright once more above the fresh-trimmed lamp."

A curious change had come over the young earl during the utterance of the last few sentences. "Now I will warrant," he said, with a laugh, strangely contrasting with the deep emotions he had lately displayed, "that the inflammable heart of John Hume has taken fire at this fair girl's bright eyes, and that they have led him every day to the small house near the Treviso gate?"

Hume gazed at him for a moment with a grave look; and then, moving his chair a little nearer, he laid his hand upon that of Gowrie. "I have gone every day," he said, "but not for those bright, dark eyes, for I have not forgotten a pair, blue as the twilight sky, that dwell at Perth; but I have gone out of pity to the old man--pity for the young girl--and affection for John Ruthven."

The earl gazed at him for a moment, then started up, and cast his arms around him, saying, "You have my secret, Hume; but how you learned it I know not; for until this hour it has rested in my own bosom, which I ever fancied the only sure casket for the treasure of one's own thoughts."

"Good faith, my noble lord," answered Hume, "there are other languages than words. Looks and acts, for those who mark them, speak as plainly as the best orator. Here, during the last year of your stay at Padua, each night you stole away in private to visit the house of an old man, learned, indeed, and doubtless full of mighty secrets in nature and art, known for an astrologer, and suspected of practices with things less full of light than the bright stars. Your devotion to knowledge no one doubted, but such regular attendance at her shrine seemed more than natural in a young man of twenty; and I sometimes doubted that you were wooing a fairer and a warmer lady than cool Dame Science. When you went away from this poor place, too, you were wondrous sad, and with a sadness different from that with which we part from the calm pleasures and dull tasks of youth to take part in the eager strifes of manhood. 'Twas a passionate sadness, not a thoughtful one. Well, when I saw her who must have been the companion of many of your hours of study in the old man's house, I easily discovered that they had not been cold ones; and as I knew that you proposed to return, for a time at least, to Italy, I studied, for your sake, to show all kindness to those whom you had loved. Nay, more, I ventured even to seek a confirmation of my fancies; throwing out your name in conversation, as we cast a gilded fly upon the water to see if the shining salmon will spring up to catch it. I said that, to my belief, it would not be long ere you returned to Italy."

"What did she say?--How did she look?" demanded Gowrie, eagerly.

"At the first mention of your name she sighed," replied Hume, "and her cheek turned a shade paler than before; but when I talked of your return, the retreating blood rallied back into her face with double force, conquering the paleness in its turn, and dying the whole with crimson."

"Indeed!" said Gowrie, thoughtfully. "It is strange! I knew not that it was so!"

"Not know it! Not know what, Gowrie?" exclaimed his friend.

"That there was one feeling in her heart towards me," answered the earl, "which would make her heart's pulse beat with a faster stroke, or vary the colour in her cheek a shade. You are mistaken, Hume, in thinking that she was the companion of the hours I spent at old Manucci's house. I seldom saw her; but gradually there came a passion into my heart, which made the chance of one of those rare, short interviews, attraction strong enough to lead me, night after night, to where they might be had. Not that I did not struggle against growing love, restraining myself by prudent worldly thoughts; and I would have quitted Padua sooner, but that my station as Lord Rector held me here. You, who know me, can well judge, I think, that while thus debating with my love in my own heart, I would not do that sweet girl such a wrong as by word or look to seek her love in return."

"You could not hide your own, Gowrie," replied Hume; "yours is not a nature that with a cold exterior can cover over the fiery heart within. Your actions you may rule, and do so often with great power; but your looks and tones refuse such rigid sway."

"It may be so--it may be so," said the earl; and he leaned his head upon his hand, and thought. "And so the old man is better?" continued the earl, after he had remained silent for a few minutes, during which his friend had not ceased to gaze at him without speaking.

"Better, but not well," answered Hume; "what he chiefly needed was strengthening food and wine; but he had a sore disease for which I know no cure--old age, I mean--all other things but that we may fend off or remedy; but that slow creeping sickness of old age may often be hurried, but never delayed. In short, his last attack has shaken him much. He sits up, however; and his appetite has returned. A superstitious notion too has aided to his recovery so far, even when at the worst. He told his grandchild that he was certain he should not die before the morrow of the Assumption."

Lord Gowrie laid his hand upon Sir John Hume's arm, saying, in a marked manner, "Because

he expected to see me to-night; and I must go to him, Hume; but before I go, tell me, truly and sincerely, has your own heart remained firm against the beauties and the graces of this fair being with whom you have been so much?"

"See what a thing is love!" said Hume; "you cannot fancy that any one can escape the bow which has wounded you. Have I not said, Gowrie, that I have not forgotten the deep blue eyes in Perth, and never shall forget them? I am as constant as a fixed star."

"What, little Beatrice," exclaimed the earl, "of whom you brought me such a glowing picture two years ago? but she is still a mere child."

"You think her so, because she was one when you left her," answered Hume; "but let me tell you, Gowrie, when I saw her she was a woman, and rich in all a woman's graces. Your mother thought that it would be well to wait a year or two, but nothing now is wanting but your consent. We have stood even the trial of absence, and are both still of the same mind."

Lord Gowrie pressed his hand, replying at once, "My consent is yours, Hume, whenever you choose to claim it. It is strange," he continued, with a smile, "I can but think of Beatrice as the curly-headed child, who, seven years ago, wiped the blood and dust from my brow when I came back from the field of Downcastle. Hark! the clock is striking nine, I must set out."

"I will go with you nearly to the door," replied his friend; "and you had better have your man to wait for you. The streets of Padua have proved somewhat dangerous since you were here; and on the night of a high festival, the excellent Christians of this part of the world think it no crime to put a dagger in a friend's back, if they have saluted the blessed virgin as they passed the church."

"Well, call him in," replied Lord Gowrie; and having rung a small bell that stood upon the table, they were joined immediately by the earl's servant.

"Get your beaver and your cloak, Austin Jute," said the earl; "we are going out into the streets, and you must follow. Take broadsword and dagger too. I know you can use them well upon occasion. Have you them at hand?"

"A good workman never wants tools, my lord," replied the man; "and as to using them, Heaven send the opportunity, and I'll find the means. A man that threads a needle, ought to be able to stitch; and I who have hammered hot iron in my day, should be able to use it cold, though men say practice makes perfect, and I have had but little in your lordship's service. However, what is early learned is long retained; and a hand that is well acquainted with a cudgel remembers its use as well as the back that bears the beating."

The earl and his friend both laughed. "There, there," cried Sir John Hume, "in pity's name, good Austin, content yourself with ready-made proverbs, and do not eke them out with your own manufacture."

"All as old as the King of Spain's wine, worshipful sir," replied the man; "though all old things are not bad, a new doublet is better than a worn cloak, and proverbs, like lenten pie, may get musty by keeping. I shall have my pinking iron on before your worships are down the stairs; and God send you a safe journey to the bottom, as I shall not be there to take care of you."

CHAPTER III.

When the Earl of Gowrie had parted from his friend at the door of Hume's lodging, he walked on, followed by his servant, for some four or five hundred yards farther, till the wider and more fashionable street deviated into a number of narrow and somewhat intricate lanes, each, however, having its arcades on either side, with the three or four upper stories of the houses built over them, so that two people might have shaken hands from window to window. At the last house of one of these lanes, where the street terminated at a canal, with a bridge over it leading to the Treviso gate, the young nobleman stopped, and using a great bar of iron which hung upon the door, knocked three times aloud. He had to wait some time, however, before the door was opened, and was just about to knock again, when an old woman, with a lamp in her hand dangling by a long chain, appeared to give him entrance.

"How are you, Tita?" he said. "I am sorry to hear that Signor Manucci has been so ill. Can he see me to-night?"

"Oh yes, sir; he expects you," replied the woman, "and will go into his own private study to receive you, though the signora thinks it may hurt him."

The young lord's countenance fell at her reply; for he might fancy that the old man had determined upon receiving him alone, and to say sooth, he had come to see another also. He followed the woman, however, up the narrow stairs, telling his servant to wait below; and he was well pleased to find that his guide turned at once to the right; for he was acquainted with every step in the house, and knew that she was conducting him first to a cool little room where Manucci and his grand-daughter usually sat in the vehement heat of summer. He was even more fortunate than he expected to be, for when the door opened, the light within showed him that, for the time, the chamber was tenanted by one person only, and that the one he most desired to see. It is a strange passion, love, often agitating the strong in frame and powerful in mind more than the weak and gentle. It were vain to deny that the young lord was greatly moved as his eye fell again upon the fair being whose society the ordinary principles of worldly prudence had taught him to believe might be dangerous to his peace. Nevertheless, he advanced straight towards her, holding out his hand with eager agitated pleasure. Nor could she meet him without emotion, too plainly visible, notwithstanding all that inherent self-command which is one of the first qualities in a modest, well-regulated woman's heart. The colour varied in her cheek. The finely chiselled lip quivered in the vain effort to speak; and the dark bright eyes, as if afraid of their own tale, veiled themselves beneath the long lashes, avoiding the glance of tenderness of which she had caught a momentary sight.

The instant he had entered the room, the wise old woman left him and closed the door; and he stood for an instant silent, with the lady's hand in his. A moment after, he slowly raised her hand, and pressed his lips upon it. It was in those days but an act of ordinary courtesy, implying nothing but friendly regard or reverence; but they each felt that there was a fire in that kiss, and both were more agitated than at first.

"Julia," said the young earl, at length--"Julia, you are much moved; and so am I, indeed--we have been parted long----"

She sank slowly down into her seat again; but she felt that she must speak to welcome him, or let silence confess all; and she answered, "I have had much, very much to agitate me lately. It is not wonderful that I am a good deal moved, in seeing an old friend after a long absence."

"And is that all?" said the earl, almost sadly. "I had hoped it was something more. May I not trust that the agitation of both has the same source--that in absence we have learned to know our own hearts, and to feel that our happiness depends upon each other?"

"Hush! hush!" she said, raising her eyes to his face, with an expression which was answer enough. "I must not hear you. I must not reply upon such subjects--at least not now."

"And why not now?" demanded the earl. "Who can say when the opportunity may present itself again? Who can say what obstacles may intervene between us, if we do not seize the moments which fate has given?--Say, Julia, why not now?"

"Because I have duties to perform," she answered, "from which nothing should estrange me. The time may come--nay," she added, sorrowfully, "it must come, and that but too soon, when I shall have no one to think of but myself, no one to ask or to consult with, in regard to what I should do; but now I would not, if I could help it, take a thought away from him who has bestowed for long years all his thoughts upon me. I have even reproached myself, when I saw him suffering and sinking before my eyes, for having but too often let those thoughts, which should have been all his, wander away to other things."

"And did they seek me in their wanderings?" asked Gowrie, taking her hand again, and gazing into her eyes.

She answered not, but averted her look, while the rose deepened in her cheek; and as they thus sat, the door opened suddenly, and the old man appeared. It made them both start; but Gowrie was strong in honesty of heart and purpose; and advancing frankly, he took Manucci's hand in his, saying, "I have longed much to see you, my old friend, and your dear Julia too. We have been long parted; but my affection for neither has decreased."

Manucci was very feeble; and perhaps with agitation, perhaps with weakness, he tottered on his feet. Lord Gowrie held him firmly by the hand, however, drew forward a chair, and supported him till he was seated.

"I have many things to speak to you about," said the old man; "many things which may agitate me and you. But let us not talk about them just yet. I have been very ill; and the little strength I have left, would soon be expended if I did not economise it carefully."

"I have grieved much to hear of your illness," replied the earl, standing beside his chair and gazing down upon him. "My friend, Sir John Hume, has told me how much you have suffered, and how you have been persecuted."

"The latter is nothing," replied the old man. "Every man, not behind his age in knowledge, and who from that point casts his view farther forward than the rest, judging of the consequences of each fact by experience of the past, corrected by a full acquaintance with the present, will ever seem criminal in the eyes of the fools who disbelieve, and of the knaves who believe and dread. Persecution was to be expected when I held myself aloof from idlers who consumed their time in

mere amusement, and from learned busy-bodies, who wasted it in vain and fruitless studies; but that illness was a sturdy, stern, and less conquerable foe. He has battered down the outworks, and the shattered fortress must soon surrender."

"Yet you look better than I expected," replied the earl. "Indeed, at your age, which you have often told me is great, few men look better."

He might, indeed, well say so, for the old man's eye, as he sat there, was clear and bright; and a hue, very like that of returning health, was in his cheek. He was a tall man, and had once, apparently, been a very powerful one. His frame, indeed, was a little bowed. His beard and hair were snowy white; and the skin was wrinkled, except upon the high forehead and the bald crown of the head. All the signs of age, indeed, were there, except that the teeth were fine and apparently undecayed, and that the hand--which, with the exception, perhaps, of the ear, shows the advance of age more distinctly than any other part of the frame--looked not so knotted and bony as it often appears at a late period of life.

The conversation easily and gradually deviated into topics of a calm and tranquil kind. The young earl spoke of many things which had occurred to him since he left Padua. They might afford little matter of amusement to the reader of the present day; but they were interesting to the ears which heard him. The old man, too, had his tale of the changes which had taken place in Padua; but he more frequently referred to the results which had followed his own researches in matters of science. Deeply read, for that period, in natural philosophy--mingled as it was at the time, before the immortal Bacon had established a juster system of investigation, with the dreams of alchemy and judicial astrology--he discussed many subjects familiar to the ears of Lord Gowrie, whose whole family had a strong and unusual taste for inquiry into the secrets of nature. The old man seemed to be revived by his young friend's presence; and he soon recovered that cheerful gaiety which had greatly distinguished him in earlier years. Still, however, the earl remarked, that from time to time his eyelid would drop and his voice become low, as if with fatigue, and at length he said, in a kindly tone, "You are tired, my good old friend. It will be better for me to bid you good night now, and come to talk of other matters with you to-morrow."

"No, no!" cried Manucci; "it must be to-night, or never. I have waited for you, Earl Gowrie, for I told you if you would return on this night, I would read you the scheme of your nativity--point out to you, as clearly as man's voice can show, the course by which you may avoid the perils and secure the advantages of life, and tell you what must absolutely happen--what is still dependent upon courage and conduct. For this I have studied, and pondered, and tried the indications of the stars again and again; but the hour is not yet come, and you must wait till the clock strikes twelve. Then I will speak; for to-morrow, perchance, I shall not have strength to do so."

"Nay, I trust your strength will every day increase," replied the earl; but the old man shook his head, and cast a grave and melancholy glance upon the beautiful girl who sat near him.

"The things of this life are waning away," he said; "and in truth, it is time that I should depart. Eighty years are a heavy load; and the burden is still increasing. There were men, as you have heard, who would fain have eased me of it; but as it contained a few things that are valuable, I was unwilling at that moment to part with it, like all other men, clinging to my treasure though it bent down the shoulders that bore it."

"Methinks a life of study and the calm enjoyment of tranquil thought may well lighten the burden of years," replied the earl; "and but for the apprehension and annoyance caused by these foolish men, your existence, my good friend, has been tranquil and peaceable enough."

The old man smiled sadly. "We always fail," he said, "when we judge of the fate of others. Life is double, Gowrie, an internal and an external life; the latter often open to the eyes of all, the former only seen by the eye of God. Nor is it alone those material things which we conceal from the eyes of others, which often make the apparently splendid lot in reality a dark one, or that which seems sad or solitary, cheerful and light within. Our characters, our spirits operate upon all that fate or accident subjects to them. We transform the events of life for our own uses, be those uses bitter or sweet; and as a piece of gold loses its form and its solidity when dropped into a certain acid, so the hard things of life are resolved by the operations of our own minds into things the least resembling themselves. True, a life of study and of thought may seem to most men a calm and tranquil state of existence. Such pursuits gently excite, and exercise softly and peacefully, the highest faculties of the intellectual soul; but age brings with it indifference even to these enjoyments--nay, it does more, it teaches us the vanity and emptiness of all man's knowledge. We reach the bounds and barriers which God has placed across our path in every branch of science, and we find, with bitter disappointment, at life's extreme close, that when we know all, we know nothing. This I have learned, my young friend, and it is all that I have learned in eighty years, that the only knowledge really worth pursuing is the knowledge of God in his word and his works--the only practical application of that high science, to do good to all God's creatures."

"Still study is not wasted," said the earl, "when it leads to such an elevated result, when it teaches us in the creature to see the Creator, and in the events of existence to behold his will, and surely the fruit of such conclusions must be peaceful."

"Tend to peace they must," replied the old man; "for they must quiet strong passions,

moderate vehement desires, teach us to bear afflictions with fortitude, and to temper our anxieties with hope; but yet, noble lord, neither philosophy nor religion can alter the constitution of our minds. We may know that God is good and merciful. We may know that in the end all must be well; but we still see that on this earth there is a world of sorrow, and we may shrink under the anguish ourselves, or tremble at seeing it approach those we love."

"Fear not for me," said the beautiful girl who was seated beside him, seeing his eyes turned with a sad look towards her; "oh, let not one anxiety on my account add to the burden of years, and make your last days cheerless. Though those may deny me who are bound to protect me, thank God, I can render myself independent of them. The education you have given, the arts you have taught, would always enable me with my own hands to win my own bread----" and then she added, in a low tone, catching a look almost reproachful on the earl's face, "should it be needful."

"Which it shall never be," replied the earl at once, "so long as I have a hand and heart to offer, and means----"

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed the old man, turning his eyes almost sternly from the one to the other; "no such rash words. You know not what you speak of. At all events wait till you know what fate maybe before you; and then, with the deliberate forethought of a man, act as becomes a man, and not as a rash boy."

The effect of his words upon Julia were not such as might have been expected, perhaps; for whether the severer part had found an antidote in what her lover had said before, or whether, from some secret source in her own heart, the waters of hope swelled forth anew, she seemed from that moment to cast away the deeper tone of thought and feeling which had characterized her conversation and demeanour during the evening, and to resume the light-hearted spirit of youth which had spread such a charm around her in the first years of her acquaintance with Lord Gowrie.

"Nay," she said, laying her hand upon the old man's arm, "all other things apart, is it not true that I can win my own bread by my own hands? Can I not paint well enough to gain the few scudi that are needful for my little sustenance? Can I not compose music which brings tears at least into your eyes? Can I not write as well as many a one who lives by his pen? Can I not illuminate missals, or embroider, or work baskets, if needs must be? Would I not long ago have done all this for your support as well as mine, if you would but have let me?"

"You would indeed," he answered, "but that I could not have. Not that I hold it degradation in any one, my child, by their own industry to remedy the niggardliness of fortune; but I could not bear to see you labour for me."

"Oh, man's pride!" exclaimed Julia; "what an obstacle it is to peace and happiness. Here," she continued, turning to Lord Gowrie, with a sparkling look--"here has he, for many a year, supported, instructed, educated me; and now he will not let me repay a small portion of the debt I owe him by labouring for him now, although he knows right well that to do so would be my greatest joy, that the object would be happiness and the means amusement. But you look tired," she said, gazing affectionately in the old man's face; "let me go and bring you some refreshment."

"Call Tita," replied the old man; "she will bring it; and now let us speak of ordinary things."

A small tray was soon brought in, with some fruits, and bread, and wine; and the conversation was renewed in a gayer spirit, Julia striving by her light and happy tone to cheer the old man, and banish the gloom which seemed to hang about him. The time thus passed rapidly; and some few minutes before midnight the old man rose, saying to the earl, "I go before for a moment. Follow me speedily. She will show you the way, but remember, in the meantime, no rash words."

When he was gone, the earl and Julia stood for a moment gazing at each other; and then Gowrie took her hand, saying, "Notwithstanding his prohibition, thus far, at least, I must speak---"

But she laid her left hand on his shoulder, lifting her bright eyes swimming in tears to his, and interrupted him. "Not now, Gowrie," she said; "I am no dissembler, nor are you. My heart is open to you, and yours to me. If we were to speak for years we could say no more, and anything like promises are vain at this moment, for nothing shall ever part me from him but death. Now come. His lamp is lighted by this time; and I fear to trust myself with you here alone, not from doubt of you, but of my own firmness; and a few more words would make me weep. I see the dark day coming, Gowrie; and, as I said before, I would not, for the joy of heaven, rob him of one thought or care, so long as his life shall last."

As she spoke she led the way to the door without withdrawing her hand from her lover; and thus, hand in hand, they went along the corridor which led to the old man's study. There Julia left him, and the earl went in.

CHAPTER IV.

The room which the Earl of Gowrie entered was a small one of an octagonal shape, having tall lancet windows on every side but one. It had probably, at some period long past, been the interior of one of those small projecting turrets which we still occasionally see ornamenting the angles of the ancient castellated houses of the Italian nobility. The bridge leading towards the Treviso gate, and the small canal were underneath; the city walls rose up black beyond; but the turret was high above, and through the windows, on every side but that next to the city, were seen twinkling the bright and multitudinous stars of heaven. In the centre of the room was a large oaken table bearing a lamp, the flame of which was peculiarly bright and perfectly white in colour, and over the rest of the table were cast in strange confusion a number of curious objects. There were books--some closed, but some open, and displaying characters with which the young earl was perfectly unacquainted. One page was covered all over with cyphers alternately of red and blue; and one was traced with many mathematical figures, which, although the earl was well versed in that science, seemed to him strange and new. Another manuscript lay near, which he saw at once was written in Hebrew, but there were others in which the lines ran from corner to corner of the page, with such a multitude of strokes and flourishes, that the letters themselves could hardly be distinguished. Scientific instruments were there too, tossed about amongst the papers, with the uses of many of which the young lord was unacquainted. There were triangular glasses filled with sand, and glass globes, connected together by a tube of the same substance, half filled with mercury. Squares and triangles of brass covered over with curious signs were there likewise; and round about the room, beneath shelves loaded with ponderous volumes, were several globes, and instruments of a rude construction for observing the stars. In one corner stood a small furnace, with crucibles and retorts, and various other implements of chemical or alchemical science; and on a small pedestal of black marble between two of the windows was raised a crucifix of ebony and ivory, supported by two heads of cherubim, exquisitely sculptured in white marble, the one looking up towards the cross with a bright smile, the other with the eyes bent down, as if weeping, and the whole expression sad. At the foot of the crucifix lay a human skull.

At the moment the earl entered, the old man, Manucci, was seated on the side of the table opposite to the door, with a reading desk bearing up a large vellum-covered book before him, and a paper covered with a strange-looking diagram on the table. He had a pen in one hand, and a pair of compasses in the other; and without noticing, even by a look, the young earl's entrance, he turned his eyes from time to time to the book and then to the paper again, and once or twice inscribed a figure of a curious form at the side of the diagram. Twice he paused and listened, as if in expectation of some sound, and then laying down the pen, he leaned his head upon his hand, and remained in silent meditation.

At length the large bell of the Franciscan church of St. Antony struck the hour of midnight, and all the other clocks in the city proclaimed that a day was ending and beginning.

"Now," said Manucci, addressing the earl, "come hither, and sit beside me. Here is the scheme of your nativity, drawn out carefully according to the dates that you have given me. Of the past I will not speak; for, as you have often told me the events which have occurred to you at various periods of your life, perhaps in drawing deductions from the aspect of the stars, my judgment might be somewhat guided by the knowledge I already possessed. It is sufficient, however, that to any one who is acquainted, even superficially, with this science, it would plainly appear, that the aspect of the stars in the month of October, 1593, menaced you with great danger, and that in '94, towards the end of the year, you were clearly destined to quit your native land. Of the future, however, I must speak more strongly; for times of great trial to you are coming. Look at these menacing aspects, and judge for yourself."

"I know so little of the science," replied the earl, "that I cannot pretend to form a just opinion; but it seems to me, from the little I do know, that here," and he laid his finger on a part of the diagram, "is the promise of much happiness, honour, and peace, and love."

"Ay," said Manucci, "but look farther. Here is honour, and peace, and love, but hardly has the sun of next year touched his extreme point north, when see what menacing aspects appear. Almost every planet is in opposition in your house. Do you not see?"

"I do, indeed," answered the earl; "but yet it is nearly unintelligible to me. I beseech you read it, according to your skill."

"It is dark and yet clear," said the old man. "This, however, I can tell with certainty, that the greatest point of peril in your whole life, lies between the end of June next year and the anniversary of this day. The danger shall come upon you in the midst of peace and tranquillity, when all things seem to promise fair. If you escape that period, the rest of existence shall be bright and happy, your life shall be long and prosperous, and fortune shall smile upon you to the end; but there is great peril there."

"But how shall I avoid it?" asked the earl. "Can you give me no indication for my guidance? Can you not tell me what is the nature of the peril, from whom or whence it comes?"

Manucci mused. "It is not war," he said, "for Mars is low down. I should say that policy had to do with it, that the danger is more of conspiracy than of war."

The young earl smiled; but Manucci went on, in the same sort of musing way. "Love, too," he said, "has a share in the evil, though indirect; but conspiracy assuredly, from the menacing aspect of Saturn. Avoid, I beseech you, avoid all meddling with the politics of your native land; scrupulously and carefully eschew treason, or anything that may be so construed; listen not even to the words of conspirators, take no part in their counsels, drive them forth from your presence if they seek to tempt you, and so I trust you may escape the peril; but if not, you will certainly fall, for the anger of a king evidently threatens you; and the cause of danger is conspiracy, goaded on by love."

"Safely and surely can I promise," answered the earl, "for I have long made up my mind to avoid all plots, and to take no share of any kind in aught but the ordinary business of the day. My family have suffered too much already from their dealings with that foul fiend, Policy, which ever proves the ruin of those who give themselves up to her, who soothes them with hopes but to deceive them, and raises them up but to dash them down. Neither have I ever seen or heard of one benefit procured for the country by the blood of all the patriots who have fallen in defending their fellow citizens' rights, still less by that of those who have suffered base personal ambition to lead them into schemes of treason and disloyalty under the pretence of redressing grievances. There comes a pitch of tyranny sometimes, it is true, when it is necessary to dare all and to risk all for security, liberty, and repose; but it very, very seldom happens, in the ordinary course of events, that anything can be gained by revolt, which can compensate even for a few days of turbulence, anarchy, or civil war. Nothing of the kind exists at present, or is likely to exist, to justify anything like conspiracy or rebellion. Make your mind easy then, as far as I am concerned; for I can safely promise to avoid everything which can afford even a reasonable cause of suspicion."

"Thank God that it is so," answered Manucci, solemnly; "but ever keep in mind what I have said. Think of it every day. Remember it on every occasion; for I have told you that the peril will come suddenly, and probably, therefore, the temptation also. If you attend to my warning, and thus escape the danger, you will have to thank me for long years afterwards. Therefore now sit down here in my seat, and copy accurately that which is there written. Keep it constantly about you, refer to it often, and thus will you ever be upon your guard."

"If your warning prove effectual," replied Lord Gowrie, "I shall owe you, my dear friend, much indeed; and I only wish you would tell me how I can repay the service."

"Perhaps I may--perhaps I may," said the old man; "but copy that quickly, then we will talk more."

Lord Gowrie sat down to copy the paper; but it occupied him during a longer time than he had imagined, and in the meantime, a little scene had taken place in the kitchen of the house, which ultimately took a direction towards the same subjects which closed his conference with Manucci.

Left alone in the dark, worthy Austin Jute waited with exemplary patience till the old woman who had opened the door, returned with a lamp, and invited him to come and take some supper with her in the kitchen.

"One cannot have too much of a good thing," said the Englishman, for such he was, in his own tongue; "but then again, another proverb says, 'Enough is as good as a feast;' and to speak the truth, I have supped; but 'a full bag is better than an empty sack;' and, for that matter, no one knows when he has had enough, and therefore I cannot be supposed to be a judge in a case of conscience."

This reasoning was addressed to himself rather than to the old lady who stood by his side, listening to all he had to say with an air of the most perfect unconsciousness, waiting for the time when it should be his pleasure to explain himself in Italian.

"Well, ma'am, I will come," he replied, in the latter language, which, by the way, he spoke remarkably well. "My stomach says it would not object to any reasonable quantity of good food, and still less to a cup or two of good wine. I will follow you, and if----"

But the servant, accustomed to see many strange people, and to hear many foreign languages, seemed to comprehend his meaning as much by his looks as his words, and beckoning him to come on before he had ended his sentence, she led the way towards her refectory. The fare she spread before him was not very abundant nor very rich, but it was refreshing, for fruit was ever cheap at Padua, and of such consisted the principal part of their meal. Austin Jute was a man to make himself easily at home wherever he came, and though, to say truth, he might have been well pleased if his companion had been younger and prettier, nevertheless he was soon in full talk with the old woman; and when a little bell rang above for refreshments there, he helped her to arrange the dishes and place the glasses with their long stalks, as willingly and cheerily as if she had been sixteen.

"There now, Tita," he said, as she lifted the tray, "put the other side with the bottles next to you. Always, in life and on a tray, place the load where it is easiest borne. Two hands are enough

when we know how to use them, but four are better when work is plenty: so I'll go and open the doors for you, for there seem many in your house."

As may well be supposed, Master Austin was now in high favour with the good dame; for age receives as a boon what youth exacts as a tribute; and when she rejoined him after carrying in the supper, she said, in a low voice, "Well, your lord is certainly one of the handsomest, noblest-looking cavaliers I ever saw; and so frank and friendly in his way. He always speaks to me as if I were an old friend, and not a poor servant."

"Like master, like man, my dear," replied Austin Jute; "birds of a feather flock together. Like sticks to like. That is the reason my master and I are so fond of each other; but I hope there is somebody else fond of him too, for I saw, as you came out, such a beautiful pair of eyes outshining the lamp, that I now understand very well why my lord came back to Padua, and why he used to come hither almost every night when he was here before, with that dull-looking fellow, Martini, after him, like an ill-conditioned cur running at the heels of a fine horse."

"I never liked that man," said the old woman, seating herself on her stool in the kitchen. "I am glad your lord has not brought him to-night."

"He could not bring him if he had wished it," replied Austin; "he would have tumbled to pieces by the way. He was hanged two months ago at Geneva, for robbing a gentleman who was in the same inn with us. My master would never believe he was a rogue till he saw him hanging, though, when he fell out of the ferry-boat into the Po, and floated like a bad egg, I told the noble earl, that he who is born to be hanged will never be drowned. They hanged him at last, however, and made the proverb good."

"I dare say they were quite right," said the old woman, in a moralizing mood; "though people who are set to do justice, often do great injustice. Do you know, they came and wanted to drag my good old master away, who is as honest a man and as good a Christian as any in Padua; and they would have done it, too, and most likely put him to the rack, if it had not been for the courage and kindness of one of your countrymen, a student here, called Hume, and the wit and lightness of the Signora Julia."

"Yes, I heard of all that Signor Hume did," replied Jute, "for he told my master while I was sitting in the ante-room, with nothing but a thin door between; for you know, Tita, though everything is made for one purpose, most of them will serve two. But what did the young lady do?"

"The moment she heard the noise," replied the old woman, "she ran and shut the door across the passage which leads to the study. So they found nothing but some scraps of old papers that were in the room where my poor master was ill in bed; for that door shuts so close that no one can tell it from the wainscot, and having no keyhole, but a spring lock, they thought the passage ended there. If they had got into the study there would have been fine to do, for there are all manner of strange things there, which are as innocent and as holy as the *bambino*, I will vow; but nobody understands them but my master, and everything people don't understand they think wicked."

This sage and just observation did not lead Austin Jute from the track he was following; for, to say sooth, curiosity was one of his failings, and the sight of so beautiful a face as he had seen in the room above, had stimulated that very ticklish quality till he could not resist it. "Ah, she is a charming creature, I am sure," he said; "it is true, all is not gold that glitters; and handsome is who handsome does. The devil will take an angel's form at times. The frock does not make the monk; but still she looked so sweet and sad, I am sure she is very amiable. Many a one, Donna Tita, looks gay and cheerful, and many a one looks pleasant and merry, and is but a sour devil after all; but it is a good heart that looks sad for other people's sorrows. Besides, my master would not be so fond of her if she were not an angel. But who is she? Is she the old signor's daughter?"

"And is your master so fond of her, then?" said the old woman, without answering his question. "Are you sure he has never been straying after other women, all this long time while he has been away?"

"Not once, upon my word," replied Austin, with a solemn air, laying his hand upon his left breast. "Lord bless you, since he knew the signora, he has become as discreet as a bell-wether. Why, he sent me out of Genoa for six weeks, just for pinching the cheek of Ninette Bar, the daughter of the innkeeper, and putting my lips too near those of Rosalie, the smith's niece. It is true that I had to break the head of Jerome, and whack Rosalie's lover in self-defence; for it came to crabstick. But as for my lord, he passed all his time at the house of an old gentleman called Beza, where fewer women got in than get into a monkery--though he used to have as gay a heart as the gayest once on a time."

"Then why did he go away, and stay away so long, if he is so fond of her?" asked the old lady, who had her own share of curiosity as well as Austin Jute.

"Nay! gads my life! you must ask that of the earl himself," replied the man, "for I am not his father confessor. Perhaps the lady was cold, for you women will have your whimsies. Dear

creatures, you would not be half so charming without."

The compliment oblique is almost always sure to go deeper than the direct; and good Tita, though she had long lost any external claims to the title of a charming creature, included herself comfortably in the general category, and felt her heart open towards her companion. "No, no," she answered, "she is not cold--to him, at least; and how should she be, when she scarcely ever saw a young man before? He is not so bad looking either, and a kind heart too; and as for whimsies, dear child, she has none, and never had. She lay in my arms when she was two years old, and that is sixteen years since."

"Upon my life, the old gentleman must have taken to matrimony late in life, to have a daughter of eighteen, when he is eighty," said Austin Jute, laughing.

The shot took effect.

"His daughter, you foolish knave!" cried the old lady, "she is not his daughter!--His daughter's daughter, if you will."

"Well, there would be no great harm in it, if she were his daughter," answered Jute; "so you need not look so angry, my dear; many a man marries at sixty for the consolation of life, or at least of the little bit of life that remains. Better late than never, men say. I would rather come in at the end of the dinner than see no dinner at all. It is never too dark to see one's way, if one has but a lantern; and if we have gone on wrong from the beginning, why should we not try to get right at the end?--And so the young lady's name is not Manucci, after all?"

"Her mother's was," answered Tita. "Poor thing, I remember her well. When she gave the child into my hands," she said, "Take care of her, Tita, for she will soon have no mother to do so, and no father has she ever known."

"Oh, ho!" said Austin Jute, with a peculiar expression of countenance; but the old woman's black eyes flashed fire. "Out, knave!" she said, without allowing him to finish the sentence; "would you slander a saint in heaven?"

The next moment, however, her face resumed its ordinary expression, and she said, "I spoke foolishly. I should have told you, the babe's father died on the day that she was born. The mother never held her head up after; and she kept her word with me too truly; for scarcely four months were gone by, ere we laid her in Campo Santo."

"Poor thing!" said Austin Jute, in so natural a tone of pity, that all remains of anger were banished from Tita's heart. "How did the lady's husband die? Was it in battle or of disease?"

"By the axe, young man--by the axe," replied Tita, sharply; "a plaything with which people in your country sport even more than we do here in Italy--at least I have heard so; for I know nothing of any other land but my own; but I have heard the Signor say that there has been sufficient innocent blood shed upon the scaffold in England and Scotland to bring down a curse upon the country."

"Upon my life, he said true," replied Austin Jute; "for I have seen a few heads roll in my own day, and have always thought it a pity that people cannot find some other means of putting those out of the way who stand in their light, but by cutting them on the back of the neck. Were men's heads no better than turnips, we could not treat them more carelessly than we do in our little island. Poor child, her misfortunes came early; and I hope and trust that she got over them all at once. People must eat black bread, they say, at one time of their life; and it is better to swallow it before we have tasted any other, than to eat the white bread first, and then have the other after."

"God send that it be so with her," said the old woman, "for a dearer, sweeter girl never lived."

"And, after all, what is her name?" said Austin Jute, in that quiet sort of easy tone which so often leads on confidence; but good old Tita answered quietly, with a shrewd glance of the eye, "Julia, to be sure--the Lady Julia. That has been enough for me all my life; and it should be enough for you too, I think."

"Enough is as good as a feast," answered Austin Jute; but as he saw he could gain no more information he dropped the subject, and began to wonder at the length of his lord's visit.

CHAPTER V.

"It is done," said the earl, "and, I think, accurately."

The old man bent over the paper, and examined every line. "Saturn is wanting in the third house," he replied; "and you have left out the sextile there."

Lord Gowrie corrected the error, then folded the paper carefully, and put it in his bosom. When he had done so, he turned his eyes to Manucci's face, and saw that the old man was very pale, while a dropping heaviness of the eyelid and a quivering of the lip seemed to the young lord to indicate great weariness.

"I wish much to speak to you, my good old friend," he said, "upon matters of great moment; but I see that you are weary, and I must not begin now, for our conversation might be long."

"We must begin now and end now, Gowrie," said the old man, looking at him gravely; "for who shall say what a day will bring forth? I have learned this in eighty years, if nothing else, that the present only is ours, the past is gone beyond our recall, the future is in the hand of God. Then let no man think that he can command to-morrow, for health or sickness, strength or weakness, fortune or adversity, are all as unstable as the wind, changing how and why we know not. I have much to say to you too, and on the same subject, I believe. You would speak of Julia, is it not so?"

"It is," answered Lord Gowrie.

"And you love her. I have seen it before this night. I have caught your eyes watching her anxiously, as if you loved, yet hesitated; as if the thoughts of the world's opinion, and friends' advice, and courtly favour, and ambitious dreams perchance, came like dull vapours from the earth, clouding the star of love. You went away; and I let you go, without one word to stay you; for no man can be worthy of her, so long as one such doubt remains in his bosom. Are they all gone now?"

"All that I have ever entertained," replied Lord Gowrie, in a tone of some mortification; "but you have done me some wrong, my good friend, in your own fancies. Very few of such considerations as those you imagined have had influence with me. I loved, but I saw no surety of being loved in return. I knew not how strong my love was till I went away; and I judged that it was but right to her to make myself sure--before I strove to win her affection--that my own was durable and true. I had often heard of boyish passion soon forgot, of love that waxes and wanes in a few short months, and if I have learned no other point of philosophy, I have learned to doubt the human heart till it is tried. As for worldly considerations, you do me wrong. No thoughts of court favour, of ambition, of avarice, ever crossed my mind. I am wealthy enough, powerful enough, high enough in station to set such things at nought: nor did the world's opinion influence me; but I thought it might be wiser and better too, if, ere I acted decidedly in any way, I opened my heart to my own dear mother, one of royal race, but who has withal a royal heart, and knows that the true wealth is the wealth of the mind, the highest nobility that of the spirit. Such were the only worldly feelings I bore with me when I went away; but I will not deny that long before that, when I found passion rising in my heart towards her, I did struggle against my growing love, though I struggled in vain. I am candid with you, my old friend--I tell you all; but now that I have the hope of being loved in return, every other consideration is cast away."

"Every other?" asked the old man, gazing at him thoughtfully.

"All, all!" replied the earl. "This is no time to ponder or to pause, no time to seek either consent or counsel. You have been very ill, nearly at the gates of death, were threatened with persecution, might have been torn from her in a moment, and she left desolate, friendless, defenceless. What should I have thought of myself--how should I have felt, if, when I returned, I had found you dead or in prison, and this dear girl cast upon the world? This must never be again, my old friend--if she will give me her heart, share my station and my fortune, and trust to this arm for her defence."

"Spoken nobly, and like yourself," replied the old man. "That she loves you, I doubt not; for, though unconsciously, perhaps, yet you did seek her love. That you love her well and truly, I am very sure; otherwise you would not be here to-night, Gowrie, for you came not alone to learn your fate from me. But yet I must think both for you and for her; and I will place the greatest trust in you that ever was placed in man, because I know you to be full of honour, and that she is firm in honesty and purity of heart. Yet I will exact some promises from you both--promises which, solemnly given, you will not dare to break."

"I never yet broke one knowingly," replied Lord Gowrie; "and I never will. Where her fate is concerned, believe me, my good friend, a promise given would be but the more sacred."

"And you are then resolved to marry her?" said Manucci.

"If she can give me her whole heart," replied the earl.

"Do you ask no question as to her birth, her station, her family?" said the old man.

"None," replied the earl. "Love, they say, my good friend, is blind; but mine has not been so. Before my feelings towards her deserved that name, I had many opportunities of observing; and my eyes were then, at least, open. Small traits, which might have escaped many, told me great secrets of her heart and character. Her love and her devotion to yourself, seeming to merge all feelings in her duty towards you; her prompt obedience to your lightest wish, flying before

command, and seeming to divine your unspoken thoughts; her tenderness towards all, even towards the wicked and the cruel, censure losing itself in pity for those who are not happy enough to be good; that true modesty which is without vain affectation, and, ignorant of evil, places no watchful guard against false appearances. All these, and many more things of the kind, I marked, and often thought, these are the qualities which will only have greater scope and shed brighter lustre in a wife; and when to these was added, each day, the perception of some new grace of person or of mind, was it possible not to love, Manucci?"

"You have, indeed, watched closely, and judged well," replied the old man; "and, with one who can so justly estimate, I have no fear of my dear child's happiness. Now listen; and, though weary, I will tell you sufficient to show you that, even according to the world's usual judgment, you have not chosen so far amiss. By the side both of father and of mother, she is your equal in rank. Though an exile from my native city, I am of a race which can count its generations back almost to the days of ancient Rome. That she is the child of my only daughter you know, for you have often heard me say so; and, by the father's side, she is descended from a race, if not royal, as you have said of your mother, often more powerful than the kings they served. They, too, are of your own land; and their blood has mingled with that of your own ancestors. Your family and hers have fought, and plotted, and achieved, and sat together on many a field, in many a cabinet, at many a council board. Her father, indeed, she never knew, for he died by the hand of the executioner on the day when she was born; his lands were confiscated and given to another; and I fled from Scotland with her mother and herself, trusting that, at some future time, and by a more wise and just sovereign, that portion which was secretly settled on my poor child, as her dowry, and which no confiscation could touch by law, might be restored to its true owner. These papers, which I will give to you, will tell the rest and prove the whole; and now listen to me, Lord Gowrie--you must soon return to your own land---"

"Not to leave her here," replied the earl, interrupting him; "that I cannot do, my friend."

"Peace, peace," said the old man; "you must hear before you can understand. She shall go with you--but not as your wife, impatient boy--under the charge of your honour, and under your solemn promise to me, not even to seek to wed her till one of two things has come to pass. You shall endeavour, to the utmost of your power, to restore to her the estates which were reft from her and from her mother by the hand of oppression. The papers I am about to give you will prove her title, and all that she demands is justice. If you succeed, then in God's name, if you so will, make her your wife; but if not, you shall wait patiently till after the last day of September in the next year. Then the danger will be over."

"But what will become of you, my good friend?" demanded the earl. "I should never desire Julia to make such a sacrifice as that: nor would she, I am sure, accede, even if I were to demand it."

"Before that time," replied the old man, "my head will rest upon an earthy pillow. The blood is freezing in these wintry veins, and it will soon cease to flow. You said you were going farther on--to Rome, to Bologna, to Florence. Go on; and by the time you return, she may need protection and support. I know that I shall die within these two months; and although the precise period I know not, yet depend upon it, you will be still in Italy when that event happens. Then take her away at once from scenes which must have their bitterness, place her in honourable ward with your mother, who, if I know her right--and I remember her well--will be zealous in the cause of the orphan daughter of her husband's friend; and when her rights are established, or the day of danger for yourself is passed, then be to her as fond and true a husband as your noble father was to Dorothea Stuart. Will you promise me all I demand?"

"I will," answered the earl. "I do most solemnly; but as yet, my good friend--" and a slight shade of doubt came upon his face, "I am not sure that she herself will consent. I think--I trust she will; but there is no promise between us, no assurance upon her part, that she can love me as I love her. I must see her, I must ask her, before my heart is fully at ease. I will come to-morrow, for doubtless she has retired to rest ere now."

"See her at once," said the old man, with a smile. "Her answer will soon be given, or I know her not. Nor will she seek her pillow while I am waking. See her now. It were better, I think, that you proceeded on your journey to-morrow, so that when the hour comes, you may be ready to act at once."

"My journey can be postponed, or given up altogether," replied the earl. "It would be one full of care and anxiety, if I thought that she might be left here suddenly, without friends or support. I speak plainly, because, my noble friend, I know that you fear not death, and are prepared for its coming. Were I to follow out the plan I had proposed, she might be left here for weeks without comfort or assistance."

"No, no," answered Manucci, "I will not have it said, that your love for this dear child made you linger on here when you had other objects before you. As to her fate, fear not for that. I see what you dread; but there you are misled. I am very poor, it is true; but I have made myself poorer than I am, in order that she may be richer when the moment comes. In that cabinet are two thousand golden ducats, saved from my small means by the utmost parsimony. That will be sufficient, and more than sufficient, till she is under the protection of your mother. She must not go back to her native land altogether as a beggar; and she must hire one or more maidens to

attend upon her by the way. Neither must she, my good lord, be dependent upon you; for that might give occasion for busy tongues to bruit about rash suspicions. Let her pay her own servants; let her defray her own expenses; there will be still enough and to spare. Now go and speak with her. I will wait you here."

The young earl rose with a faint smile, and moved towards the door; but ere he reached it he turned, and approaching the old man, grasped his hand, saying, "Many, very many thanks for all your confidence; but yet there is one more boon which I must ask, and I shall not be satisfied unless you grant it. My friend, Sir John Hume, whom you already know well, the affianced husband of my young sister Beatrice, will remain here for a fortnight longer. Should need be, Julia must trust in him, till I can reach her. He is the soul of honour, and kindly and gentle in feeling. But I must also leave a servant here, who shall attend every day at your house, and if events should require it, will either stay to assist his master's promised bride or seek and find me, with wit and diligence such as few can show. His character is a very mixed one, with faults and virtues in excess; but he has proved his devotion to me many a time, and of his honesty I am well assured. Say you agree to this! Then I shall go in peace."

"Well, so be it," answered the old man.

And leaving him for the time, the young earl hurried away towards the room whither he had been first conducted. His first steps along the passage were eager and impetuous. It seemed as if he could not too soon hear the words which were to decide his fate; but as he approached the door, his feet relaxed their speed; and he paused thoughtfully, with his hand lifted towards the lock. What was it that made him hesitate? Let his own words answer. "No, no, studied speech is vain," he said at length. "I will pour my heart into hers, and if the feelings within it but find voice, no eloquence can match them."

Thus saying, or rather thinking, he opened the door and went in. Julia was seated at the table with a book before her, on which her eyes rested not, with the lamp casting its pale light on the fair white forehead, the jetty hair, the long fringed eyelids, and the sweeping arch of the mouth. Her eyes were turned away, gazing on vacancy; but the first step of her lover in the room roused her from her reverie, and with a start, sudden but graceful, she rose, exclaiming, "Where is he?-- Is he ill?"

"No, dearest Julia," replied the earl; "but I have come from him to you, to speak a few words, which, with your answer, must decide our fate for life."

As he spoke he took her hand, and led her back towards the chair from which she had risen; but she shook her head mournfully, without resuming her seat, and said, "Have I not answered already? I have told you that I cannot, that I must not speak now."

"Nay, listen to me," said the earl, "for I seek not to take you from him, nor even to bind you to quit him; but he and I have now spoken of all; and we have made promises to each other, which it remains but for you to ratify; for upon you depends the execution of his plans, as well as the fulfilment of my hopes."

She bowed her head in silence and with tearful eyes, looking like a flower bent down with heavy dew, and the earl gazed at her tenderly--almost sadly, for a moment. "I am about to leave you again, dear Julia," he said, at length; "but I go this time with very different feelings from those which I experienced when last we parted. I then knew not all that was in my own heart; I knew nothing of yours. I felt love without being aware how powerful it was, and without even hoping it was returned. But now I comprehend all the strength of my own attachment; and I do entertain hopes which it is for you to confirm or to destroy. Painful as it is, I must mingle sad images even with the expression of my brightest hopes. A time must come, Julia, and you yourself see that it is coming fast, when you will be left alone, bereft of kindred support. I have offered, I have promised, to supply to you the place of him whom death may soon, and must eventually, take away. Nothing that you can now say can make that promise void. It shall be executed fully, sincerely, with my whole heart and my whole energies; but it is you who must decide how it is to be executed by me--whether as the promised husband, plighted to you till death, with mournful happiness soothing your sorrows, sharing your grief, and with a right indefeasible to protect and comfort you, till your lot is blended by the marriage vow with his----"

The colour had come warmly up into her cheek as he spoke; and Gowrie paused an instant, doubting what were the emotions in which the blush had its source; "Or--" he added, "or as the true and sincere friend, fulfilling towards you the promise made to one loved, esteemed, and mourned by both; but, with deep and bitter disappointment in his heart, pouring shadow and darkness over his whole afterlife."

Julia started, gazed at him for an instant, and then exclaimed, "Oh no, Gowrie, no!--Can you have doubted?--Can you really have painted such a picture to your own fancy?--Can you think me so ungrateful--so base?" And she let her forehead fall upon his shoulder, while his arm stole round her waist.

"Thanks, dearest girl, thanks!" he said; "but tell me--tell me, Julia, is it with your whole heart?"

She looked up, with her cheek burning, and replied, in a voice hardly audible, "Do not doubt

it! When he is gone, there will be none to share with you;" and Gowrie pressed her tenderly to his bosom.

"Enough, enough," he said; "now I shall be quite happy."

Oh, vain words! Oh, rash anticipations! What mortal has ever had the right to infer that he shall be happy, even for an hour? Any man may learn, how much stronger hope is than fear in the human heart, by examining whether his expectations of joy, or his apprehensions of sorrow, have been most frequently disappointed.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a dull and heavy day in the month of September. The sky had been covered each evening, for the last week, with dark flocculent clouds, high up in air, but still leaden and lowering, and now the rain descended in the city of the ten colleges in a perfect deluge. The country round Padua rejoiced, for the summer had been very dry and hot, and the land yearned for the dew of heaven; but the streets of the town were almost impassable, except under the arcades on the west side--where any street was fortunate enough to have a west side--for there was a strong wind blowing, which drifted the large drops under the arches to the east, and a torrent flowed down the middle of each street, increased every two or three yards by a gushing spout projecting from the house top.

There was, however, sunshine in one of the dwellings of the town, for Julia's heart was happier than she almost liked to own. She sat with a letter before her from Gowrie, announcing that he would be speedily back in Padua; and she herself was writing to him, telling him part of the feelings which arose in her own bosom--for she had not yet taken courage to tell him all--and conveying to him the glad tidings that her aged relation had entirely recovered from his late serious illness, and was looking better than she had seen him for many a month.

Manucci himself was sitting beside her, busy with some abstruse problem, and from time to time raising his eyes to watch her write, or to mark the varied expressions which passed over her beautiful face, with that calm and heavenly satisfaction which spreads through the breast of age--when the mind is well regulated and the heart generous--at witnessing the hopes of youth and the joys which no longer can be shared.

Julia wrote on. The old man bent his head over the papers; and a few minutes after Tita entered to tell her master that a man with sea-fish was at the door, and to ask if he would purchase any. She spoke to him, but he did not answer; and Julia suddenly turned round and gazed at him. He was very pale, and his head rested upon one of the great wings of the chair. Starting up with a low cry of fear, his grandchild ran round, and raised his head. The eyes were closed, but he still breathed hard and noisily. His limbs, however, were motionless, and he was evidently insensible. Assistance was called, and he was removed to his room and laid upon his bed. Tita ran away at once, first for a physician and then a priest; and both came nearly at the same time. The man of art applied the remedies usual in those days, while the good priest watched narrowly to take advantage of the first return of consciousness to perform his functions likewise. Extreme unction was given while he was still insensible; and about two hours after the attack Manucci opened his eyes for a moment, and the priest eagerly advanced the crucifix towards him. Whether the motion was voluntary or involuntary who can tell? but old Manucci raised his hand, and it fell upon the cross. It was the last effort of expiring life. The next moment a sharp shudder passed over his frame, and he was a corpse.

"He has died like a good Catholic," said the priest, who was a man of a kindly and a liberal heart.

Julia wept, but replied not; and the old man, coming round to the side of the bed where she stood, tried to comfort her to the utmost of his power. She pressed his hand gratefully, but still remained in silent tears; and the priest, drawing the physician apart, they conferred together for several minutes in a low tone.

"The sooner the better," said the physician, "lest the suspicions that have been abroad should make them stop it."

"You're a witness he died as a good Catholic, with his hand upon the cross," rejoined the priest.

"I am," answered the physician; "but it will be better to say as little, either of his death or anything else, as possible, till the funeral is over, otherwise we shall have a scandal, and perhaps a disturbance."

"You are right, you are right," said the priest. "My dear child," he continued aloud, turning towards Julia, who was kneeling by the dead man's bedside, while Tita stood weeping at the foot, "you had better come with me into another room. There is nothing here but the clay. The spirit which you loved has departed in peace to our Father which is in heaven. There are sad duties to be performed; but trouble not yourself with them. I and your friend here, Signor Anelli, together with good Tita, will care for all that;" and approaching her side, he took her hand and gently led her away.

The funeral was performed as secretly as possible and as speedily; and it is always speedy in Italy; and Julia sat alone in the little room, where she had been writing when the old man was struck by the hand of death. The two letters were still open upon the table; and, as her eye fell upon the very last sentence she had been writing, in which she spoke of Manucci's recovered health, the tears flowed fast and long.

"I must write him another tale now," she said, tearing the letter; and then rising, she inquired whether Austin Jute, whom Gowrie had left to assist her in case of need, was in the house, for Hume had by this time left Padua.

The man was in her presence in a moment, and Julia told him that she wished him to set out immediately to seek his lord at Bologna, and tell him what had occurred.

"Disobedience is a great sin, dear lady," replied Austin Jute; "but I must either disobey you or my lord. He told me to leave you on no account whatever; and to say sooth, I believe, as things go, I can be of better service here than at Bologna, for Sir John Hume has gone to join my master, and there is no one but me to take care of you. If you will write a few lines, however, dear lady, I will see that it goes by a sure messenger."

Nor was Austin Jute wrong in his conclusions, though at that moment he did not choose to tell the lady all he had heard. Rumour had been busy in Padua, and of course from the moment it was generally known that old Signor Manucci was dead, some one of her hundred tongues was busied in manufacturing a new falsehood every instant. Citizens and shopkeepers talked. Tutors and professors laid their heads together. The heads of the colleges met and consulted, and thought fit to call in the advice of a commissary of the holy office. They had made such a bustle about it, however, before that secret and discreet functionary had anything to do with the matter, that a report of what was going on had spread far and wide. Austin Jute had his ears and his eyes open; and, as he knew many of the servants of the colleges, he soon learned much that was taking place, and determined to watch all the more eagerly over her who had been committed, in some degree, to his charge. Such were the motives of his answer to Julia; and ere evening he had cause to rejoice that he had not undertaken her mission, for one oversight, or rather act of neglect, on the part of the inquisitor, afforded him an opportunity of turning his stay in Padua to the greatest advantage. Some one suggested, in the meeting of the heads of colleges, that it would be expedient, before proceeding further, to examine the priest who had attended Manucci on his death bed. The commissary of the holy office was either tired, hungry, or busy; and he left the worthy doctors of the university to make that investigation themselves. Had the good father been examined by the inquisitor, he would have dared as soon chop off his right hand as give any intimation of what was likely to take place. For the mere scholastic dignitaries he had no such fear or reverence; and the moment he quitted them, he hastened to the house near the Treviso gate. The first person he saw was Tita, but immediately behind her stood Austin Jute; and a short conference was held by the three, so brief, indeed, that the old servant did not catch half of the good priest's meaning, for he was too much alarmed to remain more than a few moments.

As soon as he was gone, Austin laid his hand upon the old woman's arm, saying, "Not an instant is to be lost. We must take Time by the forelock. We shall never catch him if he once gets on. I must go and prepare means. You go and bring the young lady down into the garden, and by the steps to the gate. Tell her to take whatever money she has, gold, or jewels, or anything else, and as few clothes as possible, packed in a small space. Lock and bar the door of the house as soon as I am gone, but keep the garden gate upon the latch, and mind you do not open the front door, whatever knocking or hammering you may hear."

"But what is it, what is it?" exclaimed Tita. "I did not understand what the good father meant."

"That your sweet lady will be handed over to the inquisition within half an hour, if you do not do as I tell you, and quickly," replied Austin. "Remember, a minute lost is never regained. Time and tide wait for no man.--Haste, haste, Tita. But stay! It were well if the lady had some disguise. Where could one get a novice's gown and veil?"

"Not nearer than at the stall by St. Antony's," replied the old woman; "but I've got my festa gown and a large black hood, that would cover her head and shoulders. The gown is too big, but no matter for that, it'll go on the easier."

"Away, then. Dress her in it, and bring her down. But mind, lock and bar the door, and open to no one." Thus saying, he set out at full speed.

With trembling hands Tita fulfilled his directions in regard to securing the front entrance of the house. As soon as that was accomplished she hastened to her young mistress, whom she found writing a few sad lines to Gowrie. The agitation and terror in the woman's face at once

caught Julia's attention; and she started up, exclaiming, "What is it now? What new misfortune has happened?"

"Oh, dear lady, you must fly!" said Tita. "Austin Jute, my young lord's man, says there is not a moment to be lost; and he understands what the good father said better than I do. I only heard him say they were coming here immediately to search; but Austin says you must get all the money you have, and everything that is valuable, and put on some disguise, and come down as fast as possible to the garden gate, where he will join us; they will put you in the inquisition else."

The beautiful girl seemed to comprehend her danger at once; and the thought of being deprived of liberty, and cut off from all power of communicating with the only being on earth whom she now sincerely loved, brought a look of terror into her face.

"A disguise!" she exclaimed. "Where shall I find a disguise? I have none but my ordinary clothes."

"Never mind that. I will bring that in a minute," replied Tita; "only you get ready without delay. Get the money and the jewels, and all that is worth carrying, and don't open the door on any account till I come down, however they may knock."

Thus saying, she ran away to her own room, and soon descended with her gala dress, which was that of a Lombard peasant. By this time her naturally sharp wits had recovered from the first effect of fear and agitation, and now she was all promptness and decision. Throwing the dress she had brought over her young mistress, she fastened the bodice as tight as she could, and gathered together the large folds of the petticoat. But before she covered her head with the black hood, which she had likewise brought, she could not forbear gazing at her for an instant, and kissing her cheek, saying, "Bless thee, my child. Thou art as beautiful a little peasant as any in all the Veronese." The rest of the preparations were soon made. Some few articles of dress were packed in a small bundle; the money taken from the drawer in which it had been placed; and a heart cut in red cornelian, and set round with large diamonds--the only trinket which Julia possessed, with the exception of the gold pins for her hair, and a brooch to clasp her mantle--was taken from a casket and placed in her fair bosom. All this being arranged, they hurried down the stairs towards a door leading into the garden, their steps being accelerated by a considerable noise in the usually quiet street. In the passage of the house, however, Tita stopped, saying, "I had better take the key," and approaching the door, she drew the key forth quietly, and hastened after her mistress, who was by this time at the small door leading into the garden.

I should, perhaps, have mentioned before, some particulars respecting the situation of the house, in explanation of the directions which Austin Jute had given. It was, as I have said before, the last house in the street, and close to the bridge which led over the little canal, towards the Place d'armes within the Treviso gate. As that gate had been one of much importance in former times, a good deal of pains had been taken to strengthen it against an enemy, and at the side of the canal, a work of earth, faced with masonry, with a regular platform and parapet, had been formed, commanding the bridge on one side, and the Place d'armes on the other. As quieter times had come, this work, abutting upon the house of Signor Manucci, had been neglected; and the space within, had been cultivated by him as a little garden. The whole level was considerably higher than that of the water, and a short flight of steps arched over, descended from the garden to a small sally port in the wall, which led to a narrow path not more than two feet wide, by the side of the canal, at a spot distant some sixty or seventy yards from the bridge. The house itself was, in fact, included in the fortification; and the turret, in which the poor old man's study had been placed, overlooked the wall and the country round, and had probably, in former times, served the purpose of a watch tower. The little garden, however, except at one point, was only visible from the turret when a person stretched his head far out of the windows in the massy walls; neither could the steps be seen which led to the sally port.

With all these particulars Austin Jute, whose disposition was naturally inquisitive, had made himself thoroughly acquainted; but he had forgotten to warn the fugitives not to cross that one part of the garden which was visible from the windows above; and Julia, as soon as she had passed the door, was running straight across, when Tita stopped her, calling, "Under the wall, my dear--under the wall, and behind the fig tree and the mulberries.--I will lock this door though.--Heaven! we are not a minute too soon. They are knocking in the street there, as if they would have the door down. Well, let them try. It will take them some time, I warrant, for it is good strong oak, clasped with iron."

With this reflection she followed her young mistress, and keeping amongst the shrubs as much as possible, they reached the top of the steps, and descended to the sally port. That was soon unlocked, and there they remained for nearly a quarter of an hour in a sort of semi-darkness, hearing faint and dull the sound of heavy blows proceeding from the street, as the officers of the university and the holy office, when they found that no gentler means were effectual in obtaining admission, had recourse to sledge-hammers to effect an entrance. At the end of that time a loud crash was heard, and Tita whispered, "They've got in now."

Julia trembled very much, but a comparative silence succeeded, which lasted some five minutes more, and Tita tried to cheer her, saying, "Perhaps, after all, they wont find their way to the study this time either. I pulled to the door in the passage as I came along, and the spring's not easily seen."

Hardly had the words been pronounced, however, when the sound of voices coming through the windows above showed that her hope was fallacious; and Julia said, in a low tone, "Had we not better go out to the bank of the canal?"

"No, no," replied Tita; "we shall hear them if they come into the garden, for they must knock that door down, too, or force the lock."

A moment after the latch of the sally port was lifted, and the door opened. "Come out! come out!" said the voice of Austin Jute; and, like lightning, Julia darted through the door, and stood beside her lover's servant on the bank of the canal.

"I'll lock this door, too," said Tita, taking out the key and placing it on the other side.

"Safe bind, safe find," said Austin; "but the proverb is not true at the other side of the house, for they've dashed the door in, and the whole street is filled with a mob. So much the better for us. There will be fewer people in the other places."

"But which way shall we take?" asked Tita; "if we go to the bridge, we must cross the end of the street; and all the neighbours know me right well."

"That would never do," replied Austin. "Take the other way to the bridge higher up. Then we can cross there, and come back to the gate from the other side. It's longer; but it cannot be helped. The farthest about is sometimes the nearest way home. I have bought three asses, and they have just gone through the gates, to wait for us at the little wine-shop half a mile on."

Tita took a few steps in the direction which he indicated, leading the way, for the path was not wide enough to admit of two abreast; but then she stopped suddenly, saying, "I think two asses would do, Signor Austin."

"How do you mean?" asked the man.

"Why, I mean that it will be much better for me not to go away from the city," said Tita; "if they find us all gone, and should afterwards catch the Signorina, they will be sure to say that she ran away because she knew she was guilty of something. Now, a plan is come into my head, and as soon as I've seen you out of the gates, I'll just go round by the market, buy a basketful of things, and go back with the key, as if I knew nothing that has happened."

"But, Tita, they may shut you up in prison," cried Julia.

"No, my dear, they wont," replied the old woman, calmly; "they'd only have to feed me there if they did, so they'll know better. I can tell them, with a safe conscience, that you were gone before they ever came to the house; and if they ask where, I'll say you took the Treviso way. The truth is, my child, I am not fit now for running anywhere in a hurry; and if I were to go with you, I should only delay you, and perhaps lead to your being found out, for many people all round know old Tita, and there is scarcely any one in the town has ever seen you. I know you will think of me when you are away; and when you are safe and happy again, perhaps you may send for the old woman who nursed you in your youth."

"That I will, Tita," replied Julia; "but I am terrified to leave you with these people."

"No fear, no fear, my child," answered the old woman. "They can say nothing against me, for I went to confession every week. But you would never go, you know, my child, because neither you nor the signor thought it did any good; and, indeed, I don't think you had anything to confess. They can't hurt me; and they wont, I'm sure, for I'm neither too wise for them nor too good for them, and have always done what the priest told me; said my prayers, and counted my beads; and if that is not being a good catholic, I don't know what is."

"But you must have some of this money, at least," said Julia, as Tita was walking on again.

"Give me two ducats," said the old woman; "that'll keep me a long while."

But Julia insisted on her taking much more; and when that was settled, they proceeded on their way, without difficulty or obstruction. It was not without some tears that Julia parted with her faithful old servant, nor without much emotion that she went forward on an untried path of life, protected by a man whom she had known only a few weeks; but there seemed no other course before her, and she strove not to show any doubt or dread. The asses were found ready at the spot where they had been appointed, and telling the man who brought them, that "the other girl" would not come, Austin Jute placed his fair companion on the pad with which one of them was furnished, bestrode the other himself, and led the way for about a mile farther on the Treviso road. Then, however, he turned to the left, and, circling round the city, endeavoured to regain the highway to Bologna.

In the meantime good Tita re-entered the town by one of the other gates, bought herself a new basket as she went along, and leisurely took her way to the market, where she stopped at several of the stalls, and, as the following day was a fast-day, bought herself a portion of fish and vegetables sufficient for the frugal meal of one person, and no more. She laid the key between the articles of food and the side of the basket, and was, with the same calm, deliberate step,

proceeding homeward, when a man, who was passing through, exclaimed, with looks of wonder and surprise, "Ha, Tita, you take matters wonderfully quietly! Do you not know that they have broken into your house, upon a charge of sorcery against your old master, and are now seeking for proofs amongst his papers, I understand. Orders have been given, they say, to apprehend your young lady, for all men admit that she never came to confession or absolution, and some would have one believe that she is but, after all, a familiar spirit, which your master consented to have dealings with, in order to get at unheard-of treasures."

"I had her in my arms when she was two years old," said Tita, sturdily; "and she was more like flesh than spirit, and good Christian flesh, too."

This answer seemed irrefragable to the good townsman, who replied, "Well, you know best; I never saw her."

And Tita replied, with a toss of the head and a scornful air, "Unheard-of treasures, forsooth, when the poor old man died as poor as a rat! Sorcery must be a poor trade I trow, and the devil be very uncivil to his friends and acquaintances."

With this answer, she walked quickly homeward, as if she had heard, for the first time, of what had occurred. When she reached the door of the house, she found the whole passage filled with people, many of whom were anxious to get up the stairs, and see the inside of a sorcerer's dwelling, in good company; but the officers of the inquisition, the beadles and servants of the university, and some half-dozen of the company of soldiers to which the garrison of Padua was now reduced, kept back the people with brandished partizans and staves, till at length a shout was raised by some one who knew her, of "Here is old Tita! here is old Tita! A fagot and a tar-barrel for the old witch!"

Now Tita had sufficient experience in the ways of the world to know that the attacking party always has a certain advantage; and, consequently, making her way through the crowd as best she could, she assailed the officers, high and low, with great volubility. Could they not wait for her coming back, she said, when she had only gone out for half an hour? What was the need of breaking down the door, when they had only to wait a minute or two, and it would have been opened for them? But they must needs be making work for the smith and the carpenter.

She insisted, as if it was a right she demanded, instead of a fate that was certain to befall her, to be carried immediately before the illustrissimi up stairs; and even when in their presence, she assumed all the airs of towering passion, and poured forth, upon the commissary of the inquisition himself, such a torrent of vituperation, that for a moment or two he was utterly confounded. As he recovered himself, however, he reprehended her with dignity, and demanded how they could tell she would ever come back at all. To which Tita adroitly rejoined, "What right had you to suppose I would not? Had not I got the key with me?" and she instantly produced it from the basket which she carried on her arm.

Whether logic was not in its most palmy state in Padua at the time, or whether the functionaries of the holy office were not accustomed to deal in the most logical manner with questions brought before them, I know not; but assuredly, the commissary regarded the anger, the apostrophe, and the key, as very convincing proofs of Tita's ignorance and innocence. He nevertheless proceeded to question her in regard to the departure of the Signora Julia, who, he informed her, was gravely suspected of having aided her late grandfather in unlawful studies, of which pursuits, on his part, they had discovered irrefragable proofs.

"Lord bless you, illustrious signor," replied the old woman, with a very skilful sort of double dealing, not exactly falsifying the matter of fact, but giving it a colour altogether different from that which it naturally bore, "my young lady went out before I did. Why, she set off on the road to Treviso some time ago; and she is gone to see a gentleman to whom she is to be married, I understand; but I don't know much about the matter, for she does not talk to me greatly about such things; and all I know is, that a better young lady or a better Christian does not live. As to my poor master's dealing in magic, I don't believe a word of it; for I never saw a ghost or a spirit about the house, and I am sure it would have frightened me out of my wits if I had. I'll tell everything I know, and show every cranny about the house for that matter, for I've swept it every bit from end to end many a time, and I never saw anything about the place except what I've heard gentlemen call philosophy, which I thought was something they taught at the university, God forgive me!"

This reply produced an unwilling smile, and the great readiness which Tita expressed to tell all she knew perhaps saved her from many after questions, for but a few more were asked; and then the commissary and those who were joined with him departed, sweeping away all the papers, and many of the instruments of poor Manucci, Tita following them to the very street, and teasing them vociferously to have the door mended.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a sultry autumnal day--one of those days of early autumn when the summer seems to return and make a fierce struggle to resume its reign, when the leaves are yet green, or just tinted with the yellow hue of decay, when the grape is still ruddy on the bough, and the fig looks purple amongst its broad green leaves. The air had seemed languid and loaded all the day, as if a sirocco had been blowing, though the wind was in the west, and a hazy whiteness spread over the wide plains through which wander the Po, the Mincio, and the Adige. The silver gray cattle strayed lazily through the fields, sometimes lifting their heads, and bellowing as if for fresh cool air, sometimes plunging amongst the sedges, or actually swimming in the streams. Not a bird was seen winging its way through the air, the very beccaficos were still amongst the vines, and the horses of a large party of travellers who were approaching the banks of the Po, hung their heads, and wearily wended on, oppressed more by the languid heat of the day than by the length of the way they had travelled.

The travellers themselves, however, seemed gay and full of high spirits: the three gentlemen who rode in front jesting lightly with each other, though one was an elderly man of a staid, though somewhat feeble looking countenance: and the servants behind chattering in various languages with no very reverent lowness of tone.

"Do you remember, Hume," said one of the former, as they rode on, "our first journey by night through these plains?"

"Yes," replied the other, "and your plunging your horse into the Mincio, vowing we had all got off the high road."

"Because we had nothing but fire-flies to light us," replied Gowrie, "and Mr. Rhind took the first we saw for falling stars."

"Though there were no stars in the sky to fall," cried Hume; "or if they had fallen, they would have been caught in the thick blanket of cloud, and tossed up again."

"Well, my young friend," said meek Mr. Rhind, "they were the first I ever saw, you know, and every man may make a mistake."

"I wonder you did not take them for the burning bush," said Hume, a little irreverently; "for, my dear Rhind, you had had the Old Testament in your mouth from the moment we left Mantua, and you had paid our bill to the Moabitish woman who cheated us so fearfully. You called her by every gentile name you could muster, simply because she would have twenty *scudi* more than her due."

"Well, I own I loved her not," replied Mr. Rhind.

"But she did not want you to love her!" retorted Hume; "she wanted Gowrie to love her, and he would not; so she charged the twenty *scudi* for the disappointment; and all she wanted *with you* was to pay the money."

"Which I certainly would not have done, if I could have helped it," replied Mr. Rhind.

"But you could not, my dear sir," said Lord Gowrie; "depend upon it, Rhind, there is no striving against woman, circumstances, or an innkeeper's bill; and it is only waste of words and time to contest a point with either."

"I am sorry you find it so, my dear lord," replied Mr. Rhind, somewhat tartly, for he had been rather hardly pressed by his young companions' gay humour during the morning. Lord Gowrie only laughed, however, for his heart was very light. He was returning to her he loved; he had known few sorrows since his very early years, and each step of his horse's foot seemed, to hope and fancy, to bring him nearer to happiness. He could have jested at that moment good-humouredly with a fiend; and certainly Mr. Rhind did not deserve that name. The young earl, however, saw clearly that his former preceptor was somewhat annoyed, and he consequently changed the subject, stretching out his hand, and saying, "Behold the mighty Po. I know not how it is, but this river, about the part where we are now, though less in course and in volume than either the Rhine, the Rhone, or the Danube, always gives me more the idea of a great river than they do. Perhaps it may be even from the lack of beautiful scenery. With the others we lose the grandeur of the river in the grandeur of its banks. Here the broad stream comes upon us in the dead flat plain, without anything to distract the attention or engage the eye. I am inclined to believe that a river, as a river, is always more striking when there is no other great object to be seen."

"And yet to me," said Hume, "the ocean itself, simply as the ocean, without storms to lash it into magnificent fury, or rocky shores to hem it in, like a defending and attacking army, but seen from a plain sandy shore upon a calm day, is not half so sublime a sight as poets and enthusiasts would have us believe. There is a great deal of quackery in poetry, don't you think so, Gowrie? Poets bolster themselves and one another up with associations and images, till they believe things to be very sublime, which abstractedly are very insignificant. I remember once standing

upon a low beach, and putting the whole sea out, by holding up a kerchief at arm's length. I have never since been able to think it sublime except during a storm."

"Take care how you try other things by such standards," said Gowrie; "I am afraid, my dear Hume, that the same kerchief would have equally reduced the finest, the noblest, and the best of all the things of earth. It is he who extends his vision, not he who contracts it, that learns to judge things most finely, and also, I believe, most really."

As these words were passing, they were slowly approaching the banks of the great river, which at that spot is broader perhaps than at any other point of its course. The land on either side was bare and dusty, and the heat became more and more intense from the want of verdure around. At length a proposal was made that instead of crossing at once in the ferry boat, and pursuing their journey on horseback from the other side, they should hire a boat and drop down to Occhiobello, leaving the horses and grooms to rest for an hour or two at Massa, and then follow down the stream in the course of the evening, when the weather would be less sultry. The proposal came from Mr. Rhind, who was evidently a good deal fatigued; and the Earl of Gowrie, ever anxious to contribute as much as possible to his old tutor's comfort, acceded at once, although the plan might cause a few hours' delay, and he was anxious to hasten on as fast as possible, impelled by love and the expectation of speedily meeting her for whom his affection seemed but to increase by absence. There was some difficulty, indeed, in procuring a boat; for although the large ferry-boat, which, like Charon's, had carried over many a generation, was lying at its accustomed mooring place, yet no small boats were near, and they had to ride slowly down the bank of the stream for more than a mile before they came to a village where they could procure what they wanted. There, however, they engaged a small skiff of a rude kind, then commonly used by the peasantry; the three gentlemen embarked without any of their attendants; and the boatmen, after a little consultation amongst themselves, put off from the shore.

"What were you talking about just now while you were looking at the sky every minute?" asked Lord Gowrie, in Italian, addressing the master of the boat.

"We were saying that we should not get back without a storm, signor," replied the man. "I should not wonder if we had to stay at Occhiobello to-night, for when the Po is angry she is a thorough lion."

"I hope the storm will not come before we land," said Mr. Rhind, who was of a timid and unadventurous nature.

His two young companions only laughed, teasing him a little with regard to his fears, for they were at that age when a portion of danger is the sauce of life, giving a higher flavour to enjoyment. The boatmen assured the old gentleman that the storm would not come till evening; and away they went down the full quick stream, having for the first half hour the same hot and glaring sun above them, shining with undiminished force through the thin haze which lay upon the landscape. If they expected to find fresher air upon the water they were mistaken, for not a breath of wind rippled the current of the stream, and the reflection of the light from its broad glassy current rendered the heat more intense and scorching than on the land. Sir John Hume amused himself by taking Mr. Rhind to task for the bad success of his plan; but Lord Gowrie good-humouredly remarked, that at all events they were saved the trouble of riding. The boat dropped down the stream more rapidly than usual, for there was a large body of water in the river at the time, and the current was exceedingly fierce; but at the end of about a quarter of an hour the wind suddenly changed to the southeast, and blowing directly against the course of the eager waters, tossed them into waves as if on the sea. The change was so sudden--from almost a perfect calm, with the bright smooth glassy river hastening on unrippled towards the Adriatic, to a gale of wind and a wild fierce turbulent torrent--that good Mr. Rhind was nearly thrown off his seat, and showed manifest symptoms of apprehension. The boatmen showed no alarm, however, and Lord Gowrie and Sir John Hume contented themselves with looking up towards the sky, which in the zenith was becoming mottled with gray and white, while to windward some heavy black masses of cloud were seen rising rapidly in strange fantastic shapes. The air was as sultry as before, however, and after blowing for about a quarter of an hour sufficiently hard to retard the progress of the travellers very much, the wind suddenly fell altogether, and a perfect calm succeeded. The waters of the river still remained as much agitated as ever, and Lord Gowrie called the attention of Hume to a very peculiar appearance in the sky to the south.

"Do you see that mass of leaden gray cloud, Hume?" he said, "lying upon the black expanse behind. See how strangely it twists itself into different forms, as if torn with some mortal agony."

"Agony enough," answered Sir John Hume, "for the poor cloud looks as if it had the cholera; but I have remarked that it always is so when the wind is in the southeast. We shall see presently if there be thunder or anything else, for it is nothing strange to witness a conflict of the elements at this season of the year, especially in this dry and arid country, where the sun seems to reign supreme, without one green blade of grass to refresh the eye, or one cheering sound to raise a heart not utterly deprived of feeling for its fellow creatures."

The young gentleman spoke in English; but the elder boatman, a man who had numbered many years, and who with his three sons was now still following the profession in which he had been bred in his early youth, seemed to remark the direction of his eyes, and to divine the subject of his thoughts and conversation. "Ah, sir," he said, "I should not wonder if there were an

earthquake before night. You are staring at that queer-looking cloud; and I have rarely seen such a fellow as that, working away as if it were twisting itself into all sorts of shapes rather than begin the devastation, without its ending in something very sharp."

The two young men, who comprehended every word, though spoken in the broad Mantuan dialect, looked at each other in silence; but Mr. Rhind, who, notwithstanding his long residence in Italy, had with difficulty mastered the common terms of the language, remained silent, merely observing, "Well, it is pleasant that the wind has gone down, although the river is still tossing about in a strange way; I am half-inclined to be sick as if I were at sea."

Half an hour passed without the prognostication of the fisherman being fulfilled. The same lull in the air, the same agitation of the water continued; Occhiobello was in sight, and the sun was sinking far away over the Piedmontese hills, surrounded by a leaden purple colour, in which it was difficult to say whether the dull stormy gray or the crimson glow of evening predominated. In the south, the same heavy clouds were seen, somewhat higher than when the wind fell, cutting hard upon the blue sky overhead; and the large mass of vapour, the peculiar appearance of which I have already mentioned, lay contorting itself into a thousand different forms every moment. On the right bank, not far behind them, when they looked back, the travellers could see their horses and servants coming at an easy pace down the course of the stream, the slow progress of the boat having given an advantage to the party on land; and in front, a little more than half way between them and Occhiobello, a row boat was perceived crossing the broad river from the left bank to the right, apparently with great difficulty, and heavily laden.

"That is Mantini's boat," said one of the boatmen to the other.

"Ay, he'll get himself into a scrape some day," said the old man. "You see he's got horses in it now!"

"How is that likely to get him into a scrape?" asked Lord Gowrie. "Is the boat not fitted for horses?"

"Oh yes, signor," replied the man; "but it is not that I spoke of. The law says, no boat shall carry horses, oxen, or asses, except the regular ferry boats."

"Few would get across, then, by any other conveyance," said Sir John Hume; "for this infernal tossing is beginning to make me think that none but asses, would go in a small boat when they could get a big one. Come, row on, row on, my men; for if you lose time grinning at my joke, I shall not take it as a compliment."

The men put their strength to the oar, and the boat flew on a good deal more rapidly; for a gay good-humoured manner will always do more with an Italian than either promises or commands. The boat before them was rather more than half way across the river, while they, in the mid-stream, were rapidly approaching it, when suddenly the old boatman, starting up, pushed his way to the stern between the earl and Mr. Rhind, and thrust his oar deep in the water, somewhat in the fashion of a rudder, exclaiming, "It is coming, by St. Antony! keep her head on, boys--keep her head on!" and looking out along the course of the stream, Lord Gowrie saw a wave rushing up against the current, not unlike that which, under the name of the Mascaré, proves so frequently fatal to boats in Dordogne. Towards the middle of the river, the height of this watery wall, as it seemed to be, was not less than seven or eight feet, though near the banks it was much less, and all along the top was an overhanging crest of foam, snow-white, like an edge of curling plumes. A loud roar accompanied it; and the fierce hurricane, which was probably the cause of the phenomenon, seemed to precede the billow it had raised by some forty or fifty yards; for the heavy-laden boat which they had seen, and which, having approached much nearer the bank, was much less exposed to the force of the rushing wave than their own, was in an instant capsized by the violence of the blast, and every one it contained cast into the rushing water.

Horses and men were seen struggling in the stream; and with horror the earl beheld a woman's garments also. "Towards the bank!--towards the bank!" he cried, "to give them help;" but the boatmen paid not the least attention, and scarcely had the words quitted his mouth when the wind struck their boat also. One of the young men, who had been standing up, was cast headlong into the bottom of the bark; those who were seated could hardly resist the fury of the gale; and the next instant the wall of water struck them with such force, that instead of rising over it, as the old boatman had hoped, the skiff filled in a moment, and went down.

For an instant the Earl of Gowrie saw nothing but the green flashing light of the wave, and heard nothing but the roaring of the water in his ears; but accustomed from his infancy to breast the dangerous billows of the Firth of Tay, he struck boldly out, rising to the surface, with very little alarm for himself or for his companion Hume, whom he knew to be a practised swimmer also. His first thought was for his good old preceptor; but he soon saw that Mr. Rhind was even in a better condition than himself, having somehow got possession of an oar, over which he had cast his arms, so as both to hold it fast, and to keep his head and shoulders out of water. The old boatman and his two sons were seen at some little distance striking away towards the shore; and Hume, never losing his merriment even in the moment of the greatest peril, shouted loudly, "Get to land, Gowrie--get to land! I will pilot Rhind to the bank, if he will but keep his helm down, and his prow as near the wind as possible."

As Hume was much nearer to the worthy tutor, Lord Gowrie followed his advice; but the first two strokes which he took towards the land, drifting, as he did so, part of the way down the stream, showed him at a few yards' distance a scene of even greater interest than that which actually surrounded him. It was that of the boat which had been capsized by the first rush of the hurricane. It had not sunk at once as his own smaller craft had done, and one or two men were clinging to a part of it which appeared above the water. Close by, a horse's head and neck protruded above the stream; and the hoofs were seen beating the water furiously, in the poor animal's violent efforts to reach the land. Considerably nearer to the earl was a group of three persons, two men and a woman. One of the men, only a few feet distant from the others, and apparently but little practised in the art of swimming, was struggling furiously, with energetic efforts, to reach a better swimmer, who was not only making his own way towards the shore, but supporting coolly and steadily with his left hand the head and shoulders of the girl beside him. She herself was dressed in the garb of a peasant; but a feeling of terror indescribable seized upon the earl, when in the face of the man who supported her he recognised the features of his own servant, Austin Jute. He saw in an instant that if the drowning man once caught hold of them, all three must inevitably perish; and swimming towards them as fast as possible, he shouted, "To the shore, Austin--to the shore! Don't let him reach you, or you're lost!"

"Here, take her, my lord," cried Austin Jute--"take her, and leave me to settle with him. Drowning men catch at a straw; and he has got hold of one of the tags of my jerkin--in God's name take her quick, or he'll have us all down!"

As he spoke the earl reached his side. He asked no questions, for one look at the girl's face before him was enough. The dark eyes were closed. The long black hair floated in ringlets on the water, and the face was very pale, but the small fair hands were clasped together on the breast, as if with a strong effort to resist an almost overpowering inclination to grasp at the objects near.

"She lives," thought the earl, cheered by that sign; and placing his hand under her shoulders he bade the servant let go his hold. Then, with no more exertion than was needful to support himself and her in the water, and to guide them in an oblique line towards the shore, he suffered the stream to bear them on. The only peril that remained was to be encountered in passing the boat, where the horse was still struggling furiously; but that was safely avoided, and then, confident in his own strength and skill, the earl made more directly for the bank, and reached it just as the sun was disappearing in the west. For one so young, Lord Gowrie had known in life both very bitter sorrow and very intense joy; but nothing that he had ever felt was at all to be compared with his sensations at the moment when, after staggering up the bank with Julia in his arms, he placed her on the dry turf at the foot of a mulberry tree, and gazed upon her fair face as she lay with the eyes still closed.

"Julia," he said, "Julia;" and then everything gave way to joy as she faintly opened her eyes and unclasped her hands. The bright purple light of evening was streaming around them, and glancing through the vine leaves which garlanded the trees. There was no one there but themselves; and with warm and passionate joy he kissed her fair cheek again and again, and wrung the water from her hair, and bound the long tresses round her ivory brow, while, with wild words of tenderness and love, he poured forth the mingled expression of joy and apprehension and thankfulness. For a moment or two she did not speak. I know not indeed whether it was terror, or exhaustion, or the overpowering emotions of the moment that kept her silent; but even when she could find words they were at first but two, "Oh, Gowrie!"

A moment after they were joined by Sir John Hume and Mr. Rhind, and, looking up the stream, Gowrie saw a group of several persons on the bank, busy apparently in helping sufferers out of the water.

"Did you see my man Austin, Hume?" asked the earl, after some other words had passed, of that quick and whirling kind by which moments of much agitation are followed.

"Oh yes, he is safe," answered Hume. "Indeed, you need not have asked the question, he'll not drown easily, though another fellow near him did his best to prevent him keeping his head above water."

"It was that which alarmed me for him," replied the earl; "and I owe him too much this day, Hume, not to feel anxious for his safety. Are you sure he reached the shore?"

"Quite sure," replied his friend, "and I trust that there are not many lost from amongst us. Fair lady," he continued, taking Julia's hand, "I rejoice indeed to see you safe, and if Gowrie will take my advice, and you can find strength to walk, he will lead you at once to the little town down there, where you can dry your wet garments and obtain some refreshment and repose."

As the young knight spoke, Mr. Rhind turned an inquiring glance to Lord Gowrie's face, as if he would fain have asked who the beautiful creature before him was, and what was her connexion with his former pupil. The earl did not remark the expression, however; but Julia called his attention away by touching his hand and making a sign to him to bend down his head. He did so at once, and after listening to a few whispered but eager words, he said aloud, "No, we will not go to Occhiobello. There is a village up there; it will do well enough. Have you strength to go, Julia? If not, we will either get or make a litter for you."

She rose, feebly, however, and though feeling faint and giddy, declared that she was quite capable of walking. "Let us see first," she added, "if all the people are saved. It would darken the joy of our own escape if any of the rest were lost."

"Here comes your man Jute," said Sir John Hume, addressing the earl. "He will tell us how the others have fared."

They walked on a little way to meet the man who was approaching; and as soon as he was within ear shot the earl called to him, inquiring if all were safe.

"Two have gone to the bottom, my good lord," replied Austin; "the master of our own boat for one, and the same fellow who tried so hard to drag me down with him. For the former I am sorry enough; for he seemed a good cheerful-minded man; but for the latter I don't care a rush; and, to say truth, I believe he may be as well where he is. He followed us down to the boat, my lord," continued Jute, in a whisper to the earl, "and jumped in, willy nilly, just as we were putting off. I've a great notion he had no good will to my young lady, for he kept his eyes fixed upon us the whole time, as if ready to make a spring at us as soon as we got out of the boat."

"You must tell me more by and by," said the earl. "Now let us forward."

Thus saying, with Julia's arm drawn through his own, he walked slowly on towards the group which was standing on the bank, while Hume followed, conversing with Mr. Rhind, whom he seemed to be teasing by exciting his curiosity in regard to Julia, without satisfying him by a single word. Such broken sentences as, "Oh, very beautiful indeed. Don't you think so?--Quite a mystery altogether--I can tell you nothing about it, for I know nothing--Gowrie has known her a long time--Her name? Lord bless you! my dear sir, I don't know her name, I hardly know my own sometimes--" reached Gowrie's ear from time to time, and brought a serious smile upon his lip. At length, however, they approached the group upon the bank, and found the whole of the Italians much more taken up with grief for the various losses they had sustained than with joy at their own escape from a watery grave. The brother of the man Mantini, who had been drowned, was sitting upon the sand, pouring forth a mixture of strange lamentations, sometimes for the boat, sometimes for his brother. The other old fisherman and his two sons were wringing their hands, and bemoaning the ruinous accident which had befallen them. The old man could not be comforted; and his sons seemed to increase the paroxysms of his grief from time to time by recapitulating the various perfections of their little craft, and the sums of money which had been expended upon her. Lord Gowrie, however, contrived very speedily to tranquillize their somewhat clamorous grief by saying, "Do not wring your hands so, my good man; you lost your boat in my service, and the best you can buy or build to replace it, you shall have at my cost. Show us now the way to that village, for I see no path towards it; and come and see whether you can procure some lodging for us there during the night. I dare say you know most of the good people there, and can tell us where we can find rest and provisions."

The old man declared that the best of everything was to be found at the village, though there was a better inn, he said, at Occhiobello, which was not above three quarters of a mile farther.

"That makes all the difference to the lady," replied the earl; "and we shall do very well at the village for the night."

He then approached the younger Mantini, and attempted to comfort him as he had done the other boatman, by promising to pay the amount of his loss.

"That wont buy back my brother," said the man, sadly. "I should not have cared a straw about the old boat if it had not been for that."

"That is God's doing, not man's," replied the earl; "and man cannot undo it. This should be some comfort, for he deals better for us than we could deal for ourselves; but think of what I have said, and let me know the expense of a new boat, this night at the village there. Can you tell who was the other unfortunate man who has been drowned?"

"His name I don't know," answered the boatman; "but when I wanted to keep him out of the boat, which was too heavy laden as it was, he whispered that he was a messenger of the holy office, and told me to refuse him a passage at my peril. He brought a curse into our boat, I trow, or we should not have had such a storm; but there is no use of my sitting here and watching the water. Two horses and two men have gone down beside the boat, and no one will ever rise again till the last trumpet calls them out of the grave. I may as well go with you to the village as sit here watching the water that rolls over them all;" and getting up, he followed the rest of the party with his hands behind his back, in dull and silent grief.

Do you know well, dear reader, any of those large villages which are scattered over what may be called the Mantuan plain? They deserve not, indeed, the name of towns, though they often approach them in size. I mean such places as San Felice, Gonzaga, Bozzolo, Sanguinetto, and others of that class, which now present a number of small scattered stone houses, with gardens generally around them, and a road running through the midst; and here and there a much larger house falling rapidly to decay, with no windows to keep out the storm or the tempest, and very often the roof completely off, while the tall square tower, which is certain to be found stuck somewhere about the building, rises one, if not two stories above the rest. The church is generally placed upon any little rising ground, sometimes at one extreme of the village, sometimes in the middle, with the priest's cottage close by; but in any of these at the present day, you might as well look for an inn as for the shop of a diamond merchant, unless you chose to call by that name the little hovel, surrounded by a garden, where, on festival days, the peasantry go to drink their glass of Rosolio and water, wine, lemonade, or, since the Austrians have bestrid the land, vermouth.

In the days I speak of, however, when journeys were almost always performed on horseback, and cross-roads shared more liberally with highways in the patronage of travellers, those larger houses which I have mentioned were all inhabited by wealthy contadini, who often combined with their ordinary occupation of farmers the more lucrative calling of inn-keeping. The large farms which they held furnished abundance of provisions for any accidental guests, and the upper parts of the house, though scantily decorated, were kept ready for the reception of travellers, in case the blessing of heaven, the plague in a neighbouring town, or the bad reputation of the high road, brought the wayfarers to villages in preference to cities. Very different, indeed, were the customs and habits of such inns at that time, from those which have prevailed within the last century, or, perhaps, even more; for though not more than two hundred and fifty years have passed, yet from the end of the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century, were times of great change in the habits and manners of all the nations of Europe; and at the small village inn in Italy, instead of seeing waiters, tapsters, or drawers, or even barmaids and chambermaids, all running eagerly to receive the unexpected guest, the landlord would rise up from under his fig tree or his olive, with a courteous salutation, and his sons and daughters would be called upon to attend his guests.

Such was the reception of the Earl of Gowrie and his companions, at the little inn in the village which I have described upon the banks of the Po. One of the first houses they met with was a large building, such as I have described, with its tall square tower of five stories at one corner, the whole situated at the distance of a hundred yards from the road, with a farm-yard in front. On the left of that farm-yard was a vineyard, rich with grapes; and from a pole leaning over the wall, hung suspended a garland, as indication sufficient that hospitable entertainment was to be found within. The host himself was seated under a tree in the vineyard, *pigliar la fresca*, as he called it himself; but no sooner did he see the party enter the court-yard, than up he started, notwithstanding his age and his fat, both of which were considerable, and hurrying forward to do the honours to his guests, called loudly for Bianca and Maria, and Pietronillo, to assist in making the visitors comfortable. The whole house was bustle and confusion in a moment; and although it could not afford accommodation to all, yet the Earl of Gowrie and his own immediate companions found every thing they could desire. Austin Jute was immediately sent back to bring his fellow-servants, who were coming down the river with the horses; and the boatmen were lodged in the neighbouring houses, to fill the pitying ears of the villagers with moving tales of disasters undergone.

Such details were not wanting to excite the interest, and in some degree the wonder of the host, his daughters, and his son. There was something in the air, the countenance, and even in the dress of the gentlemen who made the house their temporary residence, which seemed to show that they were foreigners; yet two of them spoke the language with the most perfect purity even of accent, and not the slightest tone of their fair companion indicated that she was not a native of the country. But then, in her case, her dress was that of a mere Paduan peasant on a gala day, while her language, her manners, and her whole appearance, denoted a much higher station, and from time to time she spoke to her companions in another tongue, without the slightest appearance of difficulty or hesitation. The pretty country girl, too, who aided her to change her wet garments for others which she kindly and willingly supplied, brought down the report that every part of her dress but the mere gown and bodice, were of the very finest materials, and that she had taken from her bosom a trinket shaped like a heart, surrounded with what seemed to her, jewels of inestimable value.

The rooms which were assigned to the travellers were somewhat difficult to allot, for each, as was and is still very common in Italian houses, opened into the other; and the young earl had determined that thenceforth Julia should be guarded by himself. When he pointed out, therefore, as they passed through them, the end chamber of the whole suite as that which was best suited to her, and took possession of the next for himself, good Mr. Rhind's severe notions seemed a little shocked, and though he did not venture to make any observation, he looked exceedingly grave.

Lord Gowrie took no notice, though he did not fail to remark the change of expression, for from the few private words which had passed between himself and Julia, he felt that the time had come when it would be necessary very speedily to give whatever explanation he thought needful.

It could not, indeed, be afforded at the moment, but a few minutes after, stopping one of the daughters of the host, he said, "Stay a moment, Bianchina. The signora may be alarmed at sleeping in a strange house alone. You must kindly take the other bed in her chamber."

"With much pleasure, sir," replied the girl, and tripped away. This being arranged to the satisfaction of Lord Gowrie, and even to that of Mr. Rhind, there remained another feat to be accomplished, which was, to obtain a quiet unwatched private conversation with Julia, in which he might learn all that had befallen her. The few words which she had spoken on the bank of the river had given him a general knowledge of the greater misfortunes which had happened, but to a heart that loved as his did, the smallest particular, the most minute detail was interesting. He longed to hear her tell all, to comfort her for all, and his imagination, which was quick and eager, painted all that she had endured--the sorrow, the terror, the agitation. He grieved bitterly that he had not been present to protect and to console her at the time when such evils had overshadowed and such difficulties obstructed her path of life, and he thirsted to pour the balm of sympathy and affection into the gentle heart so bruised.

Many an obstacle presented itself, however, during the next hour, to any private communication. The whole house was in a bustle; beds were to be made, rooms arranged, supper prepared. Julia had to change her dripping garments and to obtain others; the earl to give various orders, and to bestow the promised compensation upon the boatmen; the host, his son, his daughters, and a maid were running from room to room, and chattering with everybody; the servants who had been left to follow with the horses arrived to increase the numbers and the confusion, and some time after Austin Jute made his appearance, bearing the little packet which Julia had carried with her from Padua.

"Nothing is lost," he observed, "but what is at the bottom of the sea. Search saves seeking. All deep things have a bottom."

It was easier to obtain speech of him than of Julia at that moment, and the earl soon learned all that Austin himself knew--the death of good old Manucci, the wild and absurd rumours which had spread after his decease, and the risk which the beautiful girl herself had run of being committed to prison upon the charge of taking part in the old man's supposed unlawful arts, and being imbued with heretical notions. The means taken to effect her escape were then detailed, and Austin Jute went on to say, "We got on very well that night, my lord, and reached a little country inn which I remembered well, at Battaglia, where, although the accommodation was poor enough, I thought we should be in safety. I was forced to tell many a lie, it is true, and say that the young lady was my sister, which the people believed, because we spoke nothing but English to each other, although the family likeness is not very great, and she was dressed like an Italian girl. The next morning, however, I found that there were people out in pursuit of us. One of the sparrow-hawks had stopped at the inn in the night to refresh his horse and himself; and refreshing himself somewhat too much, he chattered about his errand, for when the wine is in, the wit is out, my lord. The people of the place were all agog about it, for they had not had a bit of sorcery and heresy for a long time; and from their talk I found that he was going towards Rovigo to give orders at the ferries and the bridges for apprehending us. That forced us to turn out of our way, and cross the Adige higher up; but I made up for lost time by selling the two asses, and buying two good horses, and we crossed the country between the Adige and the Po quick enough. The difficulty was how to get over this great river, for I did not doubt that our picture had been painted at every passage house; and besides, I had seen, two or three times, a man who seemed to me watching us. I went along the bank, therefore, till I found the boat in which we did try to cross just ready to start with some of the peasants. For a high bribe the man agreed to take us and our horses, though it's against the law; but just as we were putting off, down came the black looking fellow whom I had seen several times following, jumped off his horse, tied the beast to the boat post, and forced his way into the boat. All the rest you know, my lord, and all I can say is, if he was upon a bad errand, the fellow has gone to answer for it. He tried hard to drown me, but I would not let him."

Such was Austin Jute's brief tale; and in a few minutes after, the boatman, Mantini, came in to receive what had been promised him. His calculation regarding the value of the boat which had been lost seemed to be just and even moderate; and after having paid him his demand, the earl added ten Venetian ducats more.

"I cannot recall your brother to life, my good friend," said Gowrie, "nor can I compensate for his loss to you and others; but if he has left any children, distribute that small sum amongst them, on the part of a foreign gentleman who sincerely commiserates their misfortune."

The rough boatman, with the quick emotions of the south, caught his hand and kissed it, saying, "God bless you, sir!" He then turned away towards the door, but paused before he reached it, and coming back, he said in a low voice, "I hear you know the signora who was in our boat; and I think, from the way you looked at her, that you love her. If so, start to-morrow morning at daybreak, avoid Ferrara and all this side of Italy, and get into the Parmesan, or some place where they will not look for you."

The earl gazed at him for a moment in silence, and then replied, "This is indeed a valuable hint, my good friend, if you have just cause for suspecting any evil intended against us. So far I will acknowledge you are right: the young lady is well known to me, and her safety is dearer to me than my own."

"I *have* just cause, signor," replied the man. "The river has delivered the signora from one of those who were pursuing her, but there are others watching for her at Ferrara, and all along the course of the stream. The man who came into our boat just as we were putting off--he who was drowned, I mean--told me, in a whisper, that he was a messenger of the holy office, and bade me run to Occhiobello at once, to ask the podesta for assistance to apprehend the lady and the man who was with her, as soon as we landed from the boat. It was that made me say he brought a curse with him, for he seemed to rejoice as much at the thought of catching a poor young thing like that, as others would at making her happy. I heard all about the plans they had laid for taking her; and he said it was the duty of every one to give instant information. I shall give none, and you are safe for me; but there are other people here who will be chattering, and the noise of the loss of the two boats, and the drowning of two men, will bring plenty of inquiries to-morrow morning. If I can put them on a wrong scent, however, I will."

The earl thanked him warmly for his information, and then held a hurried consultation with Hume, to which, at the end of a few minutes, Austin Jute was called. It was evident, no time was to be lost in preparing for a very early departure on the following morning. Horses had to be purchased, to supply the place of those which had been drowned; and it seemed also needful to procure a different dress for Julia, as it was now clear that the persons in pursuit of her had obtained information of the costume in which she had left Padua; and moreover, her travelling in the garments of a peasant girl, with three gentlemen in a high station in society, would assuredly attract attention at every inn where they stopped. Where or how this change of apparel was to be obtained, proved a very puzzling question; for although the use of ready-made garments was in that day much more common than at present, yet it was not to be expected that the village could supply such, nor that even Occhiobello possessed a shop where anything of the kind could be obtained.

"I will go and talk to one of the girls of the house about it," said Hume. "There is supper being served, I see. You go in, Gowrie, and partake, while I seize upon Bianchina or her sister, and try to discover what is to be done."

He was more fortunate than might have been anticipated, for he found the two daughters of the innkeeper together, and quite willing to enter into conversation or gossip upon any subject he chose. Nevertheless, it was not very easy to explain to them what he wanted, without explaining, at the same time, Julia's dangerous and painful situation; but when he had at length accomplished the task, well or ill, the younger girl looked at her sister with an expression of intelligence.

"So," she said, "the lady wants a dress, does she? and that is all. Well, I think that can be easily procured for her. Don't you remember, Bianca, the Venetian lady who was here last year, and left a coffre behind her?"

"Well," replied the other sister, looking shrewdly at Sir John Hume, "I thought, when first I set eyes on her, that the signora was not peasant born. Now, I'll warrant me, she has stolen away in disguise from home, some dark night, to meet her lover here; and the wild river had well nigh given them a mournful bridal bed--'tis very strange that all the elements seem to make war against love. I never yet heard of any of these stolen matches going forward without being crossed for a while by storms and accidents."

Sir John Hume thought it might be no bad policy to suffer the turn which the light-hearted girl had given to the fair Julia's flight and disguise, to remain uncontradicted; and he replied, laughing, "Well, thou art a little divineress. Don't you think I'm a proper man for any fair lady to run away from home to mate with?"

"No, no," answered the girl, with a shrewd glance; "it is not you she came to mate with; it is your friend; and you stand by, like the dog by his master's chair, watching the good things provided for him, and only taking what scraps he gives you--Ha! ha! gay signor, have I touched you?"

"By my faith you have, and hit hard," replied Sir John Hume; "but I will have a kiss for that, Bianchina, before we part."

"It must be in the dark, then," cried the girl, laughing, "for fear I should see your face and not like it."

"But about this Venetian lady's goods and chattels, my two pretty maids," said the young knight, recurring to the subject. "We cannot break her coffre open and steal her apparel."

"Trouble not your brain with that, gay signor," answered the girl Maria. "We will not make you take part in robbery."

"Unless you steal my heart, and I lose it willingly," replied the knight.

"No fear of that; it is not worth stealing," replied the girl. "If it has been bestowed on every country girl you meet, it must be well nigh worn out by this time. As to the apparel, it belongs to us, now. That sweet lady's case was much of the same sort as this one's. She fled from a hard father at Venice, and came hither to meet her lover, and fly with him to Bergamo; but, by some mischance, it was nine whole days before he found her, and all that time we hid her close, though

the pursuers tracked her almost to our door. We used to sit with her, too, and comfort her, and talk of love, and how fortune often favoured it at last, after having crossed it long. At the end of the nine days, the young marquis came and found her; but as they were obliged to fly for their lives on horseback, the coffre was left behind; and when she got home and was married, she wrote to bid us keep it for her love, and divide the contents between us. They are not garments fit for such as we are; long black robes, which would cover our feet and ankles, and trail upon the ground, mantles and hoods, and veils of Venice lace. We cut up one velvet cloak, to make us bodices for holidays, but that is all we have taken yet; and we can well spare the lady garments enough for her journey, and more becoming her than those which now she wears."

This was very satisfactory news to the young Earl of Gowrie, when his friend joined him at supper, after parting from the two gay girls above, with an adieu better suited to the manners of that day than to our notions in the present times. As soon as supper was over, he hastened with his friend and Julia to conclude the bargain for the contents of the Venetian lady's coffre; and, to say truth, though good-humoured, lively, and kind-hearted, the innkeeper's two daughters showed a full appreciation of that with which they were parting, and did not suffer it to go below its value. To make up, however, for this little trait of interestedness, Maria and Bianchina set instantly to work with needles and thread and scissors, to make the garments fit their new owner; and leaving Julia with them, after a whispered petition that she would join him soon in the gardens, the earl went down again to the eating room, purposing at once to enter in explanation with Mr. Rhind, in order to save grave looks or admonitions for the future.

He found his former tutor, however, sound asleep, worn out with the fatigues and anxieties of the day, and soothed to slumber by a hearty supper and a stoup of as good wine as the village could afford.

"Faith, Gowrie," said Sir John Hume, "I could well nigh follow old Rhind's example; but I may as well stroll through the village first, and see what is going on. There is nothing like keeping watch and ward. Will you come?"

The earl, however, declined, and strolled out into the gardens, which extended to the banks of that little river which, taking its rise somewhat above Nonantola, joins the Po not much higher up than Occhiobello.

CHAPTER IX.

The moon was clear in the heaven, the skies in which she shone were of that deep intense blue which no European land but Italy or Spain can display; there was an effulgence in her light, which mingled the rays with the deep blue woof of the night heavens so strongly, that the stars themselves seemed vanquished in the strife for the empire of the sky, and looked out but faint and feeble.

In a small arbour covered with vines, on the bank of the stream, sat the lady Julia and her lover. The bright rays of the orb of night floated lightly on the water, changing the dark flowing mass into liquid silver, while a hazy light poured through the olive, the fig, and the vine, giving a faint mysterious aspect to the innumerable trees, and enlivening various spots upon the dull, cold, gray earth, with the yellow radiance of the queen of night.

I believe it is as fruitless as difficult to try to analyse the feelings of the human heart, when that heart is strongly moved by the impulses implanted in it by nature, called into activity by accidental and concurring circumstances. That nature has laid down a rule, and that the heart always acts upon it with more or less energy, according to its original powers, I do strongly believe; but it seems to me fruitless, or at all events but little beneficial, to investigate why certain bosoms, especially those of southern climates, are moved by more warm and eager feelings than others. The operation of man's mind and of his heart are as yet mysteries; and no one who has ever written upon the subject has done more than take the facts as they found them, without at all approaching the causes. We talk of eager love; we speak of the warm blood of the south; we name certain classes of our fellow-beings, excitable, and others, phlegmatic; but we ourselves little understand what we mean when we apply such terms, and never try to dive into the sources of the qualities or the emotions we indicate. We ask not how much is due to education, how much to nature; and never think of the immense sum of co-operating causes which go to form that which is in reality education. Is man or woman merely educated by the lessons of a master, or the instructions and exhortations of a parent? Are not the acts we witness, the words we hear, the scenes with which we are familiar, parts of our education? Is not the Swiss or the Highlander of every land educated in part by his mountains, his valleys, his lakes, his torrents? Is not the inhabitant of cities subjected to certain permanent impressions by the constant presence of crowds and the everlasting pressure of his fellow-men? Does not the burning sun, the arid desert, the hot blast, teach lessons never forgotten, and which become part

of nature to one class of men; and frozen plains, and lengthened winters, and long nights, other lessons to the natives of a different region? Give man what instruction you will, by spoken words or written signs, there is another education going on for ever, not only for individuals, but for nations, in the works of God around them, and in the circumstances with which his will has encompassed their destiny.

Perhaps no two people upon earth had ever been educated more differently than the two who sat together in that garden, and yet, strange to say, in the character of each had been produced traits which, while they left a strong distinction, disposed to the most perfect harmony. Gowrie, born amidst rich and wild scenery, had passed his earliest days in troublous and perilous events. Constant activity, manly exercises, dangerous sports, and wild adventures, had been alternated with calm study; and acting on a mind of an inquiring and philosophic turn, and a frame naturally robust, had increased and early matured the powers of each. Thus had passed his days to the age of seventeen, and then a perfect change had taken place in his course of life. Removed to Padua, he had devoted himself for some years solely to the cultivation of his understanding; and had followed eagerly, and with extraordinary success, inquiries not alone into the lore of ancient days, but into those physical sciences which were then known but to a few, and often perilous to the possessor. Love had come at length to complete the education of the heart, just when the education of body and mind was accomplished.

Julia, on the contrary, had been snatched, at a period beyond her memory, from the dangers and difficulties which had surrounded her infancy. She had passed the whole period of early youth in calm and quiet studies, directed to unite every grace and accomplishment with strength of mind and firmness of principle. No tender, no gentle affection had been crushed; her spirit had been embittered by no harshness; her heart had been injured by no disappointment; no rankling memory of any kind was in her bosom, and her affections had been cultivated as well as her understanding. Bright and cheerful, deep-feeling, and true by nature, a sense of duty had been given her as a guide and not a tyrant; and her attachments and her enjoyments, limited to a very small sphere, had gained intensity from their concentration upon few objects.

And there they now sat, side by side, with her hand locked in his, telling and hearing the tale of the first great griefs which she had ever known. Youth forms but a faint idea of mortality till the dark proofs are placed tangibly before its eyes. We know that those we love must die; but hope still removes the period, and draws a veil over the terrors of death. She had sometimes sat and thought of it--especially when her old relation had pointed out that the great enemy of the mortal frame was approaching more and more closely to himself--but she had never been able to realize the grim features as they appeared to her now, when she had seen them near; and now, when she spoke of the loss of him in whom, for so many years, all her feelings and her thoughts had centered, she leaned her head upon Gowrie's shoulder, and the tears flowed fast.

It was natural--it was very natural that she should cling with but the stronger affection to him who now sat beside her. The first strong love of woman's heart had been given to him, and that is intense and absorbing enough; but he was now the only one; there was no partition of affection with any other being in the world; neither brothers nor sisters, nor parents nor friends, shared her thoughts or divided her attachment. The cup of love was full to the brim. Not one drop had been spilt; and it was all his own.

Nor were his feelings less intense towards her, though different; for man's part is ever different in the great moving passion of youth. To protect, to defend, to befriend, is his allotted portion of the compact between man and woman; and to feel that he was all in all to her, that she had none to look to but him, that then and for ever her fate rested on his power and his will, that his arm must be her stay, his spirit her guide, his love her consolation, rendered the deep passion which her beauty, her grace, her gentleness first kindled, but the more warm and ardent. It was pure, and high, and noble, too. He forgot not at that moment the promises which Manucci had exacted from him. He proposed not to himself or her to break them. He told her all that had passed; and though he expressed regret that such delay must interpose before he could call her his own, and showed how much easier, safer, and happier their course would be, if she could at once give him her hand at the altar, yet he expressed no desire at that time to deviate from the conduct pointed out. Pledged to follow it, it seemed to him but as a road traced on a map, which, though circuitous, would lead in the end to happiness, and from which they could not turn aside without losing their way entirely. It was only how they could best tread that path that they considered; and there, indeed, much was to be thought of and provided for. The first object was to place the fair girl in safety; for although a sad smile came upon her countenance at the absurdity of the accusation, when she spoke of the suspicions entertained against her, yet those were days when innocence was no safeguard, and the unreasonableness of a charge was no security. The only course to be followed seemed that which had been pointed out by the boatman, Mantini--namely, to ascend the river as rapidly as possible, without venturing into the Venetian territory, and then to pass straight through Piedmont and France, to England.

"We shall have time enough, as we go, dear girl," said the young earl, "to examine the papers which your grandfather gave me, and to judge what our course must be when we reach Scotland. The first thing to be thought of, however, is security, and therefore we had better set out by daybreak. Doubtless, my good man Austin can procure a couple of horses before that time, and if not, two of those which bear the baggage must carry a saddle, and the packages follow by some other conveyance."

"I will be ready when you bid me," replied Julia, "and do what you bid me, Gowrie; but there was one injunction which he whom I have lost, laid upon me, when he told me to accompany you to Scotland. He bade me engage some women to go with me as servants, saying that it might seem strange if I journeyed with you all alone.--I know not why it should seem strange," she continued, raising her eyes to his face; "for whom have I to trust in but you? and who, but you, has any right to protect and guide me?"

Gowrie smiled, and kissed the fair small hand he held in his; but he answered at once, "He was very right, dear Julia. It *would* seem strange; and men might make comments more painful even to me than to you. The harsh, hard world neither sees, nor tries to see, men's hearts; but wherever there is the opportunity of evil, supposes that evil exists. Our poor friend was right; maids you shall have to go with you; but it is impossible to engage them here: nor, indeed, would it be prudent to attempt it. At Mantua, or Piacenza, we shall be more free to act; and in the meantime I will tell good old Mr. Rhind of the exact situation in which we are placed, to prevent him from coming to any wrong conclusions--I mean the gentleman who sat next Sir John Hume at supper; he was formerly my tutor, and will return with us to England."

"Oh, yes; tell him--tell him," replied the lady, eagerly. "He gazed at me often during the meal, and I felt the colour coming to my cheek, I knew not why. It seemed as if he doubted me, and did not like my presence with you."

"Nay, it is not exactly so," replied her lover. "He is a good and gentle-minded man, only somewhat too much a slave to the world's opinion. As soon, however, as he knows all, he will be quite satisfied, and aid us to the best of his power. And now, dear Julia, seek your rest; for you will have but little time to repose; and we must make quick journeys and long ones till danger is left behind."

The earl did not calculate altogether rightly upon Mr. Rhind's ready acquiescence. Whether it was that he had been suddenly awakened in the midst of his sleep by the landlord lighting the tapers in the eating hall, or whether it was that the portion of wine he had taken, though not sufficient to affect his intellect, had been enough to affect his temper, I cannot tell; but certain it is, that he assumed a tone with his former pupil which roused some feelings of anger.

"I wish to speak with you, my lord," he said, as soon as Lord Gowrie entered the room alone.

"And I with you, my dear sir," answered the young earl. "What is it you desire to say?"

"Why, there is something very strange here, my lord," said the other, while Gowrie seated himself. "You are suddenly and unexpectedly, as it seems, joined by a young woman of very great beauty, with whom you are evidently very well and intimately acquainted, but whom I have never seen or heard of before. Now, my dear lord, neither my character nor my principles will permit me----"

"Stop one moment," said the earl, interrupting him. "I wish to guard against your saying anything that may be offensive to me, and which you would yourself regret hereafter. Already you have used the term 'young woman,' when you should have said 'young lady,' for her manners, as well as her appearance, should have taught you what her station is. However, as I came here to explain to you my own position and hers, I may as well go on, and save you needless questions. She is a lady of birth equal to my own, with whom, as you say, I am well acquainted, and have been so long. She is plighted to me to be my bride; and but for the loss of her nearest, and indeed only kinsman in this country, I should have gone on to find and claim her at Padua, and would there have introduced you to her under more favourable circumstances."

He paused in thought for a moment, doubtful as to whether he should tell Mr. Rhind the absurd suspicions under which her whom he loved had fallen; for he knew his good tutor well, and did not believe that those suspicions would appear so ridiculous in the eyes of his companion as they were in his own.

Mr. Rhind, however, instantly took advantage of his silence to reply. "What you tell me, my lord, alarms me more than ever. What will your lady mother--what will all your friends and relations think of your marrying a strange Italian--a runaway, as it seems, from her home and her family, a follower, of course, of Popish superstitions and idolatries, a worshipper of the beast, a disciple of the antiChrist of Rome? I must desire and insist----"

"You will insist upon nothing with me, Mr. Rhind," replied Gowrie, in a low, but somewhat stern tone. "Pray do not forget yourself; but remember that your authority over my actions has long ceased to exist--had, indeed, ceased before I made this lady's acquaintance. Old friendship, respect for your virtues, and personal affection, may induce me to condescend so far as to give you explanations of my conduct and my purposes; but it must be upon the condition that you lay aside that tone altogether."

Mr. Rhind found that he had gone a little too far; but yet he did not choose altogether to abandon his purpose, and he replied, "Well, my lord, my part can very soon be taken. It is true, as you say, that you are your own master; but still I have a duty to you and to your family to perform, which I must and will fulfil, and, having done so, we can then part upon our several ways if you think fit. That duty is to represent to you the consequences of a course----"

"Of which you know nothing," answered the earl, "being utterly and entirely ignorant of the whole facts, and assuming a number of positions, every one of which is false. Your logic and your prudence have both failed you, my good sir; and as you still speak in a tone I dislike, I think it will be much better to drop a discussion which seems only likely to end in a diminution of both my respect and my friendship."

"You are very hard upon me, my lord," replied Mr. Rhind. "I am not conscious of having deserved such treatment, and all I can say is, if I have done so, I am ready to make any atonement in my power, as soon as you show me that such is the case."

"That I can show you instantly," answered Lord Gowrie; "for I am sorry to say that you have undoubtedly erred in every one of your conclusions, and should have known me better than to suppose that I would act in a manner derogatory to my character, to my station, and to the faith in which I have been brought up."

"The passions of young men," said Mr. Rhind, gravely, "will often lead them to act contrary even to their own judgment."

"I might reply to that observation somewhat severely," said the earl, conquering a strong inclination to retaliate; "but I will not do so, and will merely show you, how you have suffered prejudice to warp your own judgment. You have said the lady is an Italian. On the contrary, she is my own countrywoman, the daughter of a house as noble as my own. You have said that she is a papist, a worshipper of the beast, a follower of the antichrist of Rome. These are harsh words, sir; and they are all false. She is a protestant. Her father was a protestant, her mother, her grandfather. As to the latter, by whom she was educated, he was driven from his native country on account of his testimony against the superstitious vanities of that very church of Rome--do not interrupt me.--You have said that she is a runaway from her family and friends. There you are as much in error as in all the rest. She has fled to me, on the death of her only surviving relation in this country, to escape persecution; and one of the principal charges upon which that persecution is founded, is that she could never be brought to attend upon the superstitious observance of confession, or ask absolution at the hands of a mortal like herself. And now, my good sir, having heard the facts, let me tell you my intentions. I have undertaken to escort this young lady back to her native country of Scotland; to claim for her, and if possible to restore to her the estates of which she has been unjustly deprived; and I have promised to make her my wife at the end of about twelve months from this time. All this I will perform to the letter. Nay more, I should conceive it a duty, in the situation in which she is placed, to urge her at once to give me her hand, had I not bound myself solemnly to refrain till the period I have mentioned is past. This promise I will also keep, though in keeping it I render the rest of the task I have undertaken more delicate and difficult; but of course I shall consider it a duty to take every means in my power, by all tokens of outward reverence and respect, to shield her, not only from reproach but from suspicion, while travelling under my protection to her native land. You may aid me to do so if you will, and in so doing, I believe you will be performing a Christian act; but still, if after what I have said you entertain any hesitation, I do not press you to do so, and leave you to act perfectly as you think fit."

Mr. Rhind had bent down his head, feeling, with a good deal of bitterness, that he had placed himself greatly in the wrong; and that although he might still entertain great objections to the course which the young earl was determined to pursue, and be anxious to urge upon him considerations to which he attached great importance, his arguments would seem weak and without force, after the injustice of his first conclusions had been so completely proved. There was a little struggle in his breast between mortified vanity and the consciousness of having shown himself rash and prejudiced; but various prudential considerations arrayed themselves on the side of humility, and he answered, in a low and deprecatory tone, "I grieve most sincerely that I have done the young lady wrong; and I rejoice most sincerely, my lord, to find that whatever other objections may exist, your affections have been fixed upon one so sincerely attached to the protestant faith. My only apprehension now is, as to what your lady mother may think of such an engagement entered into without her knowledge and consent."

"Leave me to deal with my mother, my dear sir," replied the earl; "I know her better than you do, and entertain no fear of the result. She is far too wise a woman to assume authority where she possesses none, but that which affection and reverence give her. Nay, more, she is too kind and too noble not to approve of what I have done and what I intend to do, when she finds that no reasonable objection stands in the way of my affection, and that the object of my love is in herself worthy of it. Do I understand you right that it is your purpose to bear me company as heretofore, and to assist me in escorting this young lady to her own land with decency and propriety?"

"Most assuredly, my dear lord," replied Mr. Rhind, "if you will accept my services; and I do hope and trust that you will not mention to the young lady the prejudices I somewhat rashly entertained, for it might lose me her favour, and make her look upon me as an enemy instead of a friend."

Lord Gowrie smiled, and gave him his hand, saying, "Make your mind quite easy on that score. I will make no mischief, my dear sir. And now we had better all perhaps seek repose, as it will be needful for us to set off by daylight to-morrow, and to alter our whole course, taking the way towards Piacenza, as I dare not cross any part of the Venetian territory, lest my beautiful Julia should fall into the hands of the hateful Inquisition."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Mr. Rhind, to whom the Inquisition was an object of the utmost terror and abhorrence. "If she run such risks for conscience sake, well may the dear lady merit the love and reverence of all good men."

The treaty of peace thus concluded, the earl and his former tutor parted for the night; and Gowrie proceeded to inquire what had become of Hume, and to ascertain the result of Austin Jute's efforts to procure horses for their journey of the following day.

CHAPTER X.

On one of the spurs of the Apennines, where that large chain, which forms as it were the spine of Southern Italy, approaches most closely to the Mediterranean at its northern extremity, just about half way between the fair town of Piacenza and the frontiers of Piedmont, there stood in those days, and there stands still, an inn, to which the inhabitants of the neighbouring city frequently resort in the summer months, to enjoy the cool upland air and the beautiful scenery. It is situated a little higher up than Borgonovo, and then bore the name of La Festa Galante. The scenery round is wild and uncultivated, but full of picturesque beauty, with myrtle-covered hills sloping down gently to the wide plains of Lombardy, which lie stretching out to an immense extent till sight is lost in the blue distance. Ten days after the events which I have related in the last chapter, the Earl of Gowrie and his fair companion were seated on the slope of the hill, at about a quarter of a mile from the inn, gazing down with delight on the splendid landscape beneath them, while the setting sun poured his last rays over the mountains and the plain, and gilded the steeples and the towers of Piacenza, making the city look much nearer than it really was. The distance might be some seventeen or eighteen miles, and the period of the year had passed when the inhabitants of the town were accustomed to come thither to escape the heated streets and crowded thoroughfares. There were no other guests in the house but the earl and his party; and a more quiet and secluded spot could not well have been chosen for fugitives to rest after a long flight, or lovers to pass a few days of happy repose. The proximity of another state, too, by crossing the frontier of which security could soon be obtained, might be one reason why the earl had selected that spot as a place of temporary sojourn after the fatigues and anxieties which Julia had lately endured, for Voghera was not farther distant than Piacenza, and the actual boundary was within two miles of the inn.

All was calm and still around them. Mr. Rhind sat reading a little farther down the hill. A servant girl, who, with a sort of adventurous spirit which often characterizes the peasantry of that part of the country, had agreed to quit her home at Borgonovo, and accompany the strangers into distant lands, was plying the busy needle within call. The sleepy evening sunshine and the blue shadow crept in longer and longer lines over the short turf and the scattered myrtle bushes, and overhead, stretched out like a canopy, the broad dark branches of four or five gigantic pines, while, at a little distance along the face of the hill, was seen peeping out a Palladian villa, with large chesnut trees, serving rather to break the hard straight lines than to conceal that a house stood there. The villa indeed was uninhabited, for its owner had retired into the city for the cooler and more rainy months of winter; but still it gave to a scene unusually wild that air of habitation and society which, under most circumstances, is pleasant from the associations produced.

Their conversation was not gay, but it was cheerful--far more cheerful than it had been since last they met; for memory of the dead had darkened the horizon behind them, and frequent apprehension had spread clouds over the prospect before. At several places where they had stopped by the way, causes of alarm had occurred; and even at Piacenza they had found reason to doubt their security. A man, who had known Mr. Rhind in Padua, had met him in the streets, and told him a distorted tale of poor Manucci's death and Julia's flight, declaring boldly that the old man had been addicted to unlawful arts, and that it was suspected his granddaughter had aided him in their pursuit. He added, however--what neutralized in the mind of his hearer the effect of his tale, as far as poor Julia was concerned--that she was clearly guilty, because she had never been known to come to confession or seek absolution of the priest. Now, however, both Gowrie and her he loved felt in security, for he had taken measures to guard against surprise; and the memory of the loss she had lately sustained had been somewhat softened by time and the rapid passing of many stirring events. Gowrie strove to cheer her, to remove apprehension, to efface the traces of the first deep sorrow she had known; and though gaiety would have jarred with her feelings, yet a cheerful tone mingled with deep thought, will often find its way to a heart which would reject direct consolation and fly from painful merriment.

On the preceding day she and Gowrie had read together the papers which had been intrusted to him by Manucci, and the perusal had been sad; for there she found the tale of all that her parents had suffered, and though she could not but rejoice to feel that no disparity between her own rank and that of her husband could make his friends look cold upon her, yet the impression--at least the first impression--was melancholy.

He had marked it at the time, and would not recur to the subject now, but spoke of other things of a lighter nature, but which had more or less connexion with deeper and stronger feelings.

"It is indeed a fair spot of earth, this pleasant land of Italy," he said, as they gazed over the scene before their eyes; "and yet, my loved Julia, there is always something sad in it to my sight. The memories of the glorious past contrast so strongly with the painful realities of the present, that I can never enjoy these bright scenes without wishing that a happier lot had been assigned to those who inhabit them."

"But there are bright things here still," replied Julia; "if the glory of arms is gone, the glory of arts still survives."

"And policy has succeeded liberty," said Gowrie, with a faint smile; "but let us not, love, dwell upon regrets. How gloriously the rays of the setting sun are painting, almost with ethereal splendour, that high *campanile* and the old castle by its side, while the purple shadow, resting upon the village below, marks it out upon the illuminated bosom of the hill. There may be more peace, perhaps, under that obscurity, than in the sun-lighted towers above. I am resolved, dear girl, to seek no glories. See!--even now the splendour is passing away, and the gorgeous fabric is almost lost to sight. No, no! content and happiness are jewels better worth the seeking than all that ambition can offer or power can give."

"Thank Heaven you feel so," answered Julia; "but tell me, Gowrie, something of your own land--of my land too--of our land. I fear me, from the way in which you admire the scenes we pass through here, that it wants that beauty which charms you so much."

"Oh, no!" answered Gowrie; "it has beauties of its own, far different, but not less great. Its skies are often full of clouds, and its air of mists; rugged and stern are many of its features, and its winds are cold and strong. But those clouds give infinite variety to all they pass over; and if it be not a land of sunshine, it is at least a land of gleams. The shadow and the light wreath themselves in airy dance over the prospect, and the purple heath and yellow broom supply to us the myrtle and the gentia, hardly less fragrant, and in nought less beautiful. Then, the grey mists--let them not scare you--for when they rise in the morning rays from out the valleys, winding themselves round the tall hills, they look like a grey cloak trimmed with gold wrapping the limbs of the giant genius of the land. Then, though the features of the landscape are, as I have said, bold and rude, they attain in the sublime what they lose in the beautiful, and striking the imagination elevate the mind.--Yet there are many beauties too, soft and gentle and pleasant to look upon; for it is not all the deep dim lake, the rocky mountains, the roaring cataract; but there are scenes as sweet and placid as any even in this bright land; and where you find them, they seem like a smile upon a warrior's face in a moment of peace and repose."

"I shall love it, I am sure," replied Julia; "for though I have seen but little of this wide world, yet I have often gazed at beautiful pictures with feelings that I can hardly describe--a love and a longing to penetrate into the deep glades, to roam amongst the rocky hills, to trace the glistening river through the woods, to see how the lake ends amongst the mountains, to solve all the mysteries which the painter has left to be the sport of fancy. But I have ever, though pleased with both, loved those pictures best which show me grand and striking scenes. They seem to lift up my heart more directly unto God. The rocks and mountains seem the steps of his temple, his altar on the summit of the hills. But what like is your own place at Perth?"

"Our place," said Gowrie, pressing the small hand that lay in his; "'tis a large old house in one of the most beautiful cities in the land, with wide chambers and long galleries.--But look, my Julia, there is a horseman coming along the road from Borgonovo, and spurring hither at great speed. It must be my good fellow Austin, who is watching there; and lo! there are two others following at a somewhat slower pace. Hola, Catharina, call out the men! We need not fear the coming of two men, if there be no more behind. I think that second figure looks like Hume. He does not ride in the Italian fashion. But still he could hardly have reached Padua, and followed us hither so soon. The first is certainly Austin, and he spares not the spur."

They stood and watched him, while some three or four servants, well armed, as was the custom of that day, came out and ranged themselves near their lord. In the meantime, the first horseman was lost to their sight, plunging in amid some brown woods which lay at the bottom of the slope. Then, re-appearing, he rode more slowly up the steep hill, while the other two who followed were in turn concealed by the wood.

In a few minutes, Austin Jute sprang to the ground by his lord's side, saying, "Sir John Hume, my lord, is coming up; and I rode forward to warn you."

"You should not have left the village, Austin," said the earl; "I bade you stay, unless you saw cause for apprehension."

"True, my lord," answered the man; "but I have other tidings too. Bad tidings make the messenger ugly, so I told the good first. I fear you will have to move in the cool of the evening, for there is a fat dominican, a slink official, and two servitors, down there below, who, I wot, seek no good to the signora. I talked with them easily, and made myself as simple as a dove for their benefit. But there need be no hurry and no fear, lady," he continued, seeing Julia's cheek turn

somewhat pale, with that sick-hearted feeling which comes upon us amidst the anxieties of the world, when we have known a brief period of repose, and the fiend of apprehension appears at our side again. "Cheer up, cheer up! there are only four of them, and we more than double their number. They won't get much help from the podesta, who is an atheist, thank Heaven! Besides, full barrels roll slow, and they are now filling themselves with both meat and drink. It was their first call, and I bestowed on each of them a bottle of a wine which I knew to be heady on an empty stomach."

"Here comes Hume," said the earl. "Keep watch on that point of rock, Austin. In half an hour it will be dark; and methinks they will not travel after sun-down."

"If they do," answered Austin Jute, "I will undertake to rob them of their breviaries, and make them think a single man a whole troop of banditti; for, being cruel, they must be cowards--at least I never saw those two bad things apart."

"Nothing of the kind, if you please, Jute," replied the earl, who had little doubt, from long knowledge of his servant's character, that he was very likely to execute in frolic what he proposed in jest. "Go where I have told you, and watch the road well till night falls, or till I tell you to return."

"I suppose, if I see them trotting up, I may ride down to bid God speed them, my lord?" said Jute, taking two or three steps away. "I heard one of the learned professors at Padua say, 'Always meet a coming evil;' and he added some Latin, which I don't recollect."

The earl did not reply, but turned to greet his friend Hume, who, as gay and light-hearted as ever, shook his hand with a jest, saying, "Here is a letter for you, Gowrie; may it bring good news, though it came last from an evil place. Dear lady, you may well look lovely, for you have turned the heads of all the doctors of Padua, only it unluckily happens that the effect of beauty, like that of the sun, is changed by what it shines upon, bringing forth fruits and flowers in the garden and the field, and hatching viper's eggs upon a dunghill. They all declare you are an enchantress; and though Gowrie and a great many more may think the same thing, it is in a very different sense."

"They do me great wrong," answered Julia, sadly; "and they did wrong to him who is gone, for his whole mind was turned to doing good to his fellow-men, and certainly never dreamed of evil. If all people were as innocent of guile as he was, we should have a more peaceable world."

"They are not very peaceable in Padua," replied Hume, "for there has been a riot, and many broken heads. I have to thank it, perhaps, for being here, however, for the worthy council of asses had well nigh made up their minds to cause my arrest for having pronounced Gaelic, Gaelic; and I do believe, if they did not understand Italian, they would pronounce it magic also. Well, what news, Gowrie? If your epistle be as placable as mine from the same hand, your affairs will go smoothly, and happiness have a green turf to canter over. For my part, I shall go through the rest of Europe like a shot out of a culverin, till I stop rolling, at dear Beatrice's pretty little feet."

While he had been speaking, Lord Gowrie had been examining the contents of the letter which his friend had given him; and although his eye had been straining eagerly on the page with a look almost approaching to anxiety, as is the case with most men of strong feelings, when they receive written tidings from distant friends, there was a smile upon his lip which showed that the contents were not unsatisfactory. We may as well look over his shoulder, however, while he stands there with the letter in his hand, and read the words that it contains for ourselves. Thus, then, the epistle ran:--

"To the Earl of Gowrie, our dear Son, with love and affectionate greeting:

"SON,--Your letter of the 16th of August, by the hands of a trusty messenger, reached us with speed; and seeing that there are therein contained things of weight, anent which your mind is disquieted till you shall hear from us, I write at once to let you know the mind of your granduncle and myself. Having proved yourself on all occasions wise and prudent, even beyond your years, you do well to write freely of your purposes to those who have your love and interest much at heart, notwithstanding that you are now of an age both to judge and act for yourself without control. We doubt not, my dear son, that you show your discretion in the choice you have made, and that the lady Julia, of whom you write, is worthy of all commendation. We might have wished you in such a matter to choose one known to us all, and with whose friends we might have dealt in the ordinary way; but, as you have made your choice, and love beareth hardly contradiction, we are glad to find that she is one of your own countrywomen, of suitable rank, and well nurtured, and also that she hath resisted stoutly all lures to defection in a land of idolatry and well nigh heathenism. It is comfortable, too, to find that you are not so hurried on by rash and intemperate affections as to propose to wed this lady at once, but inclined rather to wait till she has been brought amongst your own friends, and has sought, if not recovered, the lands which you say are her due: not that we need heed much whether she come to you, my son, with a rich dowry or not, so that the other qualities be suitable; but we are glad to find that both you and she are inclined to act with discretion rather than hasty passion. Thus you will understand that I have conceived a good opinion both of her heart and her understanding, not only by what you write,

which might be warped by the love of a young man, but by her own acts, which speak in her praise. You may, therefore, kiss her for me, as her dear mother, and tell her that she shall have under my roof the care and kindness which is shown to her other children by your fond parent,

"DOROTHEA GOWRIE."

"*Post Scriptum.*--I trust that your coming will be speedy, for it is now many years since mine eyes beheld my son. Sir John Hume marries your sister Beatrice, who is now in attendance upon the Queen's Majesty. I have written to tell him he hath my consent, and put this letter within his in one packet, not knowing where you may be when the messenger reaches Padua."

Without answering Sir John Hume, Gowrie gently took Julia in his arms, and kissed her lips, saying, "I am commissioned, dear love, to give you this kiss for one who is ready and well pleased to receive you as a daughter."

"I wish dear Beatrice were here, with all my heart," said Sir John Hume, "then such tokens might become the fashion.--In Heaven's name what are you staring at, dearly beloved Rhind? Did you never hear of a kiss being sent in a letter before? and if the Countess of Gowrie chooses to do such duty to her fair future daughter-in-law by deputy, not being able to perform it herself at a thousand miles' distance, who could she choose better for the office than her own son?--But come, Gowrie, your mad-pated fellow has told you doubtless that you have black neighbours near; and you have now to choose whether you will set out to-night or wait till morning. Look, there is a star beginning to glimmer up there. The evening is warm and fair, and we can reach Voghera before the gates close. What say you, fair lady?"

"Oh, let us go," answered Julia. "I shall not feel in safety till I have left this land behind me."

"Come, then, let us to horse at once," said Gowrie. "We can go on with some of the men; and the rest can follow with the baggage after. Methinks they wont subject doublets and cloaks to the holy office, so that we can leave them in safety."

The plan was no sooner proposed than executed. The host's bill was paid, the horses saddled, and the three gentlemen of the party, with Julia and the girl who had been hired to accompany her, set out just as the sun had sunk below the horizon. The stars looked out clear and bright upon their path, and with a glad heart Julia passed an old tower, even then deserted, which marked the boundary of the territories of Piacenza and Voghera, then, as now, under distinct and separate rule. Her spirits rose; and though she had been somewhat silent during the first few miles of the ride, she now questioned Sir John Hume, who was on her right hand, regarding all he had seen at Padua. He answered gaily and lightly, evading her questions, for he did not like to tell her that the house which had been so long her home had been completely pillaged on the day that she fled from Padua. She soon saw that he was unwilling to satisfy her; and fancy filled up but too truly the mere vague outline that he gave. With regard to her poor old servant Tita, however, she was determined to hear more; and there the young gentleman had less scruple in affording her every information.

"Oh, as to dearly beloved Tita," he said, "she has done exceedingly well. She fairly and boldly encountered and defeated all the old women in black gowns that the university could send against her. She bullied the professors, rated the inquisitor, and nearly scratched the eyes out of the faces of the officers. She told old Martinelli to his beard, that if people had not suspected him of unlawful studies he never would have tried to cast the imputation upon others; and as to her old lord and young lady, they had much less to do with evil spirits than others she could mention, who, people said, kept books written with blood, and used to raise up the image of a child out of a pot of boiling water. The old fool got frightened out of his wits, and made his exit from the house as fast as possible, not knowing what she would charge him with next, and fearing that part of the storm which he had helped to raise might fall upon himself. Every one after was afraid to meddle with bold Tita, and she remained mistress of the field. She is now very comfortably established in a small house by the market-place, and is looked upon with great reverence as one of the heroes of Padua."

"It is really strange how men can be so mad and foolish," said the earl. "Spirits must be very weak and powerless to submit themselves to the sway of feeble old men, or half-crazed old women."

"Or have a very strange taste in female beauty," rejoined Hume, "to fall in love with wrinkles, gray hair, and more beard than is becoming on a lady's chin; but these events promise to raise a grand scholastic dispute in Padua, for already the parties are arraying themselves for and against the existence of magic at all. Antonelli has announced a lecture on the non-existence of magic, and when one of the doctors hinted that such an opinion was heretical, he turned the tables upon the persecutors, by giving the two parties the names of magicians and anti-magicians, so that Martinelli and his faction are now universally known by the title of the magicians, much to their horror and confusion."

"But we have the warrant of Scripture," said Mr. Rhind, gravely, "for asserting that magic has really existed. Balaam, the son of Balak, when he was called to curse the children of Israel,

distinctly spoke of it as an art which he himself practised."

"Are you sure it was not Balaam's ass?" asked Sir John Hume, laughing; "I am sure no one would practise it in the present day but an ass. I don't know what they did then."

Mr. Rhind, however, though silenced, was not satisfied. He had listened to the whole conversation with great attention; and combining what he then heard with words which had at times dropped from both the earl and Julia, he perceived the nature of the charge against her, and felt sadly oppressed in mind thereby. It is true he had seen nothing in her but beauty, sweetness, and rational devotion; he had discovered that she always carried with her a Bible in the English tongue; but still fully impressed, as most men were in his day, with a belief that such a thing as magic really existed, he felt grieved and uneasy on account of his pupil's long intimacy with Manucci, who, he now found, had been accused of practising unlawful arts. He tried on the following morning, by what he thought skilful questions, to extract more information from Sir John Hume; but he was, by nature, so simple, that Hume foiled him at every turn by a repartee, and the same night, eager to hurry on towards Scotland by longer and more rapid journeys than Julia could undertake, the young knight left his companions to follow, and hastened on towards France, leaving Mr. Rhind to brood over his own conclusions with bitterness and apprehension.

CHAPTER XI.

It may seem perhaps a paradox to say that expectation is enjoyment. Nevertheless it is so on this earth. Fruition is for heaven. With the accomplishment of every desire, there is so much of disappointment mingled, that it cannot be really called enjoyment, for fancy always exercises itself upon the future; and when we obtain the hard reality for which we wished, the charms with which imagination decorated it are gone. Did we but state the case to ourselves as it truly is, whenever we conceive any of the manifold desires which lead us on from step to step through life, the proposition would be totally different from that which man for ever puts before his own mind, and we should take one step towards undeceiving ourselves. We continually say, "if I could attain such an object, I should be *quite contented*." But what man ought to say to himself is, "I believe this or that acquisition would give me happiness." He would soon find that it did not do so; and the never ceasing recurrence of the lesson might, in the end, teach him to ask what was the source of his disappointment?--Was it that other circumstances in his own fate were so altered, even while he pursued the path of endeavour, as to render attainment no longer satisfactory?--was it that the object sought was intrinsically different when attained from that which he had reasonably believed it to be while pursuing it?--or was it that his fancy had gilded it with charms not its own, and that he had voluntarily and blindly persuaded himself that it was brighter and more excellent than it was? Perhaps the answer, yes, might be returned to all these questions; but yet I fear the chief burden of deceit would rest with imagination, and that man would ever find he had judged of the future without sufficient grounds, and had suffered desire to stimulate hope, and hope to cheat expectation. Yet, perhaps, if he would but turn back and look behind, when disappointment and success had been obtained together, he would find that the pleasures tasted in the pursuit, especially at the time when fruition was drawing nearer and nearer, would, in the sum, make up the amount of enjoyment which he had anticipated in possession. I will go to a certain town, says man, and there I will spend this sum in my purse, in buying things which are necessary to my comfort and satisfaction. He travels on the road. He spends his money here, he spends his money there; and when he arrives, he finds that he has not sufficient to purchase one-half of what he proposed to buy. Yet he enjoyed himself by the way, and has no cause to complain.

If we thus decorate, as I have stated a few sentences ago, the object of desire with charms not its own, we may well say that we enjoy in anticipation even while the pursuit continues, and more especially do so where success seems to us certain, though remote. In the case of Lord Gowrie it was truly so. He looked to his union with Julia as a consummation of happiness; and he longed for the passing of the time till she should be his own for ever; but yet the days were very bright which he passed beside her in the interval. Hope went on before them and they followed; but they gathered many a flower by the way. Bound by his promise, he knew that a certain interval must elapse before their fate could be inseparably united. There was no use in hastening their movements. There was no object in hurrying on towards his native land. He felt inclined to linger amongst fair scenes, and in a climate where winter comes slowly and departs soon, by the side of her he loved, with little restraint but what his own feeling of right imposed upon him, with a sense of deep happiness in the present, and expectation to brighten the hereafter.

In Piedmont and Savoy, all danger was at an end; for while the southern and eastern parts of Italy were still under that system of tyranny and superstition which strove to control the thoughts as well as the actions of men, the states bordering on France had cast off the bondage in a considerable degree, and the power of the most cruel and arbitrary tribunal that ever was founded by man was no longer recognised.

Still there was something due to opinion, especially to the opinion of those he revered and loved. Doubts might naturally arise if he halted without any reasonable motive by the way; if he detained her who was to be his bride before she was his bride, in any lengthened sojourn, almost alone with him, in distant lands. They went slowly, therefore; but they still proceeded. They stopped sometimes during a whole day for rest; and for that purpose they chose the most beautiful scenes they could find--scenes which harmonised with the feelings of their own hearts. It would have been too much to expect that two beings, loving as they loved, should ride post through the most beautiful parts of Europe. Their journeys, too, were slow and short. They sought to enjoy everything worth enjoying that presented itself. They loved to see, and to comment, and to delight--to pour into each other's bosoms every thought as it arose, and to blend, as it were, their minds together as their hearts were already blended. For the deeds that were enacted round them--and there were many at that time of surpassing interest--they cared very little. What was to them what princes or potentates said or did? What was to them the shifting scenes of policy or war? They had a world apart within themselves, in which every feeling and every thought was centred. As they approached the mountains of Savoy, however, they heard some rumours of military movements, which caused alarm in the mind of Mr. Rhind. He was a very peaceable man, and somewhat timid; but Lord Gowrie treated the matter lightly, and Julia seemed hardly to comprehend that there was any danger to unwarlike persons in the strife of monarchs. Their progress, however, was rendered even slower than before, by other circumstances. Mountains to climb presented themselves at every step; roads were bad and dangerous, towns became few, and accommodation difficult to be procured. The art of the engineer had not at that time triumphed over the barriers which nature had placed between land and land, and the first fall of snow, though scanty, had added to the difficulties of the way.

The modern reader would derive little amusement or instruction from a detailed account of the passage of the Alps, in the reign of Elizabeth. Suffice it, that after a long and fatiguing day's journey, the party of Lord Gowrie arrived, towards sunset, at the small town of Barraux. Julia was weary and exhausted, Mr. Rhind was hungry and low-spirited, and nothing was to be obtained at the inn, in the way of food, but some brown bread and some small fish out of the Isere. Nevertheless, youth and hope and love made a great difference between the two younger and the elder of the travellers. The tendency, I fear, of all the experience of age, is selfish; and it is strange that the nearer we approach towards the period of quitting earth, the more we prize its comforts. True, indeed, there are some who preserve the finer things of the unworn fresh heart even unto the end; but, of all the many trials to which man's soul is subject in this state of probation, I cannot but think that a tendency to that apathy for what is great and fine, and to that concentration of the mind upon the body which are incident to old age and long experience of life, is amongst the greatest. Mr. Rhind could not enjoy at all, though the scene around him, as the reader who may have wandered that way will know, was full of objects both to soothe and to elevate. He consoled himself with the wine, which was very good, while Julia and Gowrie wandered up to the base of the old castle on the hill, to get one last look of the beautiful soft valley through which the Isere wanders on, with gentle cultivated hills hemming it round, and blue gigantic mountains towering up beyond, while the sun, set to them, still tipped the peaks with purple and with gold.

They returned slowly to their light supper, which was preparing during their absence, and shortly after, Julia retired to rest. Mr. Rhind was not long ere he left the room also; but it was a large old rambling house, which had formerly been a priory of the suppressed order of the Temple, standing near the centre of the little bourg--I think the reader can see it still--and Mr. Rhind could not find his room. He came back, and disturbed the earl in a reverie, to ask which it was; and the landlord had to be summoned to show him. If Gowrie was sleepy before, the inclination to slumber had now passed away; and he sat for some time longer in meditation. The landlord looked in at length; and remembering that he was keeping up a race of people devoted to early hours, he rose, got a taper, and retired to his own chamber. Then setting down the light, he looked around, and again fell into a fit of thought.

There are times when--we know not why--the spirit of the mind, if I may use a strange term, seems completely to triumph over the mere corporal part of our nature, to conquer its sensations, to make light of its necessities, to overcome its habitual resistance almost without an effort--times when soul seems to possess the whole, when every faculty is subdued to thought. Vain is it to struggle against it--vain to say I will read, I will sport, I will sleep. Thought replies, no; and for the time we are her slave. Such was the case with Gowrie that night; and though he gazed round the chamber as I have said, what it contained made merely an impression upon the eye, which reached not the mind within.

It was a large, wide, old-fashioned chamber, the walls of which had no hangings, although two wide pieces of a tapestry, with which the whole room had probably formerly been decorated, were drawn across the windows. On one side of the room was a large bed, almost lost in the extent of the floor, and having curtains of a dingy green hue, and of a silk stuff, the manufacture of which had even then long passed away, formerly called cendal. There was a small round table in the middle of the room, a mirror in a black oak frame standing forth from the wall, supported by two iron bars, a washing-table in the corner, and two or three chairs. That was all that it contained; and, as I have said, it was very large and very gloomy. Nevertheless, although the year was approaching winter, there was something close and oppressive in the atmosphere. It felt as if the windows had not been opened for many a year. Gowrie did not remark it, but sat down at the table and fell into thought again. He remained thus for more than an hour. I have called it

thought, but yet it was of that trance-like character wherein all things seem more like impressions than ideas, when dead affections rise up from the tomb of memory in the shape of living existences, and from the future the shadows of unborn events, clad in the forms of actual realities, present themselves for warning or encouragement. There is no continuity, there is no arrangement, there is no operation of the intellect. Mind sits as a spectator while the pageant passes, called up before our eyes by some unnamed power.--What?

Who can say? There are things within us and without us that we know not of--that the hardest handed metaphysician has never been able to grasp.

In the midst of such fits the body will sometimes renew the struggle, and strive to regain its power, especially if anything affects it strongly. The earl seemed to feel the oppressive closeness of the room. He rose, went to the window near the bed, pulled down the tapestry, and threw open the rattling small-paned casement. It looked to the east; and the bright moon, within a few days of the full, peeped in from above the Alps, pouring a long line of splendour over the floor. He knew not, indeed, that he had moved. The external eye might see the casement and the moon, and the faint line of mountains flooded with silver light; but the mind saw not. It had other visions; and leaning his arms upon the bar on which played the part of the casement that opened, he remained buried in the same reverie. Its tone was melancholy--not exactly sad, but of that high grave stern cast which seems to rob the things of earth of all their unreal brightness, stripping off the gilding and the gauds, and leaving the hard leaden forms alone, while another light than that of the world's day spreads around, as if streaming from a higher sphere, and showing all the emptiness and the nakedness of the illusions of the earth.

How long he had remained thus I know not, and he himself did not know, but something--what he could never tell--made him suddenly turn round.

How shall I tell what followed? Was it an illusion of the fancy? Was it a dream? Was it a reality?--Who shall say? But there before him was a face and form well known, though never seen in life. It was that of a tall dark pale man, with traces of sickness on his face, a bloody dagger in his hand, and marks of gore upon his arm. His portrait hung in the earl's palace at Perth, though with a more glowing cheek, and in unspotted robes. But there he stood before him now, as if the grave had given up its dead, his father's father, the slayer of the hapless Rizzio. There was the same haggard look, the same ashy cheek, the same rolling eye with which he had sunk into a seat in the presence of his queen when the dreadful deed was done, and the full horror of the act was poured upon his conscience. There the same gasping movement of the lips with which he called for water to allay the burning thirst which was never to be quenched but by the cold cup of death. A pale hazy light spread around him, and he seemed to raise his hand with a menacing gesture. He spoke, or Gowrie thought he spoke, in tones low and stern, "Shall the blood of Douglas and of Ruthven mingle once more?" he said. "Shall the child of him who denied all participation in the act he prompted, and left his betrayed friend to perish in a distant land, unite her fate to the heir of him who was destroyed! Beware, boy, beware! Upon the children's children the blood of the slain shall call for vengeance; and the unborn of the dark hour shall seek a fatal retribution!"

As he spoke, the earl's head seemed to become giddy with awe and surprise, the figure vanished, all that the room contained became indistinct; and when Lord Gowrie again opened his eyes, he found himself lying across the bed with his clothes on, and with the morning light streaming brightly through the casement.

CHAPTER XII.

The landlord of the inn at Barraux had been up before any of his guests; and anxious to show that his larder was not always so ill provided as it had been the night before, he had contrived to procure materials for a very substantial breakfast, to strengthen the travellers for their day's journey. It was well dressed, too, after the fashions of that day, and good Mr. Rhind did ample justice to its merits both by eating and lauding it, gaily declaring that the morning made up for the evening, and that, according to the popish superstition, the landlord might claim the merit of some works of supererogation over and above those necessary to atone for the sins of the night before.

Gowrie himself was in no very jesting mood. He made, it is true, every effort to shake off the impression produced upon his mind by the strange events lately passed. It was a dream, he thought--an idle dream, or else a hallucination. He had been very much fatigued, had obtained but small refreshment, and yet he had sat up thinking, wasting time which would have been better employed in repose. Over fatigued, he had dropped asleep without knowing it, had fallen upon the bed, and imagination, set free from all restraint, had conjured up appearances strangely connected with the previous subject of his thoughts. He strove to eat, to talk, to jest playfully as

usual, but he was not very successful in the attempt, and the demeanour of his fair Julia soon put a stop to the effort. She was exceedingly thoughtful, grave, almost sad. She eat little, spoke less, and when the horses were brought round to the door, mounted with a deep sigh.

After they had ridden some little way, the earl asked, in a low tone, if anything had disturbed her.

"Nothing of importance," she answered, glancing her eye towards Mr. Rhind, who was riding near; "but I will tell you more very soon."

She spoke so low that their worthy companion did not hear what she said; but even if he had heard, it is probable that he would not have altered his position in the cavalcade, for Mr. Rhind was a very slow man at taking a hint, and seemed to have no conception that his former pupil might sometimes find the society of her he loved pleasanter without ear-witnesses. A favourable hill, however, afforded, about half an hour afterwards, as they rode on towards Chamberry, the opportunity that the lovers desired. Mr. Rhind was not fond of riding fast, either up hill or down. He had conscientious scruples as to spurring his horse, and never used a whip when he could help it. Thus, when the cavalcade began the ascent, he suffered his beast to drop slowly behind, and in the end took out a little vellum-covered volume from his pocket, and began to read.

"Now, dearest Julia, let us quicken our pace," whispered Gowrie. "We shall be at the top of the hill very soon, and Rhind will rejoin us some half league after we have reached the bottom of the descent." The lady shook her rein. The horses sprang on. The servants, more discreet than Mr. Rhind, followed at an easy trot, and by the time that Gowrie and Julia had reached a spot about one third of the whole distance from the top of the hill, they found themselves some two or three hundred yards before any of their attendants.

"Now tell me, dearest," said the young earl, "what is it has made you so grave and sad this morning? There is no one within ear-shot."

"It is nothing, really nothing," replied Julia. "You will think it very ridiculous, I fear, when I say that the only cause of my being grave, if I have been so, was an idle dream; but I love to tell you all, Gowrie, to have no thought hidden from you."

"Ever, ever do so," replied the earl, warmly; "but what was this dream, love? I fear it must have disturbed your rest, and you much needed repose."

"I must have been asleep some time," she answered; "but indeed, Gowrie, it was a thing of no moment--merely a dream--and yet if I tell you, it may make you grave and sad too."

"Nay, now you excite my curiosity the more," replied her lover. "Pray tell me all, dear girl."

"Well," she answered, with a faint smile, "I was very tired, and glad to lie down to rest. The little maid we hired at Borgonovo, who slept in the same room, was very weary too, so that her fingers would hardly do their office in unlacing my bodice. How soon she was asleep I do not know, for the moment my head rested on the pillow my eyes were closed in slumber. I cannot tell how long I slept quietly and undisturbed; but then I seemed to wake. The room was the same. The aspect of all things round me was unchanged; but there was a light in the chamber, and at the distance of about a pace from my bedside I saw a standing figure of a man, distinct and clear, but yet so thin and shadowy, that it seemed as if every part were penetrated with the light in the midst of which he stood--a coloured shadow resting on the pale blue glare."

"What was he like? Who was he?" demanded Lord Gowrie, eagerly.

"He was very pale," answered Julia, "with a face that seemed to express suffering and sorrow more than strong passions. His hair, cut short in the front, was jetty black, mingled here and there with gray, and falling in dark masses of large curls behind. He was tall, about your own height, Gowrie, and seemingly powerful in form, but with the shoulders a little bowed, as if worn by sickness. He was dressed in armour, but the head was bare; and a cloak was cast over his arm, concealing his right hand. His eyes were bright and flashing; and the face and upper part of the body seemed more real and corporeal than the lower limbs, which I could hardly see. There was a small scar upon his face, between the mouth and the cheek, as if---"

"The same," murmured Lord Gowrie, "the same! Did he not speak?"

"Oh, yes," answered Julia, "he seemed to speak, or I dreamed it. He stood gazing at me long indeed in silence, while I lay trembling with fear. I tried to ask him what he did there--what he wanted. I tried to rouse the house--to wake the maid who was sleeping near me; but my tongue seemed tied, no sounds proceeded from my lips, and I strove in vain to rise in bed. In the meantime he stood silent, gazing at me; and at last he said twice, 'Poor thing! poor thing! Do you not know,' he asked, 'that the blood of Morton and the blood of Ruthven can never be mingled together till the gore that the one shed and the other falsely denied is fully avenged?--Beware! beware! Hurry not on your own fate. Pause! Refrain till the blow has fallen, let it fall where it will----.' Do not look so gloomy, Gowrie--it was but a dream, for the agony of mind I suffered broke the spell, and with a low scream I started up. The maid woke instantly, and as I looked round I found that all was darkness. The poor girl asked what was the matter, and I told her then, as I have just said to you, that it was only a dream. I asked her, however, if she had seen the doors

closely locked. She assured me that she had, and got out of bed to see, when she found that it was so, and all was fast and safe. My rest had been disturbed, however, and I did not sleep again for some time, which is perhaps what made me somewhat dull and heavy; but still it was but a dream."

"A very strange one," answered Lord Gowrie, and fell into a fit of thought. His meditations, however, were less of Julia's dream than of what his own conduct ought to be. He felt unwilling to alarm her, or to create any doubts or suspicions in her bosom as to the course before them; but yet her frank confidence required return; and he felt that after she had told him all, he ought to withhold from her nothing.

In the meantime she rode on by his side, with the tresses of her glossy hair somewhat shaken by the exercise, falling here and there on her beautiful face. The dark eyes were bent down with the long eyelashes resting on her cheek, as if she would not interrupt his meditations by a look; but at length the earl said, "This is a strange dream, indeed, dear Julia; and the occurrence is the more strange, inasmuch as something very similar happened to me last night also."

Julia started, and looked up. "Oh, what?" she exclaimed.

"The selfsame person appeared to me likewise," replied her lover. "I know him well by your description, too accurate to be mistaken; but that which is perhaps the most strange of all is, that to me he appeared as I have never seen him represented, but as I have heard him described, and to you, who have neither seen him nor his picture, exactly as his portrait stands in my gallery at Perth."

"But what did he say to you? What was the import of your dream?" asked Julia.

"I am not so certain it was a dream," replied Lord Gowrie; "would that I were; but his warning to me was very similar to that addressed to yourself. You have told me all, dear Julia, and I must not withhold anything from you; but still, while speaking with perfect confidence to each other, we must not let anything like superstitious fears affect our conduct or turn us from our course. Your heart and mine, dear girl, are inseparably linked for weal and woe. God grant, for thy sake, that the happiness may predominate; but I feel that neither could know what happiness is were we ever to part."

"Oh, no, no!" murmured Julia, in a low tone, letting the reins fall upon her horse's neck, and clasping her hands together, while her head bowed down as if something oppressed her almost to fainting--"Oh, no, no! That hour were death."

Gowrie soothed her by assurances of eternal love, and then proceeded to tell her all that had occurred to him during the preceding night. He spoke of it, too, as of a delusion of the imagination; but Julia fell into thought which lasted several minutes after he had done. At length she looked up with a brighter glance. "If you remember," she said, "the night before last we were looking over together those papers concerning my birth, and we spoke much of my father and your ancestor who slew the unhappy Rizzio. The subject rested long in my mind; and perhaps on you also it had no slight effect. Do you not think, Gowrie, that in passing through the scenes we have lately traversed, with things exciting the imagination at every step, weary and exhausted too, fancy was likely to reproduce for us, in sleepy or drowsy hours, the phantoms which had haunted us throughout the day?"

"Perhaps so," answered her lover, glad to catch at any solution of a mystery so dark and painful--"perhaps so, my Julia; and yet these dreams are very like realities sometimes. The people in my land--in our land--are given much to superstition, and I would far rather imagine that I had yielded to those impressions implanted in us during youth, than believe that such a warning should in our case be requisite or given."

"But do you believe, Gowrie, that such a thing is now permitted as that the spirits of the dead should revisit earth in the forms which they bore while living?" Julia asked, gravely, and then added, "he who was my instructor from my earliest years had no faith in such events."

"Much has been said, much ever will be said," answered Gowrie, "upon that, in regard to which little can ever be known on this side of the grave. Philosophy, my Julia, says one thing, and something in man's own breast ever says another. Our knowledge tells us that we can never see that which has no substance, that we cannot hear that which has no voice. The spirit within says, 'There are means of communication between me and my unimprisoned brethren. The eye is my servant in my communication with earthly things, the ear is but the portico of the audience chamber of the mind, where the voices of earth are heard; but for things not of earth there is another sight, another hearing. The sovereign mind communicates with them direct, and not through her ministers.'"

He spoke gravely, for the subject was one of those in regard to which we are inclined to apply the aids of philosophy to confirm opinions formed already without their help. Few persons in the world, and very few, indeed, in Scotland, at that time, were without faith in dreams and apparitions; and what is, indeed, very strange, those who were the most sceptical of the truths of revealed religion, were often the most credulous of the tales of superstition.

Julia, however, saw that he was sad, and she made every effort to conquer the gloom which

her strange dream had cast upon her own mind; for there can be no doubt that it had made its impression--not, indeed, that she received it as a real warning from another world, for her mind had been differently tutored in early years; but still it had filled her thoughts with gloomy images, and she had given way to them more than was customary with her. Now, however, she strove to resume her natural cheerfulness, and quietly, easily, with that simple art which nature teaches to a kind heart, led the conversation away, without any abrupt transition, from the subject which seemed to give pain to him she loved.

They were now at the bottom of the hill; and although they had ridden more rapidly down than was perhaps very prudent, they drew in their horses' reins when they reached the level ground, in order to let Mr. Rhind rejoin them. He was riding slowly along, still reading; but a sound, which startled the whole party, and their horses also, soon caused him to quicken his pace, in order to get to Lord Gowrie's side again. 'Tis a strange power which strong minds have over weak ones. By circumstances, power and authority may be placed in the hands of the weak, and they may exercise them till the exercise becomes habitual; but in every moment of difficulty or danger, the strong mind assumes the sway, and the weaker one takes refuge under its shelter. Mr. Rhind had known Lord Gowrie from his infancy, had received rule over him when he was a boy, had been placed with him to guide him when he was a youth. He hardly looked upon him as more even now; he hardly comprehended that his tutorship was finished; but the instant that a peril presented itself, or an embarrassment occurred, instead of protecting and guiding, he sought protection and guidance from his former pupil.

I left the reader waiting for a sound, or at least for some description of that sound which startled the whole party. It was that of a cannon-shot, not very far distant either; and before Mr. Rhind could reach the young earl's side, or any one could ask any questions, another and another succeeded, till the number reached to four-and-twenty.

"Good gracious, my dear lord, we have got into the midst of the hostile armies," exclaimed Mr. Rhind.

"The king must have made more rapid progress than I expected," replied Lord Gowrie, in a calm, quiet tone. "Those guns must be from Montmeillant or Chamberry."

"From Montmeillant, my lord," said Austin Jute, who had ridden up. "The sounds come from the east."

"But the wind blows down the valley," answered the earl. "What shall we do, dear Julia? Are you afraid?"

"What is the choice?" she asked.

"To go on by Chamberry and the Pont Beauvoisin to Lyons, or retread our steps towards Grenoble, and take the longer way. It is evident that a part of the King of France's army is before us; but we cannot tell what is taking place on the Grenoble road."

"May I go on and reconnoitre, my lord?" said Austin Jute. "I can bring you back information, and perhaps a pass. They say it is better to be at the end of a feast than at the beginning of a fray, and perhaps it may be so; but I like a little bit of the fray, too, provided it last not too long."

"That may be the best plan," said his master. "Tie something white round your arm, and prick on; we will follow slowly."

Before this scheme could be executed, however, a party of some eight or ten horsemen came dashing round the rocky turn of the road, and cantered down into the meadow which lay on the bank of the stream, before they saw the party of the young earl. They were all in arms except two, and evidently belonged to one or other of the contending forces. The next moment, however, the eyes of one of those who bore no defensive armour rested on the group under the hill; and turning his rein suddenly thither, followed by all his companions, he was soon in front of the party of travellers, and shouting in a loud, but gay and jesting tone, "Stand, give the word!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The system of warfare carried on in Scotland, at the time we speak of, was not of the most civilized character--generally a war of partisans, which is always a bloody war. Mr. Rhind had known no other; and, consequently, he was in a state of most exceeding alarm. Julia was much less so, for the tranquil air of the young earl showed her at once that nothing was to be feared. The earl's servants, too, who, with their master, had seen a good deal of the world, seemed perfectly quiet and at their ease; and Austin Jute whispered in a low tone to one of the men, "By my fay, that is a splendid horse the fellow is riding, somewhat heavy about the shoulder and the

legs, but a noble beast in a charge, I'll be bound."

"Remain quietly here," said the earl, addressing those who surrounded him. "I will go forward and speak with this gentleman. Stay here, dear Julia; there is not the slightest danger."

The person whom he approached, and who had reined in his horse, after calling to the strangers to stand and give the word, was a man of the middle age, or perhaps a little more, for he had certainly, by ten years at least, passed that important division where the allotted life of man separates itself into two halves. Oh, thirty-five, thirty-five, thou art an important epoch, and well might be, to every man who thinks, a moment of warning and apprehension. Up to that period, in the ordinary course of events, everything has been acquisition and the development of different powers. Thenceforward all is decay--slow, gradual, imperceptible, perhaps, at first, but sure, stealthy, and increasing with frightful rapidity. The stranger might be forty-six or forty-seven years of age, but he looked a good deal older. His beard and moustachios were very gray, especially on the left side; his face was wrinkled a good deal at the corners of the eyes; and his very handsome forehead--the only truly handsome part of his face--was wrinkled also, with an expression rather of quiet and dignified gravity than with age. His other features were by no means good; the mouth sensual, though good-humoured; the nose aquiline, and somewhat depressed at the point; and the eyes twinkling and keen, with an expression of somewhat reckless merriment. There was a very peculiar satyr-like turn of the eyebrow, too, which was gray and bushy, with a thick tuft about the centre, where it ran up into a peak from the nose. The dress of this officer--for officer he certainly appeared to be--was of very plain materials, consisting of a brown cloth suit, with no ornament whatever, except a gold chain round his neck. Above his pourpoint he wore a sort of sleeveless coat, or rather small mantle with arm-holes, trimmed with sable fur; and the fraise round his neck was of plain linen, and so small as to be quite out of the fashion of the times. His leather gloves extended to his elbow, and his large coarse heavy boots came in front higher than the knee. There were pistol holders at his saddle-bow, a long heavy sword by his side, and the whole figure was surmounted by a broad-brimmed hat, with a tall white plume of feathers, which kept waving about in the wind.

"Who are you, sir?" he said, in French, as the earl approached him, "and whither are you going? Are you aware that you are within the limits of the camp besieging Montmeillant?"

"I was not, indeed," replied the earl; "but being peaceably disposed, and having no connexion with either party in the hostilities which I understand are going on, I suppose there will not be any difficulty in passing by the Pont Beauvoisin into France?"

"Upon my life, I cannot tell that," replied the other. "It will much depend upon what is your country, what is your business, and whence you came from last."

"I have come from Italy," replied the young earl, "passing quietly through Piedmont; and my business----"

"Stay, stay," said the stranger. "You have come through Piedmont, have you? Now that is not the country, of all others, from which France courts visitors just now. Have you seen the Duke of Savoy lately?"

"I never saw him in my life," replied the earl, "unless I see him now."

"Oh, no," said the stranger, "that you certainly do not. By your speech I should take you for an Englishman. Is it so? If it be, pass, in God's name, for if I tried to stop you, I should have my good sister Elizabeth coming over to chastise me with her large fan. *Ventre Saint Gris!* it does not do to enrage the island lioness."

"No, sire," replied the earl, "I am not one of her majesty's subjects, being a native of a neighbouring country called Scotland."

"Ha, ha!" cried the other, laughing. "What, one of the flock of my dearly beloved cousin, King James? Heaven bless his most sagacious majesty. How went it with him when last you heard?"

"Right well, sire," replied the earl; "but it is some time since I heard any news except referring to my own private affairs."

"May I crave your name and business, good sir?" said the King of France, who, while he had been speaking with Gowrie, had been eyeing the young nobleman's little troop. "'Tis somewhat late to travel for mere pleasure, especially with ladies in one's company."

"Business I have, unfortunately, none," answered the young earl, gravely, "except to make my way back as fast as possible to my own land, with my fair cousin, who takes advantage of my escort even at this late season, seeing that she otherwise might not meet with an opportunity for some time. My name, sire, is John Ruthven, Earl of Gowrie."

"Ha! noble lord," said Henry, with a less constrained air. "I have heard of you before,--an intimate of my old friend Beza's, if I mistake not. You passed through France some five or six years ago on your way to Padua, at least some one of your name did so."

"The same, sire," answered the earl; "I trust it will be your gracious pleasure to afford me a

pass and safe conduct."

"Assuredly," answered the king, with a gay and laughing air; "but you must come and dine with me, cousin, if it be but for the service that your name will do me."

"I know not how it can benefit your majesty," said Gowrie, anxious to proceed as rapidly as possible.

"As a terror to favourites," replied Henry, with a meaning look. "The name of Ruthven, methinks, should keep them in great awe. But I will take no refusal. You and your fair cousin too, and any gentleman who may be of your party, must come and partake of a soldier's dinner in his tent. I left the king behind at Lyons; and, on my life, I like the old trade better than the new. Ay, and even found more peace of mind, cousin, when I had daily to fight for my breakfast, than when I sit down in a palace, surrounded by men, some hungry for my treasures, and some thirsty for my blood."

"As the season is drawing towards a close," replied Lord Gowrie, without actually venturing to decline the king's invitation, "I am anxious, sire, to proceed as rapidly as possible towards England."

"Fie, man!" exclaimed the king; "have I not said I will take no refusal? Why, if I let you pass without some sign of hospitality, your cousin and mine, worthy King James, the northern Solomon--though his descent from David might be less honourable than clear--would think that I had some ill-will to his high wisdom. And now I will ride back with you. You, Monsieur de Chales, ride on to Rosni. Tell him I will come to-morrow, unless he has taken the place in order to prevent me. He is as jealous of his king as a spoilt woman. Come, my Lord Gowrie, introduce me to this fair cousin of yours. We have wanted gallantry to keep her waiting so long."

Thus saying, he spurred on, accompanied by the young earl, who, obliged to give way, resolved to assume something of the king's own humour, and said at once, as they rode up, "Sire, allow me to present to you my cousin, the Lady Julia Douglas. Julia, this is that great king of whom you have heard; who not only conquered his own throne, but the affection of his own people; the one by the sword of war, the other by the sword of justice."

"I kiss your hand, fair lady," said the king. "The Lady Julia Douglas! What, one of the bleeding hearts? I trust, my lord count, that her heart is safe in your keeping."

"In which case your majesty will not try to steal it from me," answered the young earl, to whom Henry's character for somewhat vehement gallantry was not unknown.

"No, no; honour amongst thieves," answered the king. "Were I an officer of Cupid's court I might stop you, having taken you in the very act of carrying off your booty; but being merely a poor pickpocket myself, I am not justified in interfering. Come, let us forward," he continued, seeing that the colour had risen somewhat high in Julia's cheek; and turning his horse, he rode on in the direction of Chamberry.

A young lover is always like a miser with a jewel of great price. He may feel certain of the strength of the bolts and bars which secure his treasure; he may be confident that it is safe; but yet he never feels entirely at his ease, when he knows that robbers are abroad; and undoubtedly Gowrie was somewhat less than pleased to see the gallant attentions of the king to his fair promised bride as they rode along. Henry saw his uneasiness, and was amused, though the earl concealed it well; and with some good-humoured malice--for I believe in this instance it was no more--the monarch strove to persuade his two young guests that they might well spend a few days with him in Chamberry. "You," he said, turning to the earl--"you, sprung from a race of soldiers, and who have probably been in arms yourself, can you make up your mind to leave a spot where high deeds are being performed?"

"I feel myself obliged to do so," replied the young earl, adding, with a smile, to point his double meaning, "If there were nothing else, this lady's presence would, of course, hurry my departure from the scenes in which your majesty takes so much delight."

"Parbleau! there is no danger," cried the king. "Our camp is filled with ladies. The town of Chamberry is in our hands. 'Tis but the citadel holds out for honour; and Madame de Rosni gives a ball in the city this very night.--What say you, fair lady? Will you not stay and grace her entertainment?"

"It must be as a prisoner if I do, sire," replied Julia; "for duty calls me on to Scotland as fast as possible, and, to tell truth in no very courtly fashion, inclination too."

"On my life," cried the king, laughing, "you must be both disciples of Rosni's. That hard-headed Huguenot will speak his mind however unpalatable; and I find that the Scotch are as blunt, though they cannot be more honest. Well, well," he continued, with a sigh, "as you will not consent to cheer us by an importation of fresh thoughts and fresh faces, I must even let you go, although I do believe I should be justified in treating you both as rebels, and shutting you up as prisoners, the one in the camp, and the other in the old Carthusian convent, to do penance for your offence--I acting as father confessor of course."

Julia looked anxiously to Gowrie, who replied, with a laugh, "That would be a breach of the law of nations, sire. Francis the First suffered his enemy, Charles the emperor, to pass unscathed; and as your majesty deigns to call me cousin, good faith, I will only treat with you as crown to crown."

"I call many a man cousin who is less so than yourself," replied the king, seeing that he could not succeed in detaining them. "If I remember right, your grandmother, or great-grandmother, was sister to Mary Queen of France, and to Henry, the excellent King of England, eighth of that name, who had an admirable expedient for ridding himself of troublesome wives. Upon my life, I wish it were an inheritance of kings. Parbleau! it would be a more valuable privilege than that of curing the evil by our touch, which they say we kings possess. I would rather touch my own sore and cure it, than that of the lame beggars who crowd about the cathedral doors at Rheims."

"Methinks your majesty would not use it even if you did possess it," said Julia.

"Why not, fair lady?" cried Henry, quickly, for the subject was one which always excited him.

"I mean the sharp touch which King Henry used to cure the ill of which you speak," replied Julia.

"No, perhaps not that," said Henry, musing. "I am not cruel; and I do not love such sharp remedies even with hard, iron-tempered men. I have a notion, too, that ladies' necks were made for other things than to bear an axe--to bear gay jewels and bright glittering chains, I mean. That same fondness of the axe you speak of, especially in the case of women, seems a particular characteristic of the Tudor race. Thank God, it has not come hither. I do not think I should like the practice, even on the worst of women; and by my faith, the dagger and the bowl, which we have been rather fond of here in former years, is not to my taste either. If I were to choose, I would rather be the victim than the executioner. God deliver me from being either!"

There was something in the conversation, and the course which it had taken, which brought a fit of deep thought upon Henry; and for the next twenty minutes he said little or nothing; then looking up, he pointed forward with his hand, saying, "There is fair Chamberry; but it is some miles distant yet; and as you must needs go forward to-night--which, after all, is perhaps better--I will send on to bid them have my homely dinner ready, and a few spoonfuls more pottage than is ordinarily supplied to the king's table. I can tell you, cousin, the kings of France are almost sure to find their way to Abraham's bosom, for there is much more of Lazarus than of Dives in their condition on this earth. Things are rather better now, thanks to Rosni; but in times past I have often wanted a dinner, and even now, as you may see, and will see, I am neither clothed in purple and fine linen, nor fare sumptuously every day."

CHAPTER XIV.

Although Henry IV. was much accustomed to call things by their own names, the tent which he had spoken of was a handsome house in the town of Chamberry, his camp the wide circuit of the city itself, though, to say sooth, there were other tents, and another camp without the walls. The purveyors of the royal household had not, it is true, been much more careful in providing "cates divine" for the monarch's table than they usually had been in times past. Perhaps no general officer in his army fared so ill as Henry IV., for he was too good-humoured to take notice of any little derelictions, and cared less for an offence against his own person than one against the state. Perhaps he was wrong; I believe he was: for a man who tolerates disobedience of orders or default of duty in one instance, gives encouragement to the same fault in another. But still men of great genius have many roads open before them to the same ends; and the rigid rule which one considers necessary to the attainment of his objects, may be dispensed with by another without danger.

It may be true as an axiom, that the French nation can never remain peaceable and prosperous--considering their peculiar national characteristics--except under a tyrant. It may be true that Henry IV., had he been a tyrant, would never have perished by the knife of Ravallac. It may be true, that no *strong-minded* tyrant ever fell either by the hands of the assassin or the judgment of his people; that it is the combination of weakness of character with despotic theories, that has been the downfall of every monarch who has succumbed to public indignation or private vengeance:--"The roar of liberated Rome" itself was merely the exultation of a people who had been cowed for years by a madman and a fool, at their liberation from a yoke as pitiful as it was oppressive. But there is a power in love, when excited by a being whose sterner and stronger qualities command respect, which is powerful over great masses; and although Henri Quatre passed over many small faults in those who surrounded him, I believe his vigour and determination in great things would have secured him against anything like popular caprice or versatility; and that the only thing which he had to fear, as a consequence of his good-humoured

lenity in regard to personal offences, was the cowardly means of private assassination.

However that may be, the king's table, on the day of which we have been speaking, was certainly more poorly provided than that of many private gentlemen of modern fortune. The pomp and circumstance of a court waited around; but yet his scanty meal was no way royal, and the king felt a little mortified that such penuriousness had been displayed before a stranger.

Immediately after dinner, Henry left the fair Julia with Madame de Rosni and some other ladies, and called Gowrie away to a small cabinet of the house in which he had taken up his quarters. Seating himself, he motioned his young guest to a chair, and then said, "I take it for granted, my lord, that what you have said is actually the case, and that you have not seen our good cousin of Savoy, nor know anything of his affairs; but that you are simply travelling homeward with the beautiful bird in your trap, intending, of course, to make her your bride when you reach your native land?"

Gowrie merely bowed his head, saying, "I assure your majesty, I know nothing of the Duke of Savoy whatever."

"Well, then," replied Henry, "there may be one, perhaps, whom you may be well pleased to know--I mean Elizabeth, Queen of England. I will therefore write her majesty a few lines in your favour; and you will do well, when you reach Paris, to see her ambassador, Sir Henry Neville, in order that he may second my recommendation. I can see the time coming," continued the king, "when favour in England may be highly beneficial to a Scottish nobleman. If you should attain it, use it discreetly, for you have to deal with two people who have their peculiarities. The one, with strong sense, has small sincerity, with infinite policy combines many weaknesses, who can be a bitter enemy, but not an honest friend, and who will always sacrifice to expediency those who have served her--and there are none others--for their own ends. It will be right for you to be well with her, but not too well. The other has the greatest wit of any man I know, and the least wisdom. Cunning as a fox, his policy is as wily as that of the beast, and as pitiful. But his hatred is very dangerous, for it is strong in proportion to his weakness, and will pursue paths as obscure as his logic or his religion. To the latter personage you must have access from your own rank; to the former I will give you a letter, which will prove of good or bad effect on your own fortunes as you shall use it. Wait a moment, and I will write. You have done me some wrong in your own thoughts to-day; but I do not bear malice long; and I will not tell the maiden queen that you were half afraid to trust yourself with her brother of France, having a fair maiden in your company."

The king looked at him with a meaning smile as he spoke; but Gowrie instantly replied, "It was doing your majesty no wrong to suppose that you have great power over all hearts, and to be anxious to preserve one at least from your sway."

"Out, flatterer!" said the king; "do you think I do not know mankind, when I have dealt with them, fought with them, negotiated with them, and played at cards with them for seven-and-forty years? I knew what was going on in your young heart better than you did yourself, and would have teased you a little longer, but that I know myself too, and am aware that it is dangerous sporting where a fair girl is concerned--at least, with Gascon blood in one's veins. So you shall go, and God speed you. I knew your father in my youth, when he was here in France, and I would have saved his life if he had fled to me at once, as he should have done. You are a sad race of rebels, you Ruthvens; but all my best friends have been rebels in their day, and therefore I must not exclude you."

Thus saying, the king began to write with a rapid and careless hand, while the young earl, in whom some part of what he had said had wakened painful memories, sat with his eyes bent upon the ground, and his mind buried in thought.

Henry's letter, though somewhat quaint and formal, as his epistles to Queen Elizabeth usually were, was conceived in a gay and light tone, and intended beyond all doubt to do the young earl service with the royal lady to whom it was addressed. After the usual form of superscription, he went on to say, "I have learnt of your Majesty to deal promptly with enemies, and therefore, though most unwilling to have recourse to arms against our good cousin of Savoy. Being desirous to live peaceably with all men, yet finding that he mistook us for children, I judged it right to lead here, into the heart of his territories, an army which, I think, is bringing him rapidly to a better judgment. We have taken a number of his towns and castles, and are now here in the very heart of the mountains, with Chamberry and Montmeillant in our hands, and nothing but the citadels holding out. In the midst of these successes, I have been visited by the noble lord, the Earl of Gowrie, who will lay these at your feet; and as he is exceedingly desirous of serving your Majesty, I trust my letter to his care, being well assured of his honour and fidelity. Moreover, as doubtless your Majesty well knows, he is bound to honour and serve your royal person, even by the ties of blood, being descended, though remotely, and by the female line, from that great prince who terminated by the sword on Bosworth field the dissensions of York and Lancaster. I doubt not that for his own sake you will grace him with your favour, and whatever may be wanting in his own deserts to the eyes of one who judges not lightly, I trust you will grant him, for the sake of your Majesty's brother and grateful servant." "HENRY."

"Now, a few words to good Sir Henry Neville," said the king, looking up; "and then I will dismiss you, Gowrie, to your journey, that you may say, you had nothing but good at the hands of the King of France."

He then wrote a letter, in rather a different strain, to the English ambassador in Paris, recommending the young earl to his care and notice, and begging him to forward to the utmost of his power, consistently with his duty to his royal mistress, whatever views the earl might have at the English court. Then starting up, he said, "Now call the page, Gowrie, and let him bring wax and silk to seal these epistles, after which we will to horse with all speed, for I must on the way too. I have played Henry of France long enough to-day. I must now play Henry of Navarre again, for I intend to have Charbonnieres before to-morrow night."

The letters were soon sealed, and once more Lord Gowrie and his party set out upon their way, the king himself accompanying them with a small troop some three or four miles on their road. He then took leave of them with a gallant speech to the fair Julia, and a gay jest with the young earl; and wending onwards slowly, those whom he thus left made the best of their way to Lyons, where some repose became absolutely necessary.

As this book is not intended for an itinerary, I shall not dwell upon the events of their farther journey, which was very much like all other journeys in that day, when very few facilities were offered to the traveller for proceeding at a rapid pace to the end of his journey. Inns, indeed, were infinitely more numerous in France than even at present, for the very slowness of progression rendered it necessary that halting places should be provided at short distances; and, of course, those inns were sometimes very good, and sometimes very bad, according to the quality of the landlord, and the class of guests whom he was accustomed to receive. Although it is probable that, from the most barbarous ages down to the present time, some sorts of machines on wheels, usually called carriages, have been used amongst European nations, and that persons travelled in them from one part of a country to another, yet very few persons in France at that period ever adopted such a mode of conveyance, but performed their journeys on horseback, when they were capable of so doing. I am not aware, indeed, whether the horses which were provided for travellers at different stations all along the high roads, were even fitted for draft; and the usual plan, when either dignity or infirmity induced any one to travel in a carriage, was to proceed with his own horses, or to hire of the peasantry beasts of draft, which could usually be obtained at any of the small towns on the road. For travellers journeying with their own horses, the best inns were of course always open; and the appearance of the party of the Earl of Gowrie secured reverent reception from landlords and attendants. Nevertheless, the inconvenience and fatigue to which the fair Julia was subjected during her long journey were so great, that at Lyons Gowrie determined to purchase a carriage and four horses for herself and her maid, and in this conveyance they proceeded on their way, escorted by the rest of the party on horseback. The length of time spent on the journey, however, was by this means rendered much greater than it otherwise would have been, for--tell it not in these days of railroads--the utmost they could accomplish on the average was three-and-twenty miles in the day.

Who is there now-a-days who would not declare such a journey very tiresome? but yet, if the truth must be told, neither Lord Gowrie nor his fair companion found it so. Bee-like, they extracted pleasure from every flower on the way; and an impression seemed to have taken possession of them, which we but too rarely obtain in life, that the present may be rendered, if we please, the happiest part of existence. There were no particular clouds in the horizon of the future. There was nothing tangible which could make them dread the coming days; but they felt that they were very happy in the society of each other; and though they both longed for the hour when their fate would be permanently united, every other change but that presented itself to imagination as something fearful. Long as the journey from Lyons to Paris was, it was at length accomplished; and as they approached the barriers of the great city, Lord Gowrie rode on with a single servant, to seek and prepare lodgings for his whole party. He commended Julia to the care of Mr. Rhind, but spoke a few words, before he rode away, to Austin Jute, directing him where to seek him in the city, and trusting, if the truth must be told, more to his wit and capacity than to any knowledge of the world possessed by his former tutor.

The carriage passed the gates of Paris without difficulty, and went slowly on through the tortuous streets of the capital of France, the way being so narrow in many places, that the servants who rode with the vehicle were obliged to drop behind. Mr. Rhind had taken a place in the coach at the barrier; but he could not refrain here and there from drawing back the leathern curtains which covered that open space which is defended by windows in more modern vehicles, but which was then altogether destitute of glass. The motive he assigned to himself and Julia for so doing was to see that the driver went right to the Place Royale, where they were to meet the young earl; but, in truth, the worthy gentleman's knowledge of Paris was much too limited to enable him to give any accurate directions in case the man had gone wrong, and perhaps curiosity might have as great a share in the act as caution. However that may be, the proceeding proved unfortunate. The sea remains long agitated after a storm, and the civil wars which had desolated France for so many years had left a great deal of licence in the capital, which not all the firmness and energy of the king had been able to repress. Just as the carriage was turning out of the Rue St. Antoine towards the river, and while the servants were yet behind, a gay company of young men rode by at the very moment Mr. Rhind was about to close the curtain again. The look which one of them gave into the vehicle called the colour into Julia's cheek. It might be difficult to explain what there was in the expression which caused the blood to rush so quickly into her face--she never could explain it herself; but she felt that it was insolent, if not insulting. The curtain, however, was immediately drawn, and she thought the annoyance past, when suddenly the clatter of a horse's feet at the side of the carriage was heard, the curtain was pulled rudely back from without, and the same face which she had before seen was thrust partly

into the carriage.

The stranger said something in a laughing tone, but Julia heard not what it was, and almost at the same moment she saw an arm stretched out, and a clenched fist strike the intruder a violent blow on the side of the head, while the voice of Austin Jute exclaimed in English, "Take that, for showing so much more impudence than wit. Never thrust your snout where you can't get it out."

A scene of strange confusion instantly followed, of which she could only behold or comprehend a small part. She saw Austin Jute off his horse, and the stranger in the same situation. But then Mr. Rhind drew the curtain tight, and tied the thongs. There was a clashing of swords, however, and the combatants seemed to run round and round the vehicle, which, by this time, had stopped, till at length there came a low cry and a deep groan, and then the voice of Austin exclaimed aloud, speaking to the driver, "On!--on to the Place Royale as quick as possible!"

CHAPTER XV.

We must now change the scene for a while, and carry the reader to a very different part of the world. In a small cabinet in the old castle of Stirling, sat a young man between nineteen and twenty years of age. It was clear, and even a warm day, though the season was winter. No snow, however, had yet fallen; the fields were still green; and the beautiful scene that stretched out beneath the eye, with the tall highlands mounting to the sky on the one side, with the fair lowland scene spread out for miles on the other, displaying all the windings of the Forth on its course towards the sea, little needed the leafy foliage of the spring or summer to render it exquisitely beautiful. It is probable, indeed, that he who built the high turret in which the cabinet was situated, had little thought of affording a beautiful scene to those who occupied it, for its destination was that of a watch tower, and from its peculiar position it commanded the widest possible view to be obtained of the country on three sides. The young man whom I have mentioned, paid as little attention to the fair landscape stretched beneath his eyes as the builder of the tower may be supposed to have done, though he sat near one of the four small windows which it contained, and the casement was wide open. In his hand--as he had cast himself back, resting against the stone-work of the window, with his head leaning forward, and his feet crossed over each other--was a small piece of paper, closely written in a female hand, and oft he gazed upon it, and oft he smiled, and once he raised it to his lips and kissed it. There was something that pleased him well in that paper. Oh, false and treacherous hopes of youth, how often do ye prove sweet poisons, which we quaff gaily to our own destruction! I once saw a curious piece of ancient sculpture, representing a child playing with a serpent, and I have often thought that the sculptor must have intended to typify the hopes of youth.

Still he gazed, and smiled, and played with the paper, and fell into thought. What was it the enchantress promised him? What was the golden dream which, for the hour, possessed the palace of the soul? I know not. Woman's love belike, for he was as fair a youth to look upon as ever mortal eye beheld--exceedingly like his brother, the Earl of Gowrie, but of a lighter and a gayer aspect.

Hark! There is the sound of a foot upon the short flight of steps that lead up to the turret from the large chamber below! It is not the step of her he loves. It is not hers, the giver of the gay day-dream in which he has been indulging; for see, he suddenly hides the paper, and looks towards the door with a glance of surprise if not alarm. And yet it is a woman's foot, light and soft falling; and the form that now appears at the door is surely young enough and bright enough to waken all the tenderest emotions of the heart.

But no! There is a slight gesture of pettish impatience, and he exclaims, "What, Beatrice! What do you want now? Really, you tiresome girl, one cannot have a moment's time for thought."

"Thought, Alex?" cried the young lady, with a laugh; "I wish to Heaven you would think, or think to some purpose. I have come to make you think if I can. Nay, nay, no signs of impatience, for I intend to lecture you; and you must both hear and consider what I have to say. Though I be a year younger, yet I am older in court and experience than you are. Oh, if you get up that way I shall lock the door;" and she did as she threatened, adding, "What do you laugh at?"

"At your sauciness, silly girl," answered Alexander Ruthven. "Where should you get experience, and what right have you to assume all the airs of sage old age?"

"I got my experience in this court," answered Beatrice, "where I have been for eighteen months, and you but three; and as for age, Alex, a woman of eighteen is as old as a man of four or five-and-twenty. So now sit you down there, like a good boy, and listen to what I am going to say to you."

Alexander Ruthven cast himself down in the seat again, with an air in which a certain affectation of scornful merriment overlaid, but could not conceal altogether, an expression of irritable mortification. "Well," he said, "here I am. Pray to what do your sage counsels tend, sister of mine?"

"They tend to your happiness, your safety, your honour, Alex," answered the Lady Beatrice, a little sharply, for though she had come with the kindest as well as highest purposes, her brother's tone hurt her.

"Now, gad's my life!" replied Alexander Ruthven, "I do believe that no man upon earth would suppose this to be the gay, bird-hearted Beatrice Ruthven."

"If so, what must be the brother's conduct which has so changed me, which has made the gay, grave, the light-hearted, heavy?" demanded Beatrice.

Her words now seemed to strike him more than those which she had previously uttered, for there was a deep melancholy in her tone, which gave their meaning additional point. "Well, Beatrice," he said, laying his hand on hers, "you are a dear good girl, I believe, and love me truly. Tell me what it is in my conduct that you object to?"

Beatrice instantly threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. "This is like my own dear brother," she said; "and now I'll be Beatrice again. But to the point. Do you know, Alex Ruthven--do you know that you are flirting with a queen till it is remarked by many?"

The youth's cheek turned fiery red. "Pooh, pooh!" he cried, "this is all folly! Can I not, in common courteous gallantry, profess my devotion to my sovereign's wife without any evil construction? Surely the difference between our stations is so great as to leave no ground either for danger or suspicion."

"The difference of station is so great as to free her from all danger of evil," replied Beatrice; "and I trust there are higher and holier principles too which would keep you, Alex, from the same; but neither those principles nor that difference will free either of you from suspicion, nor will it free you from danger even of your life, if you and she go on as you have been doing."

"Why, what have I done, and what ought I to have done?" demanded the young man, almost sullenly.

"I can tell you better what you ought not to have done," answered his sister. "You ought not to take private moments for stooping over the queen's chair, and whispering words into her ear with low tones and sweet smiles. You ought not, in any mask or pageant at the court, to seek her out, and find her instantly, as if you had some secret way of discovering which she is, amongst a hundred different disguises. You should not have pages coming to you with billets to be delivered secretly. I could tell you a dozen more things you should not do; but methinks this is enough."

The young man's countenance had changed expression several times while she spoke; but at last he answered, angrily, "Do you consider, Beatrice, that you censure your royal mistress as well as me?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed his sister. "I am her lady of honour; and her honour is dear to me as my own. No, no, what she does, and what she permits, is, I do believe, from a knowledge of the vast difference between her and you--the barriers between the sovereign and the subject, which she never dreams that you will venture to overstep. She knows not the danger to herself and you, even of that which is done in all innocence; and you, who should know it better, go rashly on, I trust with a pure heart, but still with an evil aspect to the world. Nay more, Alex, I tell you, you are watched by eager and jealous eyes, and that your name--which never should be--is ever coupled in men's mouths with the queen's. Beware, beware in time, my dear brother."

Alexander Ruthven put his hand to his head and gazed down on the ground with an expression no longer that of anger, but rather of sorrow, and almost of despair. "I knew not it would come to this," he said. "Heaven and earth! what is to be done?"

"I thought you knew it not," said his sister, "and therefore, my dear brother, I was resolved to warn you. As to what is to be done, I think nothing can be more easy. Get leave of absence for a while, and when you return, be careful of all your words and looks. Of your purposes and acts, I believe--nay, I am sure--there is no need to warn you to be careful. But remember, my brother, and ever bear it in mind, that though you yourself and though the queen may be perfectly blameless, a court is always filled, not alone with the suspicious, but with the malevolent. It must ever be so in a place where one man can only rise by another man's downfall. If your purposes be true and noble, and I will not doubt they are so, and if your conduct be but prudent, the task before you is an easy one."

The young man waved his hand and turned away his head. "More difficult than you know," he said, gloomily. "Oh, how difficult!"

He seemed as if he were about to go on, but at that moment some one suddenly laid a hand upon the lock of the door, and tried to open it. The young man and his sister both started, and looked at each other with an expression difficult to describe. Beatrice turned very pale, her

brother very red, for each fixed in their own mind upon a person in that court as the yet unseen visitor; and in the imagination of both it was the same. Another instant, however, undeceived them. The door was shaken violently, and the voice of the king exclaimed, in broad Scotch, "Hout! What's this? Wha's lockit in here? Alex Ruthven, what need to steek the door, man?" At the same time he continued to shake the door furiously, as if seeking to force his way in.

Beatrice instantly started forward and turned the key, and the door at once flew open, nearly knocking her down. In the door-way appeared James himself, with his coarse countenance flushed, and a heavy frown upon his brow, while a little behind was seen one of his favourites at that time, named Doctor Herries, and another form, the sight of which made Beatrice's heart beat quick. Without noticing the young lady, James took a stride into the room, and looked all round, with his large tongue lolling about in his mouth, and the tip appearing between his half-open teeth. It was evident that he expected to see some other person besides those which the room contained; but there was no place of concealment of any kind, and no means of exit except the door near which he stood. The furniture itself was so scanty, that one glance was sufficient to show him he had been mistaken. Prefixing one of those blasphemous oaths in which he so frequently indulged, he exclaimed, "What the de'il is the meaning o' this? Why should brother and sister lock the door upon themselves?"

By this time, however, Beatrice had recovered her self-possession, and she replied, with a low curtsy, "It was nothing, your majesty, but that Alex and I have had a little bit of a quarrel; and I was determined to have it out with him. He wanted to run away, and so I locked the door."

"I think that's a flaw, lassie," replied the king, coarsely; "but gin you've quarrelled with your billy, tell me what it's about, and I'll soon redd ye."

"It's all redd up already, sire," answered Beatrice. The king, however, was determined to hear more, and pressed her closely; but Beatrice, without any want of respect, answered him with spirit. "I am not going to tell of my brother, sir," she said. "When brother and sister quarrel, it is better, like man and wife, that they should settle their quarrels themselves; and ours is settled. So, with your majesty's good leave, I'll not begin the matter again."

"Ay," murmured the king to himself, in a bitter tone. "These Ruthvens are all rebels. By----" he continued, turning to Doctor Herries, "I thought he had got some one else locked in here than his sister, and that there were more sweet words than bitter ones going on."

Dr. Herries, a coarse hard-featured man, with a club foot, shrugged his shoulders, saying, in a low voice, "Your majesty is seldom wrong in the end; but you had better not let him see all that you suspect, and give him some reason for coming."

"Oo, ay," said the king. "It had gane clean out o' my head. Weel, Alex, my bairn," he continued, in a cajoling tone, which he not unfrequently assumed when seeking to cozen some one, against whom he meditated evil, into a belief that he was well disposed towards him, "I was just bringing you this good knight here, who came this morning with letters from your mother. 'Deed, his business, it seems, is mair with your saucy titty than yoursel; but I thought it just as weel to let you know what was going on before I put they two together."

Beatrice coloured till the blood mounted over her whole forehead, but Alexander Ruthven answered somewhat sullenly, "I thank your majesty, and am well pleased to see Sir John Hume. As for my sister, she is her own mistress, and sometimes wants to be mine, too."

"There now," said the king, laughing, "the bairn's in the dorts; but what he says is true enough, as Sir John may find out some day. She'd fain manage us all. So now I shall leave you three together, for I've got a world of work to do. A crowned heed is no a light ane."

Thus saying, he retired with his club-footed favourite, taking a look back at the door to see the expression of the faces he left behind; but well knowing his majesty's habits, all parties guarded their looks till he was gone, and the door shut. Even then they were silent till the heavy step of Doctor Herries was heard crossing the room below, for the king's propensity to eaves-dropping was no secret in Stirling Castle.

As soon as they were assured that he was gone, Sir John Hume, even before he exchanged greetings with her he loved, turned to young Ruthven, exclaiming, "In Heaven's name, Alex, what is the matter with the king?"

"I don't know," answered Alexander Ruthven. "He does not make me the keeper of his secrets."

"But this secret somehow affects you," replied Hume; "and it is worth looking to, my friend, for James's enmities are very deadly, and his fears often as much so."

"What makes you think that he has any ill will towards me, Hume?" asked the young man, who, if the truth must be told, had been not a little alarmed by all that had taken place.

"His whole conduct," answered Hume. "He kept me below nearly half an hour talking the merest nonsense in the world--a heap of learned trash about Padua and Livy, just like the daudling nonsense of old Rollock of the High School, when he fell into his dotage. And yet he

fidged about the whole time, pulling the points of his hose in a way that showed me he was uneasy. Then he called a page, and whispered to him some message; and then he began again upon Livy, and roared out a whole page of crabbed Latin, and asked me if I could translate it. Just at that minute the boy came back again, and said aloud he could not find her Majesty, upon which up started James, saying, 'We'll find some one, I'll warrant. Come along, Cowdenknows. Come along, Herries. You must come and see the work;' and then he said, as if he had forgotten to say it before, 'I'll take you to Alex Ruthven, John Hume.' All this time he was rolling away towards the door, like an empty barrel trundled through the streets by a cooper's man. I never saw him go so fast before in my life--muttering all the way, too, till he came to this door; and he seemed in such a fury when he found it locked, that I did not know what was to happen next; and a bright sight for me was the face of this dear lady when I came in. Bright as it always is," he added, taking Beatrice's hand and kissing it, "it never looked so bright as then."

"Nay, nay, Hume," said Beatrice, "let us talk of more serious matter, and seriously. What you say makes me very uneasy. I saw the king was angry about something, and your account proves that his anger was not light. Give us your counsel. What is best to be done?"

Alexander Ruthven had cast himself down again, and seemed buried in bitter thought; but his sister's words roused him, and he started up, exclaiming, "What I will do is decided. I will away to the king, and ask leave of absence--absence!" he murmured to himself--"a bitter boon! He will grant that;" and without waiting for reply or comment, he hurried from the room.

"And now, dear girl," said Hume, as he was gone, "let us speak of happier themes. Is my Beatrice changed, or does the heart of the woman still confirm the promise of the girl?"

"Don't you see I am changed?" answered Beatrice, gaily. "I am half an inch taller, and a great deal thinner. My mother was quite right to say that she had no notion of a girl marrying till she had done growing."

"Ay, but is the mind changed?" said Hume: "you have changed, my Beatrice--from lovely to lovelier."

"Fie!" exclaimed Beatrice. "You might have made it a superlative, and said loveliest, at once; but if you think I have become more beautiful in person, why should you think I am uglier in mind? And would it not be so, John Hume, to cast old love lightly away like a crumpled farthingale? No, no; you know right well that Beatrice does not change; and, therefore, all the time that you are asking such silly questions, you call her your Beatrice, to show that you are quite sure."

"And you are my own dear Beatrice, ever," said the young knight, throwing his arm round her, with a smile; "and if there was the least little bit of doubt engendered by two long years of absence, it was the least little bit in the world."

"There, that will do," said Beatrice, turning away her head, but not very resolutely. "But now, tell me about my dear brother Gowrie. Where is he? What is he doing? When is he coming back?"

"When last I left him, he was at Voghera," replied her lover. "What he was doing, was making love; and when he will be back depends upon the state of the roads, the courage of Mr. Rhind, and the strength of the fair lady who bears him company."

"Making love?" said Beatrice. "I heard something of this from my mother. A fair Italian, is not she? Beautiful, I will answer for it: for John knew what beauty is, even when a boy; but I do not think that he would be taken by beauty alone. Heaven and earth! I must get somebody to teach me a few more phrases of Italian than I have. Can the dear girl speak French, do you know?"

"I cannot tell," answered Hume, laughing; "for I never spoke to her in anything but English, which she speaks nearly as well as you do, Beatrice, and better than I do. There is Florentine blood in her veins, it is true; and the warm south shines out in her eyes, and glows upon her cheek; but she is Scottish by birth, and half Scottish by parentage. More I cannot tell you, Beatrice, for more I do not know. She is protestant, too, Gowrie says; and certainly I never saw her tell beads or heard her say Pater-nosters. She was likely to have got roasted for the omission; but that, I trust, will secure her a warm reception here."

"From me and mine, at least," replied Beatrice. "But if you mean from the court, I do not know what to say. The king has his own notions of religion as well as of government. They are both much the same, and both somewhat strange. I believe he would willingly have the whole land papist, if he might but be the pope. Indeed, he insists upon being the pope of his own church, and makes every one bow the head to his infallibility."

"He'll find that a hard matter in Scotland," said Sir John Hume, gravely; "and I almost fear that Gowrie's humour will not suit all he finds here--at least, what I hear on my return makes me think so. I understand the king has forbidden three or four ministers to preach, because they would not defend his actual supremacy. The days of old John Knox seem to be quite forgotten."

"Not quite," answered Beatrice. "There are those who remember them, though the king does not. God guard that Gowrie may have the prudence to keep quiet, for the king will have his way. There are some men who oppose him, and many who laugh at him; but by one means or another,

he makes them all bend to his will sooner or later; and there is generally harm comes of it, if people do not yield readily."

"Everybody is tired of the feuds we have had," answered Hume; "and therefore men give way to things they disapprove; but Gowrie's is a spirit not easily bowed, and I doubt that he will ever be a favourite here."

"Heaven grant that he never may," replied the lady; "for it is a place of peril, depend upon it, Hume, and one out of which I shall be right glad to be."

"That may be when you will, dear Beatrice," answered Hume. "You have but to say the day, and free yourself from the bonds that tie you to a court."

"In order to fetter myself with others," said Beatrice, gaily; "but it is not so easy as you suppose, John. When my mother's letter came to the queen, telling her majesty that she consented to our marriage, the king vowed, with a great many hard oaths, that he would not have it for a twelvemonth."

At this announcement, Sir John Hume became very wroth, and ventured to break the precepts of the wise king in regard to speaking ill of princes; but his angry exclamations were cut short by the return of Alexander Ruthven, with the tidings that he had obtained leave of absence very readily, and was about to set out. "What must be done, had better be done quickly," he said; and then with a meaning look he added, "Excuse me to her Majesty, Beatrice, for I shall not be able to see her before I go."

It is probable that the young man did not in truth seek to deceive his sister; but certain it is, that some two hours after, when the king had gone out on horseback, Beatrice, as she looked forth from one of the windows, saw Anne of Denmark walking, unattended, between the castle wall and Heading Hill, a little mound just beyond the limits of the castle. I have said unattended, but not unaccompanied, for by her side was a form very like that of Alexander Ruthven; and Beatrice, as she saw it, pressed her hands together tightly, murmuring, "Rash boy!"

CHAPTER XVI.

In the year 1599, the Place Royal at Paris was a new and fashionable part of the world; but nevertheless, one of the best houses, forming an angle with the street which led down from the Rue St. Antoine, had been taken by an Italian speculator, to be let out in apartments as a sort of inn, or, as it would now be called, hotel, though the more modest title of auberge was all that it then assumed. Next door to this house, was the hotel of the English ambassador, Sir Henry Neville; and before the porte cochère of each of the two houses was assembled a little knot of four or five persons: in the one instance composed of servants gazing vacantly out into the Place; and in the other, of the master of the house, some of his waiters, and the Earl of Gowrie, with the servant whom he had taken with him from the gates. The young earl and the host, with whom he had just arranged for the reception of his party, were looking up the street, and waiting for the arrival of the carriage, when suddenly they saw it approaching at a much more rapid pace than they expected, and a tumultuous assemblage of several persons following, while Austin Jute, at a quick trot, rode on before. The moment he arrived in the square, he sprang from his horse, and throwing the rein loose, approached his master, saying, in English, "I am sorry to tell you, my lord, that a young man has just thought fit to insult the Lady Julia, so I ran him through the body; and now they are following with a guard to catch me. I had therefore better be off, and find your lordship out afterwards."

He spoke rapidly, without any of his usual proverbs; but his young lord replied, "Stay, stay, Austin; if you are not in fault, I will protect you."

"I could not help myself, sir," replied the man. "He thrust his head into the carriage. I boxed his ears. He drew his sword; and I defended myself. There are plenty who can prove it."

"Let him come in here," said one of the English ambassador's servants, who had been listening. "If he's an Englishman, here's the proper place for him. This is the embassy."

"Run in there, Austin," said the young earl. "Tell your story to Sir Henry Neville, if he be within, and say that I will see him in a few minutes. Let him know that you are a subject of her Majesty the queen, and he will give you protection."

"Come along, come along! there is no time to stand talking," cried the English servant; and, hurrying after him, Austin Jute ran under the porte cochère, and the gates were closed just as the carriage drove into the Place, and stopped at the door of the inn. The servants who had remained with the vehicle were four in number; and they had without difficulty contrived to cover Austin

Jute's retreat, by riding between the wheels of the carriage and the houses of the narrow street, though pressed upon by two mounted gentlemen, who followed them with drawn swords and menacing words. The moment the carriage entered the Place, however, the horsemen who were pursuing dashed round the vehicle and the servants, and just caught sight of the closing gates of the English embassy. At the same time, coming down the street, as fast as they could run, were five or six of the town guard, with large unwieldy halberds on their shoulders, which, of course, greatly impeded their advance.

"Did he go in there?" shouted one of the horsemen, as soon as he saw Austin's riderless horse in the Place, and the gates of the English embassy closed.

The words were addressed to no one in particular; but he looked straight to the Earl of Gowrie as he spoke. The young nobleman took no notice of him, however, but calmly handed Julia out of the vehicle, saying, "Go straight in with Mr. Rhind, dear one. Everything is ready for you;" and then, seeing that she was very pale, he added, "Do not be alarmed. There is no danger. Austin has taken refuge at the English ambassador's.--Go in with the lady, and show her the apartments, sir," he said, speaking to the landlord. "I will follow immediately."

"But, my dear lord," said Mr. Rhind, who had by this time got out of the carriage----

"Go in, go in," said Gowrie, interrupting him, as he saw the two horsemen coming up towards them, and the guard entering the Place. "Go in, my dear sir, and do not leave her till I come. Now, gentlemen," he continued, turning to the strangers, as soon as he saw that Julia was safe in the hotel, "you seem to have business with me."

"Sacre bleu!" cried one of the others; "does that carriage belong to you, sir?"

"It does," replied Lord Gowrie, quite calmly.

"Well, then, one of your companions has just killed a gentleman, our friend," rejoined the stranger, furiously; "and we will have vengeance upon him."

"I understand," replied Gowrie, in the same unmoved tone, "that one of my servants--seeing a person, whom I will not honour by calling him a gentleman, insult a lady--punished him as he deserved, and then, in his own defence, ran him through the body. Is this the case or not?"

"Your servant!" exclaimed the Frenchman, without giving a direct answer, but mixing a few very indecent expletives with his speech; "was it a coquin of a servant who ventured to draw his sword upon a gentleman?"

"It is impossible to know a gentleman but by his actions," replied the young earl; "and whether he were gentle or simple, my servant would certainly punish any one who insulted a lady under his protection, well knowing, sir, that I would justify him and support him either with my sword or with my means; and let me add more, that whoever or whatsoever you may be, I shall look upon those who take part with him who committed the insult, as having shared in it, and treat them accordingly."

The Frenchman to whom he spoke instantly sprang to the ground; and perhaps more serious results would have ensued, had not the guard with their halberds come up, and thrust themselves between the earl and his opponent, both of whom had their hands upon their swords.

"Where is he? where is he?" was the cry; and the officer of the guard seemed much inclined to lay hands upon Gowrie himself, not having a very correct notion of the personal appearance of him he was to apprehend.

"You are mistaken, my good sir," said Lord Gowrie; "the person you are in search of apparently, has taken refuge at the house of the English ambassador, being a subject of that crown. At present, I am but scantily informed of what has occurred. Is the person he fought with dead, and who is he?"

"He is not dead, but he will die certainly," said the officer; and the Frenchman, who had dismounted, as I have stated, finished the reply by saying, "He is a Scotch lord, who has been brought up with us at this university, the Seigneur de Ramsay."

"I know no Scottish lord of that name," said the earl.

"We must have the homicide out, however," observed the officer of the guard; and approaching the gate of the embassy, he knocked hard for admission.

It was common, in all large Parisian houses at that period, to have a small iron grating inserted in the great gates, at the height of a man's head, through which, in times of danger, letters or messages might be received by those within, without opening the doors. This, at the English embassy, was covered in the inside with a thick shutter of wood, which, on the loud knocking of the officer of the guard, was withdrawn, showing the face of a burly porter behind the grate.

"What do you want?" demanded the porter.

"I want the body of a man who has taken refuge here after committing homicide," replied the officer.

"You can't have him, either body or soul, unless his excellency gives him up," answered the porter, gruffly.

There is in every man's mind, I believe, a store of the comic, which, though often batted down under strange and little-penetrable hatches, is sometimes arrived at, even in a very obdurate bosom, by the simplest of all possible processes. The Earl of Gowrie was in no very jesting mood. He was vexed at the scrape his servant had got into; and he was vexed to think that the life of a human being had been endangered, if not lost. He was vexed, moreover, then, that Julia--his Julia, should have been insulted by any one on her first entrance into the French capital. But yet the braggadocio tone of the French cavalier had somewhat amused him; and the reply of the sturdy English porter, delivered in very indifferent French, almost made him laugh, notwithstanding the seriousness of the subject. He had approached close to the gate with the officer, who, for the moment, seemed completely rebuffed by the reply; and knowing well that the matter could not end there, Gowrie interposed, to procure a more just and reasonable arrangement. He did not choose to use the English language, lest any suspicion should be excited in the minds of the Frenchmen around; but speaking French almost as well as he did his native language, he said, "Be kind enough, my good friend, to tell Sir Henry Neville that the Earl of Gowrie is at his gate, and would fain speak with him; but as French gentlemen are very apt to take their own prepossessions for realities, and to suspect, whenever they are in the wrong themselves, that others are in fault, it will be better, if he does me the honour of admitting me, that he should admit this officer of the prevot, and also this gentleman, who styles himself the friend of the wounded man."

"I demand that the culprit should be delivered up," said the cavalier, fiercely. "The privileges of no ambassador can shelter a murderer; and as to prepossessions, we all know that you Englishmen are the natural enemies of France, and that you have never aided any party in this country but for the purpose of promoting dissensions, and thereby nullify the efforts of Frenchmen for the honour and glory of their native land."

"His majesty, your king, might well be grateful to you for the observation, sir," replied the earl; "and my opinion of a Frenchman's prejudices is not altered thereby; but as my proposal is a fair one, I am quite willing to abide by it if it suits you. If not, I shall demand entrance for myself alone, which I think will not be refused me, as a distant relative of the ambassador's sovereign."

The latter words of the earl's reply had no slight effect upon the officer of the guard, who thenceforth addressed the young earl as "monseigneur," and took pains to explain to him that he was only acting in the strict line of duty. The two French cavaliers stood apart, consulting between themselves, till the porter returned, after carrying Gowrie's message to Sir Henry Neville.

"I am to permit three to enter," he said; "but while I do so, the rest must stand back to at least thirty paces from the gate, that I may open the wicket in safety."

The guard, and Gowrie's men, who had crowded round, were ordered to withdraw to the prescribed distance; and the command having been obeyed with no great alacrity, a small wicket in the gate was opened, through which Gowrie passed at once, taking precedence of the others as his right, from a knowledge that it is always dangerous to yield a single step to a Frenchman, who is certain never to consider it as a courtesy, but to look upon it as an acknowledgment of his superiority. The officer of the guard followed; and then came the stranger, looking back for a moment to some half-dozen idlers who had gathered round, with a strong inclination to call upon them to assert the honour of France, whether impugned or not impugned. Although Gowrie saw the glance, and easily comprehended what was passing in the worthy gentleman's bosom, his mind was put perfectly at ease by the array which he saw drawn up in the court-yard of the embassy. Those days were not as these, when powdered lacqueys, in the gold and silver lace which their masters will not condescend to wear, with two or three attaches and a few clerks hired on the spot, are the only guards of a diplomatist accredited by one court to another. Men went prepared for any contingency, and buckler and broadsword were as common in the suite of an ambassador as paper and pen and ink. Full forty men, well armed and stout in limb, were drawn up in the court of the embassy, while the secretary of the envoy himself waited at the foot of the stairs, on the left hand, ready to conduct the earl and his companions to the minister's cabinet. To the Earl of Gowrie he was particularly deferential and attentive, while to the French cavalier who followed, and whom he addressed as Monsieur de Malzais, he was coldly polite. After passing through two or three handsome saloons, the whole party was ushered into a small room surrounded with book-shelves; and a tall, elegant, dignified looking man rose up from a table to receive them, laying down a book which he had been reading, with the most perfect appearance of tranquillity and ease. His eye instantly rested on the Earl of Gowrie, being in truth well acquainted with the persons of the two others, and advancing towards him, he took his hand, and welcomed him to Paris with many expressions of esteem and regard.

"I have had a letter from his majesty, the King of France," he said, "informing me of your lordship's approaching arrival; and I only regretted that I did not know how I might serve you in anticipation of your coming, so that all might be prepared for you. Pray, my lord, be seated;" and placing a chair for him, he remained standing till the earl had taken his seat.

We can hardly bring our minds in the present day to believe that all this ceremonious respect, this ostentatious display of reverence for a fellow man, could have any effect upon the view which reasonable beings would take of a simple question of justice. But there was very little of the old Roman left in the sixteenth century. When men sold their loyalty and compounded for their treason, it was not to be supposed that justice was unmarketable. Cromwell, with all his faults and all his crimes, was the first who thoroughly purified the seat of justice, and taught the world that, in one country at least, neither rank nor wealth, nor even long conceded privilege, could prove a shield against the sword of justice. The immunities claimed by and granted to ambassadors were then enormous, and the influence of high rank often amounted to elevation above the law. The officer of the guard, though a man sensible of his duties and willing to perform them, was not less subject than others to the general feelings of the age and country in which he lived; and Monsieur de Malzais, though resolute even to obstinacy and bold to rashness, was habitually impressed with the reverence thus thought due to high station; and though they had both entered the room with a determination to require that Austin Jute should be at once given up to justice, the honours shown to his master by the ambassador of the haughtiest queen in Europe, rendered their demand very moderate in tone, and not very persevering in character.

To the surprise of both, however, Gowrie himself pressed for immediate investigation. He had been brought up in a sterner school, in which that spirit prevailed which afterwards shone forth with so strong a light in the higher and purer of the puritan party in England.

"I do not request your excellency," he said, after the officer of the guard had stated his object, and Monsieur de Malzais had preferred his charge, "to throw your protection over my servant, unless a clear case of justification can be made out in his favour; and then only so far as to shield him from long imprisonment and perhaps suffering, till it is ascertained whether the gentleman he has wounded lives or dies. I doubt not that the laws of the land will do justice between man and man, though the one be a mere servant and the other a person moving in a more elevated station of life, and I shall myself stay to see that it is so. But, in the first instance, as your own countryman and as my servant, I think you have every right to inquire whether he did, as he says, injure this gentleman in his own defence or not."

"I shall certainly do so," replied Sir Henry Neville; "for I should not be fulfilling my duty to my sovereign, were I to suffer one of her subjects to undergo unnecessary imprisonment for an act which he was compelled to perform. I shall deal with the case, my lord, exactly as if it were that of one of my own servants. If I find he has been guilty of a crime, I shall give him up at once to justice; if I find he has not, I shall protect him against all and every one, as far as my privileges extend. To this neither you yourself nor these gentlemen can object."

Whatever might be their abstract notions of the sovereignty of the law, neither of the Frenchmen did venture to object, and Austin Jute was called into the presence of the ambassador, and told his story in his own words, which were translated by the secretary for the benefit of those who did not understand the English tongue.

"We were riding along quietly enough, your excellency," he said, "much more like sheep that have got into a strange fold than anything else, when three gentlemen, of whom that was one," and he pointed to Monsieur de Malzais, "rode up and passed the carriage. We made way for them to go by, for they say, 'when you meet a fool in an alley, give him the wall;' but then they said something amongst themselves and laughed, and one of them wheeled his horse with a demivolte, and poked his head in at the carriage window, holding back the curtain. As it must have been done on purpose, unless he and his horse were both taken giddy, which was not likely, for it is rare for two animals to be seized with dizziness at the same time, I reminded him of the way he ought to go by a knock on the side of the head. He did not like that sort of direction, and jumping off his beast, or tumbling off, as the case may be, he drew his sword and poked at me in a way that would have made the daylight shine through me if I had not slipped off on the other side. An open enemy is better than a false friend; and now I knew what I was about. A cat in a corner is a lion; so having no means of escape, I drew cold iron too, and we both poked away at each other till he got a wound and fell. Thereupon, thinking to make my heels save my head, I got on my beast again and came hither."

"Did this gentleman here present, or any of the others, attempt to part you and your opponent?" asked Sir Harry Neville.

"No," answered Austin Jute; "that gentleman called out, 'Well lunged, Ramsay,' or some such name--'punish the dog.' I know French enough to understand that."

"Well, sir, what do you say to this?" asked Sir Harry Neville, turning to Monsieur de Malzais. "If the man's story is true, it would seem that the provocation came on the side of your friend; that he was justly punished for insulting a lady, and that then he drove this good man to defend himself."

"But his story is not true," replied the Frenchman, in a somewhat hesitating tone; "the Seigneur de Ramsay did not insult the lady. He only looked into the carriage, as any gentleman might do."

"That's a lie!" said Austin Jute, who had a very tolerable knowledge of the French tongue. "He looked into the carriage as no gentleman would do, and pulled back the curtain with his hand."

There were plenty of people to prove it. Ask Mr. Rhind, and the other servants."

A part of this reply only was translated to Monsieur de Malzais, who was answering warmly; but Gowrie interposed, saying, "I will send for Mr. Rhind, who was in the carriage, and also for some of the servants. I have spoken with none of them myself. This man has had time to speak with none of them either, and therefore their account will be unbiassed."

The persons whom he mentioned were speedily brought to the embassy, and fully and clearly confirmed the account of Austin Jute. Mr. Rhind testified that the curtain of the carriage had been rudely and insolently drawn back, and the head of a stranger thrust into the vehicle; and the servants proved that the wounded man had drawn his sword, and made a thrust at their companion, before Austin Jute had even unsheathed his weapon. That first lunge, they said, would most probably have proved fatal, had not Austin dexterously slipped from his horse, and so avoided it.

While they proceeded in giving their evidence, the secretary translated their replies almost literally; and although the French gentleman did not actually look ashamed, yet he seemed very much puzzled how to meet their testimony. He had recourse, however, to a means not uncommon with persons in his predicament, declaring there was evidently a conspiracy to shield the offender, which called a smile upon the lips of Sir Henry Neville, who replied, in a quiet tone, "You have had so many conspiracies in France lately, Monsieur de Malzais, that you fancy almost every transaction is of the same nature. It seems to me, and I doubt not also to the officer of the guard, that no time has elapsed sufficient for these people to make themselves perfect in exactly the same account of the whole transaction. It will therefore be my duty to protect this poor man, who seems to have done nothing but what he was bound to do in defence of his lady and of his own life. My house must therefore be his place of refuge, from which he shall not be taken except by violence, which, I presume, nobody will think of attempting."

"Assuredly not, your excellency," replied the officer of the guard; "my view of the case is the same as your own; but neither you nor I are judges in this land; and I only consent to abstain from any farther proceedings against this person, till it is ascertained whether the gentleman he has wounded lives or dies. Should the latter event occur, I must apply to higher authorities for directions as to my future conduct."

"That as you please, sir," replied the ambassador; "but be assured, that under no circumstances will I give him up, unless I have express directions so to do."

"And in the meantime he will of course escape," said Monsieur de Malzais.

The ambassador made no reply, but rose and turned upon his heel with a look of some contempt; and the French gentleman, with the officer of the guard, retired.

"Now, Master Austin Jute," said Sir Henry Neville, "you may depend upon my protection so long as you keep yourself within the limits of this house, its courts, and garden; but if you venture out upon any pretext, you are very likely to get into the little Chatellet, in which case you might find yourself some day stretched out considerably beyond your usual length, upon an instrument called the rack, and perhaps might never be heard of afterwards; for there are often curious things done in this country in the name of justice. Be warned, therefore, and do not go abroad."

"Don't be afraid, sir," answered Austin Jute; "I will never stretch my feet beyond the length of my sheet. I know when to let well alone. When the waters are out, it is better to be on the top of a hill than in the bottom of a valley. If the maid had kept the pitcher in her hand, it would not have got broken; so, with many thanks, I will follow your advice to the letter."

With these quaint saws the good youth withdrew, accompanied by the rest of the Earl of Gowrie's servants, who had been summoned to give evidence; and as soon as they were gone, Sir Henry Neville said, with a smile, "I trust this young man will not die, my lord, for it might occasion us some trouble, although his character is well known here in Paris."

"Who is he?" demanded Lord Gowrie. "There are so many Ramsays in Scotland, that it is impossible to distinguish one from another, unless one knows the name of the estate belonging to the person."

"I do not believe he has any estate to distinguish him," replied the ambassador; "but he is a cousin of Sir George Ramsay of Dalhousie, whose brother John is page to your own sovereign, King James. This young man, proving of an unruly disposition, and likely to bring disgrace upon himself and his very honourable family, was sent hither by Sir George, one of the finest and highest-minded men I know, to study at the university here. He has rendered himself, however, more famous for rashness, violence, and insolence, than for learning or talent; and I believe the reports of his conduct which have reached Scotland have given great pain to his elder cousin, though the younger still remains much attached to him, and has promised, they say, to use his influence at the court of the king for this young man's advancement. But now, my good lord, by your leave I will accompany you to pay my respects to your fair lady. I was not, indeed, aware that your lordship was married."

The colour somewhat mounted into Gowrie's cheek; but he replied, "Nor am I, Sir Henry. The lady whom I have the honour of escorting back to Scotland,—her grandfather, with whom she

resided, having very lately died in Italy--is my cousin, the Lady Julia Douglas."

Perhaps the slight shade of embarrassment apparent in the earl's manner, in making this announcement, might excite the ambassador's curiosity; but he was too good a diplomatist to suffer any trace of what was passing in his mind to appear in his demeanour, and repeating his wish to be presented to the lady, he accompanied Gowrie to the inn. By this time all trace of the little disturbance which had occurred had vanished from the Place Royale; and gay groups of Parisians were beginning to assemble there, to walk up and down, and converse, make love, or observe each other, as was customary during the evening of each fine day. After being introduced to Julia, with whose exceeding beauty he seemed greatly struck, the ambassador proceeded to discuss with Gowrie that nobleman's plans. He advised him strongly to remain in Paris till the result of Ramsay's wound was known, adding, in a low voice, for the young earl's own ear, "I can almost forgive Ramsay's attempt to get another sight of a face and form like that, when once he had seen them."

"I shall not forgive him so easily," answered the earl; "for no lady under my care and escort shall be insulted with impunity."

"I beseech you, let the matter drop, my good lord," replied Neville; "if the young man dies, there is an end of it; if he recovers, he has surely been punished enough."

"He shall apologise, however," said the earl, in a thoughtful tone; "though I am not disposed to be harsh with him. Perhaps, indeed," he continued, "he may have received a lesson from the hand of my servant which may do him good. I know Sir George Ramsay well, at least I did so in my boyhood; and if there be one drop of his blood in this young man's veins, there must be some good qualities at bottom."

"Let us trust that the bad blood has been let out," said the ambassador, "and that the good remains behind, and that he may recover to make a better use of life than he has hitherto done. I will send in a short time to inquire how he is going on, and will let you know the answer I receive. In the meantime I take my leave, and will do my best to provide for your amusement during your sojourn in Paris."

CHAPTER XVII.

Austin Jute was soon quite at home at the house of the English ambassador. His talents were of a very universal kind; and they had been sharpened by certain citizen-of-the-world habits, which he had acquired in the roving life he had led for some years. He had first come over to France with the Earl of Essex, as servant to one of the gentlemen of his household; and that gentleman having been killed in one of the many skirmishes which were then taking place, Austin had been left, like a masterless horse on the field of battle, to run about the world as he liked. Doubtless the earl himself would have either provided for his return to England, or taken him into his own service, had Austin applied properly. But Austin did not, for he had no affection for the Queen of England's favourite, although susceptible of strong attachments; and with a score or two of crowns, which he had accumulated one way or another, he set out to see the world, and, if possible, improve his fortunes. He was rarely at a loss, in whatever circumstances he might be placed; for though very unlike a cat in disposition, he had the quality attributed to the feline tribe of always falling upon his feet. Ready, willing, bold, active in mind and body, a shrewd observer, a ready combiner, with a very retentive memory of everything he saw or heard, and great confidence in his own luck, Austin Jute might have gone through life with the greatest possible success, had it not been for a certain light-hearted love for the fair sex, which often got him into quarrels with more serious lovers, and a quickness of disposition, which rendered those quarrels much more serious than they might otherwise have been. Whenever he was not personally concerned, and he had to manage any affairs for others, he was generally exceedingly prudent and shrewd; at other times, however, he was rash to the greatest possible degree, and seemed to find a pleasure--a vain pleasure, perhaps--in multiplying scrapes around him, with the most perfect confidence of being able to get out of them some way or another.

Thus, in gaiety of heart, he had wandered half through Europe--sometimes being obliged to make a very precipitate retreat from one or other of the small states into which the continent was then divided, but as frequently obtaining as much honour and success as he could have anticipated--when a succession of misadventures, unusually long and serious, brought him to Padua without a crown in his pocket. He was there relieved in the midst of poverty, which had depressed, and sickness which had nearly extinguished his light spirit, by several of the English and Scottish students, and thus fell under the notice of the Earl of Gowrie, who, finding him clever, and having cause to believe him honest, engaged him in his service, at first in a very inferior position, from which he had risen by strong proofs of zeal, attachment, and honesty, to the highest point in his master's favour and confidence.

With all his fellow-servants, too, he was a very great favourite, for he had not the slightest inclination to domineer, to exact, or to exclude; and the curious sort of miscellaneous education which he had received, or rather, which he had bestowed upon himself, gave him a superiority that they were quite willing to acknowledge. He could write, and he could read, which was more than many persons in a much higher station could do at that time. He could play upon the fiddle and the flute, and the hurdy-gurdy. He could carve all sorts of things in wood. He had as many curious receipts as are to be found in the "True Gentlewoman's Delight." He could catch all sorts of birds and beasts by strange devices of his own. He could fence, use the sword and buckler, or play at single stick like a master of the art of defence. He could ride well, and was never known to appear either tired or sleepy.

He had not been a couple of hours in Sir Henry Neville's house, before a multitude of his small talents displayed themselves for the benefit of the ambassador's servants; and his frank good humour soon gained him plenty of friends in the household. Unlike most Englishmen, who seem to look upon every man as an enemy till he has proved himself otherwise, Austin Jute appeared to regard the whole human race as a friend, which is, perhaps, the greatest of all secrets for smoothing the way of life; and on the evening of the day of his arrival, he sat in the hall at the embassy, carving a little sort of box or casket out of a piece of yew, in which he produced the most extraordinary devices, whistling all the time airs so wild and merry, that many of the servants collected around to listen, and others looked over his shoulder, examining the progress of his work.

While thus employed, one of the attendants came into the hall, saying, "The news isn't good, Master Jute. The people say he will not get over the night."

"Well, he knows best what he's about," answered Austin Jute, quietly. "Every man must die once; and but once can a man die. He has got what he deserved from me, and nothing more. He must manage the rest as he likes himself."

"But it may be awkward for you, if he does die," answered the man.

"Not a whit," replied Austin Jute. "My luck is not at so low an ebb. Fortune comes tripping, they say; and a stumble's no great matter so there be not a fall. I say devoutly, 'God save the worthy gentleman!' But if he dies, he dies; and it is no fault of mine--I wish him well."

"But who is the lady who was in the carriage?" asked another of the servants; for curiosity, the passion of all semi-civilized people, was even stronger then in capitals than it is now in country towns. "They say she is not your lord's wife."

"No," answered Austin Jute, "but she is his cousin, which is better, as the world goes. She will be his wife hereafter, if Heaven so will it, and she live long enough to reach the first stage of woman's decline."

"Nay, I see not how that is a decline," said the servant. "It is promotion, I think; and all ladies think so too."

"Why was Sarah better than Hagar," asked Austin Jute, laughing, "except that the one was the free woman and the other bond woman? Now, according to our rites and ceremonies, the wife is the bond woman, and therefore, matrimony in a woman's case is the first stage of decline. It is maid--wife--mother; and then widowhood or death gives the poor thing liberty again. She is first free, then the slave to one, then the slave to many, and if ever she regains her liberty, it is by Heaven's will."

"If they are going to marry," said the blunt Englishman who spoke, "I wonder they don't marry at once, and go back home, man and wife. It is what we simple people would do. It would save trouble and save speculation."

"True," answered Austin Jute; "but there are impediments in all things, Master Jacob. Look you here, now. The lady has just lost her grandfather by death, who was as good as a father to her, or better. Now, it is improper for a lady to marry in mourning, and improper for a lady to travel all alone with a gentleman, without being married to him. Now, which is worst, think you, Master Jacob?"

"All alone with a gentleman without being married to him," replied the Englishman, "for that, one can cure one's self."

"And so one can cure the other," replied Austin Jute; "and therefore the lady does not travel all alone with my lord; for, besides her maid, who is a very nice young woman, she has got with her my master's old tutor, Mr. Rhind, who is a very nice old woman. Thus all decencies are made to meet; and they can jog along as coolly as Noah and his wife did over the waters of the flood, though, Heaven mend me! I do not think I could do the same."

Perhaps the task was not so easy to Gowrie as his good servant thought, and to say truth, all considerations of prudence prove frequently but very weak bonds against inclination. He strove to strengthen them indeed as far as possible, and though the presence of worthy Mr. Rhind was often an annoyance as well as a restraint, yet he tried not to escape from it. Mr. Rhind, however, whose sense of propriety was somewhat capricious, and who was now so much accustomed to

see Gowrie and Julia together, as to think it not so strange as he had done at first, would frequently, during their stay in Paris, go forth to see this object or that, which was worthy of attention, and the lovers would be left alone together in circumstances dangerous to their resolution. It was thus one evening, after about seven days' residence in Paris, that the worthy tutor was absent, and Gowrie sat by Julia's side. The windows were closed, the hangings drawn, the bright fire of wood sparkled and glimmered on the broad hearth, the taper light was dim and shadowy; and they sat dreaming over the future, or meditating over the past, while Fancy's timid wing dared hardly rest over the present, lest she should settle there and be unable to rise again.

It was a cold evening, the frosty air made the fire sparkle; there came sounds of joyous voices from without, rousing sympathies and hopes and visions of happiness. A gay girl's tongue was heard passing the windows, sinking into silence almost as soon as heard; but the words "*Oui, oui, je t'aime, je t'aimerai toujours,*" sounded distinct upon the ears of those within. It was the keynote of the heart, and in each bosom it echoed, "*Oui, oui, je t'aime, je t'aimerai toujours.*"

She was very lovely as she sat there, leaning back in the large chair, with her tiny feet stretched out towards the fire; every line full of grace; one small fair hand resting white upon the dark drapery falling over her knee, the other locked in Gowrie's, and her head slightly bending forward, with the bright dark curls flowing over her brow and cheek, and her full dark eyes bent upon the fire, seeing pictures in the strong light and shade.

"*Oui, oui, je t'aimerai toujours,*" said Julia's heart, and Gowrie's repeated it; and the thoughts of both wandered far away, plunging through the future like a swallow into the depths of air. Whither did Gowrie's wander? Far, far away, as I have said, and calm judgment strove in vain to regulate its flight. There was something stronger still than reason in his breast. Love--passion was for the time the master, and fancy was but passion's slave. He let her range, but it was for his good pleasure, and reason's voice was all unheard.

At length the lover started up with a thrilling frame and an agitated voice, exclaiming, "This is, indeed, too hard!"

"What, Gowrie, what?" demanded Julia, rising with some alarm at the sudden exclamation which broke the stillness, for they had not spoken for some minutes.

Gowrie clasped her in his arms, and whispered in a low tone, bending down his head till it rested on her shoulder, "Thus to love you, thus to be ever near you, and to be forbidden to call you mine till long, long months of dark uncertainty are past.--Oh, Julia, why should we not be united at once? He who is gone could never foresee all the difficulties and even dangers in which his prohibition may place us. I feel sure that had he done so, he never would have exacted such a sacrifice. One half of our journey is still before us. We must still remain here many days, perhaps weeks; and oh, dear girl, if you can feel or even conceive that which I feel, you will know that this struggle is almost more than mortal can bear, especially when I see the difficulties and dangers increasing ever before us, which would be all removed by our immediate union. What should prevent you from giving me this dear hand at once?" and he covered it with ardent kisses.

"Nothing but our promise, Gowrie," replied Julia, with a burning cheek and a deep sigh; "but, oh, let us not break our word. I will do whatever you will. You are all to me now. I have none but you; and what you can ask I will not refuse, for I know you will not ask anything that is wrong. But oh, remember and consider what it was we promised, how solemnly we promised, and that that promise was given to the dead."

"But if the dead could see," answered Gowrie, "would not the circumstances in which we are actually placed appear so different to those which were contemplated, as to justify a deviation from our engagement?" And as he spoke he pressed her closer to him.

"I know not," answered Julia, without an effort to free herself from his embrace, "nor can we ever know, till we join him where all doubts end; but yet, Gowrie, he was not one to overlook aught in his foresight of the future. Nothing has occurred which he might not naturally foresee. We love dearly, we feel strongly, we are anxious to be united, we have been delayed on our journey, we have been exposed to some insolence and some inconvenience. More, even, may be before us; but all this could not but be displayed to the eyes of one who had well nigh eighty years of the world's experience, and whose memory of every event in life was as perfect as that of youth. Besides, Gowrie, it was a promise, and I have ever held a promise to be the most sacred of all things. Did I know that I had ever broken one, let whatever be the motive, let whatever be the justification, I should never know pure happiness after--I should live in regret and fear--there would be a spot upon the past and a cloud upon the future. I should feel that I had been untrue, and fear retribution."

She raised her bright dark eyes to his face, with an appealing, almost an imploring look, and then added, in a low tone, "But be it as you will, Gowrie. My fate is in your hands, and I am ready to suffer anything--even that, for your sake."

"Enough, enough, dearest!" said Gowrie, with a sigh; "you shall suffer nothing for my sake that I can spare you. But oh, dear girl, you know not the pain which the fulfilment of this promise costs. Did you never dream, Julia, that you were parched with thirst, and saw a cool stream flowing before your eyes, but that when you bent down to drink, the pure wave receded before

your lip, leaving you more thirsty than before? Thus often do I fancy it may be with me, and that our union may still be delayed by circumstances, till some unexpected fate snatches me from you, or you from me, for ever, when a few dear words spoken at the altar might put our happiness, in that respect, beyond fate."

Julia bent down her head, with bright drops swimming in her eyes, for such sad pictures were not unfrequently present to her own imagination; but she answered, "It would be a clouded happiness, Gowrie; for we should both feel that we had done wrong. I have never, indeed, dreamt such a dream as you mention; but yet I understand well what you mean, and sometimes fears and doubts take possession of me also. Yet I reproach myself when I give way to them; and I am sure that they would increase a thousand fold were we to break our promise. I should then tremble every hour lest our dear-purchased happiness--bought by a falsehood--should be taken from us, and that the union too soon attained, would be too soon ended."

"You are wiser and better than I am," said Gowrie, gently relaxing the embrace in which he held her, and kissing her tenderly--"and it shall be as you will, my love."

"Oh, neither wiser nor better," answered Julia; "but women are accustomed to ponder upon such things, and think of them, I imagine, more deeply than men, who act often from sudden impulses."

Though grave and sad, Gowrie could not refrain from smiling at the very different view she took of human character from that which either prejudice or experience gives to man. Yet, after a moment's thought, he replied, "The world does not judge so, my Julia; and yet, perhaps, you are in some degree right. Women give more weight to feeling and thought, and men to interest and passion, in balancing the right or wrong of actions in the mind. But hark! there is a foot in the ante-room;" and he led her back to her seat.

The next instant there was a gentle tap at the door, and on Gowrie saying, "Come in," the person of Austin Jute appeared.

"Austin, Austin!" cried his master, "I commanded you strictly not to stir from Sir Henry Neville's house till this unfortunate affair was terminated."

"True, my noble lord," replied Austin, "but the *till* has happened. Not, indeed, that I could have staid longer, pent up in one house like a jackdaw in a cage, if it had cost me my life to go out. Had the doors been locked it might have been a different thing, for one soon learns to do without what one cannot get; but with what one longs for, always before one's eyes, one is sure to try for it."

Gowrie turned his eyes, with a smile, to Julia, but did not speak; and the man went on, saying, "All yesterday I looked out of the window of the porter's room, because I did not choose to trust myself to look out of the door; and this morning, as I crossed the fore-court, I found myself sidling up towards the gate, whether I would or not, like a young crab left upon the sands. To-morrow I should have been out, I am sure, had I not had a message to-night to tell me that Master Ramsay had taken a sudden turn the night before in the right way, and was now out of danger. He sent himself to tell me, which was civil, and he told the messenger to bid me come to see him to-morrow, when I should be quite safe."

Lord Gowrie mused; but after a moment's thought he said, "I trust this youth has some grace left. Nevertheless, Austin, you had better not go until I have seen and taken counsel with Sir Henry Neville. This might be a mere scheme to entrap you. I say not that it is so, for I do not know the habits of this place well enough to judge; but it is exactly such a stratagem as men would have recourse to in Italy; and I must have the advice of one who knows better the customs of Paris than either of us."

"Oh, they are very different from the Italians," said Austin Jute; but then, remembering Julia's parentage, he stopped short, and the next moment Mr. Rhind entered the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As early on the following morning as possible, Gowrie visited Sir Henry Neville, and was received with every mark of kindness and distinction. He propounded at once his questions regarding Ramsay and Austin Jute, but received a reply which somewhat surprised him.

"Oh, there is no danger to your servant," said the ambassador. "Neither Ramsay himself nor any one else in Paris, I think, would venture to send such a message to my house for the purpose of entrapping any one. Besides, I have the same information myself; but yet I think I would not let the servant go."

"Will you explain why not?" said Gowrie. "I was in hopes that the fact of Ramsay's sending this message at all, was a proof that the rash intemperance of which you formerly spoke, proceeded merely from the unchastised passion of youth, and that he has better qualities in his nature than he has hitherto suffered to appear."

"I trust it is so," replied Neville; "but yet there remains a great deal to be beaten out of him. The truth is, my dear lord," he continued, with a laugh, "that the message first came to me, and though, perhaps, kindly intended towards your servant, was still somewhat insolent in its tone. He sent to say that he was recovering, and that the man who had wounded him need fear no chastisement--that was the word he used; and he then went on to say, that the man might come to him in safety, when he would assure him of his pardon. We rough islanders, my lord, are accustomed to think that no pardon is necessary where no offence has been committed; and therefore I judge that you had better not let your man go. It might only lead to evil consequences; for I do not think, from Master Austin's look and manner, that he is one to submit to haughty or injurious words without a rejoinder."

"He certainly shall not go," answered Gowrie, "since such was the message. However, I shall myself soon quit Paris, and therefore, Sir Henry, if you will favour me with the letters which you have promised me for the English court, I will deliver them with pride and pleasure, as it is, of course, my intention to present my humble duty to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, as I pass through London."

"You shall have them this very evening," answered Neville; "but yet I wish you would stay for a couple of days longer; for I know that you are a great lover of music, and there is a very delicate concert to be given the day after to-morrow. There are three of the most excellent performers on the violin that ever were heard, besides some famous singers from Italy; and they will perform several rare and beautiful pieces by a new composer of great genius."

Lord Gowrie promised at once to stay for the high treat offered to him; but he took his leave without informing Sir Henry Neville that he had other objects in delaying his departure. Had the message of Ramsay been that which he had imagined when he visited the ambassador, the young earl would have quitted Paris on the following day; but the tone in which he now found it was conceived, induced him to adopt another course, and proceeding at once to his own chamber without seeing Julia, he sat down and wrote the following note:--

"To Master Ramsay of Newburn, greeting:--

"Sir,

"His excellency Sir Henry Neville, English ambassador at this court, has communicated to me your message to my servant, by whom you were wounded. I rejoice to hear that you are in a way of recovery, which, I trust, will be soon complete. It was my purpose to have quitted this capital long ago, but in the circumstances which exist, I shall remain here for some days longer, in order to give you an opportunity of doing that which, doubtless, you will be naturally disposed to do. We are all subjected to error, especially in youth; but when a man of good breeding has committed a fault towards another, he is always desirous of apologizing for it. I am informed, by no less than five eye-witnesses, that while I had ridden on before my carriage, you offered an insult to a lady under my care and escort, which was, in fact, an insult to myself. Doubtless you are inclined to write an apology for this conduct, as that which has passed between my servant and yourself can be considered as no atonement to

"Your most humble servant,

"GOWRIE."

When he had read the letter over, sealed, and addressed it, the earl dispatched it by an old and somewhat matter-of-fact servant, who had accompanied him from Scotland to Italy. He gave no especial directions in regard to its delivery; and the man, in the ordinary course, would probably have left it at the lodging of his young countryman, had he not been forced to take with him, both to show him the way, and to interpret for him, a lacquais de place, who had been engaged by the earl since his arrival in Paris. The lacquais de place of those days was a very different animal from that which bears the title at present, when every drunken courier, who has been discharged for bad behaviour, and whose character is too well established to obtain permanent employment, places himself at the door of a hotel, and calls himself a lacquais de place. The one who had been hired by Lord Gowrie was a brisk, impudent, meddling fellow, full of the most consummate French vanity, and determined to have his say upon every occasion. He must needs see the letter which was to be delivered; and when he got to the door, he did not fail to impress upon the good old man, that it was necessary he should deliver the letter to the Seigneur de Ramsay in person, and obtain an answer of some kind, to which the Scotchman, always well inclined to meet a countryman in foreign lands, did not in the slightest degree object. Some difficulty, indeed, was made in admitting him; but when he announced that he came with a letter from the Earl of Gowrie, the difficulty ceased, and he was ushered into the room of the

wounded man.

Ramsay of Newburn was lying on his bed dressed in a warm robe de chambre, as if he had been only allowed to get up during the morning. He was a powerful and a handsome man of one or two-and-twenty years of age, with good features, but by no means a prepossessing expression. His face was very pale from loss of blood, and from the illness consequent upon his wound; but his eye was bright and hawk-like, and, with his black hair, neglected since his wound, and falling in ragged masses over his forehead, it gave a wild, fierce look to his worn countenance. As soon as the servant entered, he motioned his own attendant to withdraw, and said in a low, hollow tone, "They tell me you are the Earl of Gowrie's servant. You are not the man who wounded me?"

"No, sir," replied the other. "He is still at the embassy."

"You have got a letter for me, have you not?" asked Ramsay, keeping his eyes fixed upon his face.

The man presented it; but Ramsay went on without opening the letter, saying, "You are a countryman of mine, by your tongue."

"Yes, sir," answered the servant. "I come from fair Perth itself."

"It is a beautiful town," said Ramsay. "I suppose you have been long in the service of the earl?"

"I was in the service of his brother before him," replied the man.

"Well, I am very sorry there should have been any disagreement between the earl and myself," continued Ramsay. "Pray, who is the lady who is with his lordship?"

"I cannot justly say, sir," answered the man; and then, seeing a curious sort of light coming into the other's eyes, he added, "She's a far-away cousin of my lord's. The Lady Julia Douglas, they call her. My lord met with her in Italy, where some of her relations dying, he agreed to see her safe back to Scotland."

"Then she is not an Italian, as some of my people told me?" rejoined the young man.

"Oh, no," cried the servant. "She speaks fine English; and I've never heard her speak anything else, except to the servants at times."

Ramsay mused, and then inquired if the earl was going direct back to Scotland.

"He'll stay a while in London town, they say," rejoined the man; "but I can tell nothing for certain. My lord does not talk much of what he intends to do."

"Will you draw back that curtain from the window?" said the wounded man, "that I may see what the earl writes;" and his request being complied with, he opened the letter and read. The first words seemed to please him well, for a smile came upon his lip. It had somewhat a sarcastic turn, indeed; but the usual expression of his face was sneering. The next words, however, clouded his brow; and as he read on, it became as black as a thunder cloud. When he had done, he remained with his teeth hard set, and the letter still in his hand, apparently musing over the contents, while quick, almost spasmodic, changes of expression came over his face, and from time to time he muttered something to himself, the sense of which the servant could not catch. Gradually, however, the irritable movements seemed to cease; and he looked at the letter again, not reading it regularly, but glancing his eye from one part to the other, in a desultory manner. His brow then became smoother, though it cost him an apparent effort to banish the frown, and the sneer which hung about his upper lip he could not banish.

"If your lord takes his departure so soon," he said, "I fear I cannot have the honour of paying my respects to him. Is it quite certain that he goes in three days?"

"I have not heard, sir," replied the man, "and so I can't say; but if he has told you so in the letter, depend upon it he'll do it: for he is not one to change his mind lightly."

"Well, then," said Ramsay, with a somewhat peculiar emphasis, "I must wait another opportunity."

"I will tell him so, sir," said the old servant; but the young man exclaimed, "No, no, you need not tell him exactly that; merely say I regret my inability to wait upon him, and that I am unable to write. You may say, moreover----"

He did not finish the sentence, but fell into thought again, tossing himself uneasily on his bed, till the servant, thinking that he had done, took a step towards the door, saying, "Well, I'll tell him, sir, just what you say."

"Stay, stay," said Ramsay; "I have something to add. You may say to the noble lord, for me, that I am sorry I offended the lady, but that I did not at all intend to insult her. The curtain was drawn rudely in my face by a man in the inside of the carriage; and I pulled it back as a reproof to him, without thinking of her at all."

"Well, sir, you know best," replied the man, who, though not very brilliant, did not think that this account accorded well with what he himself had seen. "I'll tell the earl just what you say."

"Pray do," said Ramsay; "and say, moreover, that I shall soon have the honour of seeing his lordship in Scotland, as I intend to return thither as soon as I can travel. Your master is well acquainted, I think, with my good cousin, Sir George."

"Oh, ay," answered the man. "I have seen Ramsay of Dalhousie many a time, both at Perth and at Dirleton, and young Jock Ramsay, too, his brother, who used to come to play with Mr. Alexander. They used to quarrel and fight very often; but that is the way with boys."

"They quarrelled, did they?" said Ramsay of Newburn, with a smile. "Doubtless they'll be better friends as men. And now, tell my man to give you a draught of strong waters, but don't let it make you forget to deliver my message to your lord."

"No, no, sir; no fear of that," answered the man, and withdrew.

When he was gone, Ramsay writhed upon his bed, as if in pain, and he murmured to himself, "Ay, that bitter cup is quaffed; but I'll make those who have forced it upon me taste a bitterer. But how--but how? I shall never have strength to wield a sword like a man again. The villain has crippled me for life. I can fire a shot, though; and, my good lord of Gowrie, I will not forget you."

Then he fell into thought again, and meditated in silence for nearly half an hour, while various changes of expression came over his countenance, all dark, but of different shades. At length some thought seemed to please him, for he laughed aloud. "Ay," he said, "that were better. Then, however matters go, I am the gainer. He has made me truckle to his leman. I'll try if I cannot make him bend his haughty head before those who once already have trampled on the necks of Ruthvens. Let him beware both of words and actions, for he shall be sharply looked to. The proud peat! Let him stay in London with the crooked old Englishwoman. I'll be in Scotland before him, and he shall find her protection blast rather than save him. If I know my cousin John aright, I can so work these ends together as to make this earl regret having done shame to a Ramsay. What I have not strength to do boldly, I will try to do shrewdly, and there will be some pleasure in seeing him help to work out my objects against himself. There is Stuart, too; if we can once get him mixed in the affair, the king will not be long out of it. Then, Gowrie, look to yourself, for James never forgives those whom he fears."

He continued thus muttering to himself for some time longer; but what has been already detailed will be sufficient to show that Ramsay entertained that sweet and gentlemanlike passion of revenge, which was at the time exceedingly dear and pleasant to most of his countrymen. It is so, indeed, with all nations in a semi-barbarous state, and in such a state was Scotland undoubtedly at that time. Torn by factions, frequently a prey to civil strife, when not actually a prey to anarchy, ruled by the strongest and the readiest hand which could clutch and hold the reins of government, she had long seen her children rising to power and wealth on each other's heads, and the pathway to honours marked out by a stream of blood. Ambition went hand in hand with revenge; and the terrible rule seemed fully established in the land, "to forget a benefit as soon as possible, but never to forgive an injury."

CHAPTER XIX.

I must pass over, with a very brief and general statement, the events which occurred to the personages connected with this tale during several months. There is always in tale-telling, unless the action be compressed within a very short space, a period during which the interest would flag, if the regular passing of each day was noticed, and the small particulars detailed. Were life filled with those striking events which move and interest the reader, with those passions to which the sympathetic heart thrills, with those grand scenes of action which excite the imagination, or with those lesser incidents which amuse and entertain, the human frame, like an over-sharpened knife, would be ground down upon the whetstone of the world, and existence be curtailed of half its date. It is my belief, that patriarchal age was secured to the earlier inhabitants of earth as much by the long intervals existing between the periods of intense excitement, to which they were sometimes subjected, and by the calm and careless ease of the intervening periods, as by any of the many other causes which combined to extend the space between birth and death to well nigh a thousand years. True, they were not close pent up in cities--true, they were continually changing air and scene--true, that excess in anything was little known--true, that they were nearer to the great archetype, fresh from the hands of his God, and framed for the immortality of which sin deprived him--true, that long centuries of vice, folly, contention, and misfortune had not then brought forth the multitudinous host of diseases continually warring against the mortal body, diminishing its powers of resistance from generation to generation; but still I believe that the want of excitement, which can only be known where men are spread wide

and far apart over the face of the earth, was absolutely necessary to that vast prolongation of life. The mind and body did not mutually grind down each other. Still, the more peaceful periods in any man's history are those which the least interest his fellow-men, and during the time which elapsed between Gowrie's departure from Paris and his arrival in Scotland, no adventures or impediments occurred which can justify much detail. That departure was delayed for a day or two beyond the period which he had at first fixed; and though the weather was now becoming sharp and cold, yet those few days produced a favourable change, and rain and fog gave way to clear skies and broad sunshine. The days, however, were brief, and the journeys necessarily short; so that a week elapsed between his departure from Paris and his arrival at Calais. Four days more brought him to Loudon, and now a new scene opened upon him.

Furnished with letters from Sir Henry Neville to the principal statesmen of the court of Queen Elizabeth, he was received with every demonstration of respect and esteem in the English capital, and two days after was presented to the queen herself. I find little record in history of what followed; but one historian, whose views, it must be remarked, were strongly biassed by peculiar feelings of partizanship, declares that the honours shown by the English sovereign to the young earl were of the most marked and extraordinary kind. It is sometimes, in the present day, not easy to account for the course of policy pursued by Elizabeth in her conduct to the subjects of the neighbouring crown; but we must not doubt well-authenticated facts because we cannot penetrate their motives. The writer whom I have mentioned states, in speaking of the Earl of Gowrie, that the queen "ordered that guards should attend him, that all honours should be paid him which were due to a Prince of Wales and to her first cousin, and that he should be entertained at the public expense all the time he should remain at her court."

I can scarcely imagine that this account is not exaggerated. We find that she showed no such honours to others, who stood much in the same degree of affinity to herself as he did; and unless she wished needlessly to alarm the King of Scotland, no cause can be supposed for such conduct. That she treated Gowrie with great distinction, however, is undeniable, and even marked her favour for him more strongly than her old affection for his grandfather could account for. This course was very dangerous to the young earl himself, for the court of England at that time was thronged by spies of the Scottish monarch; and even the most familiar friends and counsellors of Elizabeth conveyed information to James of all that could affect his interest, to the most minute circumstances. The natural desire of what is called currying favour, of course, gave some degree of colour to the accounts transmitted; and there is every reason to believe, from an examination of the State Paper Office, that such intimations alone were given as had a tendency to put the monarch on his guard, without discouraging his hopes or diminishing his energies. The way for his advent to the throne had been prepared long beforehand; whether from the general considerations of policy, from personal ambition, or from avarice, such men as Cecil had chosen their course, and were determined to remove or overawe all competitors, and to insure the accession of the King of Scotland. I am inclined to believe--without considering them as anything more than mere mortals--that the purest spirit of patriotism inspired those who thus acted. Every man of common sense must have seen that most important ends were to be obtained by uniting the crowns of Scotland, Ireland, and England upon one head; nor could any one doubt that--apart from all considerations of the personal character of the man--the means of maintaining his claims, of crushing all competitors, and of establishing his power upon a firm and secure basis, were more completely in the hands of the King of Scotland than of any other person who could aspire to the English throne. His faults were all personal, which never enter sufficiently into the calculations of politicians; his advantages were those of position, which almost always have too much weight with those who influence the fate of empires. By personal character, no man was ever less fitted to fill the throne of a great country, or to unite discordant races under one sway, than James I.: by political position, no one could compete with him in pretensions to the throne of England. Happy had it been for Great Britain had such not been the case, for the vices of the man more than compensated the advantages of the prince, and the weakness of his successors consummated what his own wickedness began; but no one can blame those who chose according to the lights they possessed, and who smoothed the way for that which naturally appeared the best for the whole nation at the time.

The reports which reached Scotland of the honours shown to the Earl of Gowrie in the English capital, generated, in a jealous and irritable mind, covetous of extended and despotic rule, a feeling of doubt and dread most dangerous to its object; and the busy and gossiping spirit of a small court did not fail to increase the unpleasant impressions thus produced, by a thousand rumours, which had no foundation in truth. Reports were circulated and credited, that Queen Elizabeth had actually designated the Earl of Gowrie as her successor, and even that, in order to unite two great claims to the crown which she held, she had made all the arrangements for a marriage between that nobleman and the Lady Arabella Stuart; one who, like himself, was not very remote from the direct succession. These facts have been omitted altogether, or slurred over by modern historians, in noticing that part of history in which this young nobleman appears; but that such rumours existed in England and Scotland can be proved from contemporary authorities; and we can easily conceive the feelings with which such a man as James was thus prepared to view one whose influence was already redoubtable, on his return to his native land.

Could he have seen the private life of the earl, it is probable that, although he might still have remained inimical, the king's fears would not have assumed the character of hatred. From various motives, which every one can conceive, Julia was not disposed to mingle with the gaieties of a foreign court, or, before she was received and recognised in her own land, to assume the

position she was entitled to in the society of the neighbouring state. She felt it no privation, indeed--she sought it not--she cared not for it; but even if she had, she would have forborne, and she had full compensation in the tenderness of him she loved. Gowrie appeared at the court of England alone: he put not forth on her behalf, claims which were to be decided in a different country, and by different laws; and on the only occasion when the queen jestingly alluded to his fair companion, he replied, with that courtly reverence towards the sovereign to which Elizabeth was accustomed, and that due respect for Julia's situation from which he never deviated, "It is painful, madam, to be torn by two duties and two inclinations. You may easily suppose it would be grateful for me to linger here at your majesty's feet, but my duty, both by kindred and by promise, is to escort my cousin back to Scotland, in order to establish rights of which she has been too long deprived. I trust, however," he added, with the air of gallantry which pervaded Elizabeth's court, "that ere long I shall be enabled to return, not alone to bask in the beams of your favour, but to ask a share for one who, I may humbly say, is more worthy than myself of that honour for which princes might well contend with pride."

He spoke with that serious gravity, and yet with that unembarrassed ease, which greatly struck the sovereign whom he addressed; and she replied, in her somewhat abrupt manner, "God's my life, cousin, I have a great inclination to see this same fair creature, and would do so too with all honour, either in private or in public, did I not know that it would do her no good service where she is going. Commend me to her, however, and tell her we regard her and yourself with favour, and will do our best to serve you both should need be."

The earl conveyed the message to her he loved; but Julia smiled almost sadly, as she replied, "I fear me, Gowrie, that I am not fitted for courts, at all events by inclination. Calm and peaceful quiet with him I love is all that I desire in life. Nevertheless, understand me, I would not for the world keep back him whose fame and whose character I am bound to regard even before my own peace, from the path of honour and renown, for anything that earth can give. I am ready, when you require it, to mingle with courts and crowds, to take my share in whatever may be for your benefit--nay, should need be, to buckle on your armour with my own hands for the battle-field, and bid God speed you in the right, while I remain alone to weep and pray for your deliverance and success. Heaven send me strength when the hour of trial comes; but in strength or in weakness I will not shrink from my duty towards you."

About ten days after, when the frost, which was then reigning with great severity, had broken up, rendering the roads more passable, Gowrie took his departure from London, and proceeded by slow journeys towards Scotland. He was detained for somewhat more than a week at York by a fresh fall of snow; but as soon as that had melted away under the increasing warmth of the spring, he resumed his way, and passed the border in the end of February, 1600.

CHAPTER XX.

It was a cold, clear, frosty afternoon, in the month of January, 1600, when two gentlemen, both young, but one considerably older than the other, walked together up and down a trim but formal piece of garden ground, beneath the walls of one of the old fortified houses of the day, not very many miles distant from the fair city of Edinburgh, and in the county of Mid Lothian. The hour was late, the sun was below the sky, bright stars were beginning to peep out above, and the garden was only defended from the keen blast by a wall of uncemented stones, although the castle itself was a very solid piece of masonry.

Still the two gentlemen continued to walk on, with the crisp frost crackling under their feet, whenever they fell upon the long grass at the side of the path, or upon the dry leaves which had dropped from the trees, few and far between, which graced the little enclosure.

The elder of the two was a man of about six or seven-and-twenty years of age, of the middle height, or perhaps somewhat less, slight in appearance, from the extreme accuracy of all his proportions, though in reality much stronger than many men of a more powerful look. His features were slightly aquiline, but chiseled with wonderful delicacy. The hair was dark, but the eye clear and blue, with that calm, firm, but mild expression, which we are inclined to attach to vigor of character when united with gentleness of heart. His mien and air were particularly distinguished by a sort of easy dignity, which rendered it impossible to see him without feeling that there was not only a gentleman of high race and associations, but a man of remarkable powers of mind, of which he was conscious, but not vain.

The companion of this personage was in years a mere youth, but in form a strong and active man. He was darker in complexion than the other, taller, more muscular, and the well-grown beard showed that boyhood was no more. His countenance was also very handsome; but there was in it a stern and fiery look, which reminded one of a fierce warhorse when checked by the rein; and occasionally as he talked, there would come a scowling frown upon his brow, which

rendered the expression very different from that of his companion. Nevertheless, there was traceable in the features a strong resemblance, so that in the angry moments of the one, which indeed were rare, or the gayer and gentler moments of the other, there was no difficulty in pronouncing them two brothers.

"Well, John," said the elder of the two, as they turned in their walk, "I wish much you would abandon your intention of riding back to-night. I would fain put eight-and-forty hours between your rash impetuosity and your meeting again with your former friend. You seem so little moved by reason, that I would see what time can do."

"I tell you, Dalhousie," said his brother, "I am not going to quarrel with him. Indeed, he will take care how he gives me occasion, I think. But I and Alexander Ruthven can never more be friends. His pride is insufferable, and his favour with the queen, be it good and honest, as some would have us think, be it dishonest and disloyal, as others suspect, can give him no claim to reverence from others as good as himself, or better perhaps."

"Is there no pride at the bottom of your own feelings towards him, John?" asked his brother, with a smile; "and is there not, perhaps, a little jealousy of that same favour that you speak of, which makes you look upon it in an unfair light? Ruthven's sister is the queen's dearest friend; and is it at all unnatural that a portion of her regard for the sister should be extended to the brother?"

"I do not know," answered John Ramsay, quickly; "I am not so nice in my scanning as you are, George; but one thing I do know, which is, that I do not love to see my lord and master made to look like a fool in his own court by one of his own servants. If there be nothing evil in this familiarity but that, it is surely bad enough; but if there be more, they had better not let me see fair signs of it; for I would drive my dagger into his heart as readily as his grandfather drove his into Rizzio's."

"Fie, fie! You are too rash, boy," said Sir George Ramsay; "neither zeal nor courage are worth much, John, unless tempered by discretion; and again I say, you give too much way to passion, and suffer it to give a colour to all you see; just as you used to quarrel with Alexander Ruthven, when a boy, without any reasonable cause, so do you now suspect and dislike him as a man without just grounds."

"I never loved him," answered the other, moodily. "I dislike all the Ruthvens--I always have disliked them, with their stately grandeur and proud airs."

"Because you are proud yourself, John," said his brother; "and because your pride has been somewhat offensive at times, they have not liked you. Did you ever see any of them show pride towards me?"

"Because you are not proud enough," replied the young man, sharply.

"I am as proud as any man ought to be," replied his brother, in a reproving tone; "too proud to do a base action--too proud to give way to a grovelling thought--too proud to entertain a mean suspicion. I am proud, too, of my name and race, proud of the deeds of my ancestors, and proud enough, I trust, never to tarnish their renown by any unworthy act of their descendant."

With one of those impulses which move hasty men, the youth seized his brother's hand and pressed it warmly. "I know you are, Dalhousie," he said; "forgive me, my dear brother. I may be somewhat too proud; but I do not ever really doubt that you are proud enough for all that is noble, too proud for anything that is mean. But you have not lately seen so much of what is passing at the court as I have; and believe me the sight is not pleasant."

"Well, then, John, stay another night away from it," answered his brother; "you acknowledge that the king does not expect you till Friday. One day will take you to Edinburgh and to Stirling, ride as slow as you will."

"Be it as you wish," replied John Ramsay, "but I must set out to-morrow somewhat early.--Hark! There are horses' feet coming along the frosty road. Who can it be, I wonder, at this late hour?"

"Some of our good cousins come to rest for the night," said Sir George Ramsay, with a smile; "it can be no one on business of much consequence, by the slowness of the horses' tread."

He was mistaken, however, for the result of the meeting which was about to take place was of infinite consequence to the fate of his brother and himself. The two walked leisurely along the little path which led back to the house, and passing through a small postern door, proceeded to the gates to welcome the coming guest. All that they could see, when they looked out along the road, was a dim figure on horseback, at the distance of about two hundred yards, and something like another horseman behind. Both were coming very slowly, although the coldness of the night might well have rendered quicker progression agreeable both to man and horse. As the travellers were evidently approaching the house for the purpose of stopping there, Sir George Ramsay called out some of the servants; and the moment after, his brother, looking intently forward, said, "It is very like Andrew's figure, but riding bent and listless, as I have seen him when he is drunk."

"I hope he has not chosen that condition to present himself on his return," said Sir George. "Halloo! Who comes?"

"'Tis I, Sir George," answered the voice of Ramsay of Newburn, "faint and weary, and needing much your hospitality."

It was evident, from the way in which he spoke, that the young gentleman was perfectly sober; and Sir George merely replied, "Come in, Andrew, come in. You shall be right welcome. Here, William, take Newburn's horse."

"Lend me your arm, good fellow," said the guest, slowly dismounting. "I am not over supple, nor so strong as I once was."

His own servant rode up with the saddle-bags at the same moment; and being assisted from his horse, he was led into the house, where lights were burning in what was called the great chamber. Both Sir George Ramsay and his brother were struck and moved with the ghastly paleness of their cousin's countenance, and everything was done that kindness could devise to refresh and revive him.

"Ah, now," said Sir George, after he had drunk a cup of that fine Bordeaux wine which was to be found nowhere in greater perfection than in Scotland, "there is some colour coming into your cheek again. You will do well now."

"My cheek will never bear the rose again, Dalhousie," replied his cousin. "It was once red enough, but its ruddiness is gone for ever."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed John Ramsay; "why, what is the matter with thee, man? Hast thou seen a wraith?"

"Ay, and felt one too, in the shape of a drawn sword," replied the other. "I have been run through the body by a churl in the streets of Paris. 'Tis now some two months ago, and I am well, they tell me. But where is my strength gone? Where the quickness of my hand, which could always keep my head, till that hour?"

"But how did all this happen?" demanded Sir George Ramsay. "Some foolish quarrel, I'm afraid, Andrew."

"Good faith, foolish enough," answered the young man; "but I am cured of folly for life, George;" and he proceeded to give his own account of the adventure which had befallen him with good Austin Jute.

"I was riding through the streets of Paris," he said, "with two young friends, when we had to pass a large old country carriage, in which I espied a very pretty face--you know I always loved pretty faces. I might gaze at it somewhat earnestly perhaps for a moment longer than was needful; and I am not sure that I did not rein in my horse a little, when lo, up rides one of the servants who was behind the carriage, and struck me a blow, which made me miss the stirrups, and left me scarcely time to save myself from falling under the horse's feet."

"A lounder on the side of the head," said John Ramsay, half inclined to laugh; but his cousin went on gravely.

"I should not have had the blood of a Ramsay in my veins," he said, "if I had not taken sword in hand to avenge such an insult. But, good faith, the fellow was as quick as I was, and a good swordsman too, though I have seldom met my match. The street was narrow and crowded, however, the carriage in the way, horses all about us, and somehow I slipped my foot, and the next instant found his sword running like a hot iron through my chest and out of my shoulder bone. Here--it went in here," he continued, laying his hand upon the spot, "and passed out here, going clean through flesh and bone. I dropped instantly, and was carried away to my lodging, where I lay upon a sick bed for many a day, and rose only to find that I have lost the full use of my sword arm for ever. I may hold a pen perhaps, like a clerk, but as to manly uses they are gone."

"But what became of the man who hurt you?" demanded Sir George Ramsay; "if your tale be quite correct, Andrew, his conduct was most unjustifiable."

He laid a strong emphasis on the word, if, for he knew his cousin well, and there was a conviction in his mind that something had been kept back. Ramsay of Newburn, however, did not appear to remark the peculiar tone in which the words were pronounced, but replied, "It was unjustifiable, I think, Dalhousie; but he had great protectors. The English ambassador stood his friend, and the ambassador's intimate--your friend, the Earl of Gowrie--talked high, and opposed the pursuit of justice. Between them they would not suffer the man to be secured, even till it was ascertained whether I lived or died."

"But what had Gowrie to do with it?" asked Sir George, while his brother's brow grew dark, and his teeth tight set together. "I should have thought that Gowrie, of all men, would have been inclined to resent an injury done to a Ramsay; and the earl has a strong sense of justice--he had, even as a boy."

"Not where his own followers are concerned," replied his young cousin; "and this man was his own servant. I know not what became of his sense of justice in this case; but the matter is as I told you. He defended the man against all pursuit; and had I died I have no doubt that he and his dear friend and counsellor, the English ambassador, would have found means to shelter the offender altogether."

Sir George Ramsay mused, still doubting much; but John got up and walked about the room, and, after a momentary pause, his cousin continued, "He had even the kindness, when I was lying on a sick bed, to send a demand that I should make an apology to the lady whom I gazed at."

"You did not do it!--I trust you did not do it!" exclaimed John Ramsay, vehemently.

"I trust you did," said Sir George, looking up. "An apology is due to any lady we have offended, whoever asks it; and I cannot but think, from what I have seen of the young earl myself, and from what I have heard through others, that he would not have demanded an apology had there been no cause of offence."

"You always judge me harshly, Dalhousie," said his cousin, somewhat bitterly.

"Faith, not I," answered the young knight. "I judge men as I find them, Andrew. I know Gowrie's nature and temper well, and I know yours, too, my good cousin.--But what did you do? Did you make the apology?"

"I could do nothing else," answered the other. "I was ill on a sick bed; I felt that the powers of my right arm were gone for ever; I knew not what might happen if I refused, with such influence as there was arrayed against me. Otherwise, I would have made him eat my sword first. As it was, I only said that I was sorry if I had offended the lady, and that I had no intention of insulting her; but with that he contented himself."

Sir George Ramsay smiled. "I can see Gowrie in it all," he said; "resolute in what he thinks is right, but mild and easily appeased."

"Out upon it!" exclaimed his brother, and darted impatiently from the room.

Sir George did not seem to notice his departure in the least, but went on with what he was saying. "But what I do not understand is, that he should send you a message. Surely he wrote, Newburn? Have you still the letter?"

"Yes," answered his cousin. "I will show it to you some other time. It is in my baggage."

"I should like to see it much," said Sir George. "Now, tell me truly, Andrew, did you do nothing else than gaze? I know you well, my good cousin. You are gay and rash, have a somewhat evil opinion of all women, and believe that admiration, even when implying insult, must still have something pleasing in it for them. Did you add no words to the look?"

"Not one, upon my honour," replied his cousin, boldly.

"And no act either?" asked Sir George; and then seeing a sort of hectic glow come into his cousin's pale face, he added, quickly, "You did--I see it there--What was it?"

"I really do not know what right you have to tax me so," replied Andrew Ramsay, colouring still more.

"I will tell you," answered Sir George, in a calm, but stern tone. "You have told me some passages which have lately taken place, implying that you have been injured. Now, if wrong has been done my cousin, and the very consequences of that wrong prevent him from redressing it himself, I take up his quarrel as the head of his house. But I must first be sure that wrong has been done you. I must see the case clearly, and therefore I ask you what it was you did. Do not conceal anything from me, Andrew, for depend upon it I will know the whole, and that very soon."

The other grew white and red by turns, but his elder cousin had habitually great command over him, and he answered in a low and somewhat sullen tone, "I only pulled back the curtain of the carriage a little, to see her more plainly, nor should I have done that if it had not been rudely drawn in my face."

"So now we have the truth," said Sir George; "and I will tell you how I read your story, Andrew. You and some young companions--gay libertines, mayhap--in riding through the streets of Paris, met a carriage containing a young lady of great beauty. You stare rudely in, as I have seen you do a thousand times; the curtain is drawn to shut out an insolent gaze, and you pull it back again with a sort of coarse bravado. These are the plain facts of the case, I take it, and even by your own showing I cannot but see that Gowrie was quite right."

"You seem to have got his own story by heart, Sir George," replied his cousin, "and throw it somewhat unkindly in the teeth of a kinsman who, wounded, weak, and sick, comes to seek your hospitality."

"I am sorry for your wound, Andrew," said the knight, "and trust you may soon recover health and strength. As for the story, I have never heard one word of it but from your own lips. The

writing was not very legible, but you cannot deny that I have managed to decipher it. And now let us change the subject a little. Who is this lady in whom Gowrie takes such an interest?"

"I know no--this leman, I suppose," replied the young man, with a scoff.

"Not what you suppose, Andrew, but what you have heard. You cannot have been mixed up in such an affair without having learned more of the object of your admiration. Who did people say she was?"

"Oh, she was given out to be his cousin, whom he was bringing from Italy," replied Ramsay of Newburn. "They said that she had been living with relations there, who were lately dead, and that Gowrie, like a true Paladin Orlando, was bringing her straight back, defying all men in her cause by the way."

"But what was her name?" asked Sir George. "You must have heard her name."

"His servants called her, the Lady Julia Douglas," answered his cousin. "I never heard of such a person. Did you?"

Sir George Ramsay mused, saying slowly, "No--no, not exactly--yet at the time of Morton's death there were rumours of a private marriage with an Italian lady--there were many Italians about the court at the time--Ha! here comes John back again--Have you ever heard, John, any rumours of the Regent Morton having left a daughter? I think I remember something of it."

"Oh, yes," answered John Ramsay. "I have heard Stuart talk of the matter. He was employed himself to search for the supposed widow and child; for they got about a story that the regent had married an Italian in the end of his life, but dared not own it for fear of the ministers, who would have put him on the stool of repentance, or preached at him by the hour, which would have been just as bad. Stuart could hear nothing of them, except that an old Italian count, with his daughter and young child, had fled to Leith as soon as Morton was arrested, and had taken ship there for France some weeks after his execution. They supposed that this was Morton's wife and child, and that she had carried away with her all the vast treasures he had scraped together."

Sir George Ramsay shook his head; but saying, "It must now be supper time; I will call for it," he left the room without any further observation on the subjects of which they had been talking.

The moment he was gone and the door closed, John Ramsay gave a peculiar glance to his cousin, saying, "I must hear more of this matter, Andrew--but alone, alone. Dalhousie's cold prejudices drive me mad. I cannot keep my temper with him when he talks of these Ruthvens. I have much to say to you, too."

"And I much for your ear, John," said his cousin, hurriedly. "Find out where your brother's people lodge me, and come to my room, after I have gone to bed and all is quiet; I shall retire soon, upon the plea of weariness; but I shall not sleep till you come, for I have those things in my breast which are enemies to slumber."

They had not time to say much more before Sir George Ramsay returned, and it was immediately after announced that supper was served in the hall. Thither, then, they took their way; and over the good cheer and the rich wine all painful subjects seemed forgotten, till Ramsay of Newburn rose, and alleging that he was weary, retired to rest.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was nearly midnight when the door of the small room which had been allotted to Ramsay of Newburn, opened, and, with a lamp in his hand and a quiet stealthy step, his cousin John entered, and seated himself at the foot of his bed. "I could not come before, Andrew," he said, "for Dalhousie has been walking up and down the hall an hour beyond his usual bed-time."

"Never mind, never mind," answered the other. "I can rest, but I cannot sleep, John. I never sleep now till two or three o'clock, and shall not do so, till I see those punished who deserve it."

"My longings go in the same way," said John Ramsay; "but my brother has been telling me that you pulled back the curtain of the lady's carriage in order to stare in at her. You should not have done that, Andrew. I cannot call upon Gowrie for reparation after that."

"Pshaw! give not one moment's heed to private quarrels, John," answered his cousin, in a frank tone. "I might be wrong in the business; and Lord Gowrie was certainly overbearing and unjust. I have apologized, however, to the lady--not to him, and that matter is settled; but there are other matters behind."

"Of a more public nature, I suppose, from what you say of private quarrels," observed John Ramsay; "and I know right well that Alexander Ruthven has run up a score which he may find it difficult to wipe off; but the earl has nothing to do with that. Happily for him, he has been so long absent that he cannot be suspected either of intrigues at court or treason to the state."

"Be you not sure of that, John," replied the other. "Would I had as free access to the king as you have, I would soon put his majesty upon his guard against this haughty young lord, who is now wending back to plot here as his ancestors did before him."

"I will soon bring you to the king's presence if you have any charge to make against him," said his cousin. "If you accuse him boldly and with good proof, you will not want supporters who will bear all before them."

"Nay, but I have no direct charge to make, my good cousin," replied Ramsay of Newburn; "and clear proofs are difficult to obtain."

"Indeed!" said John Ramsay, his countenance falling. "I thought, from your words, that you were very sure of your game--I mean, sure that this man is plotting."

"As sure as I lie here and you sit there," answered his cousin; "but a man may be very sure himself, and yet not be able to make others so. The most dangerous traitors are always those who conceal their designs most carefully; and Gowrie is such. Calm and tranquil in speech, thoughtful and prudent in act, he never commits himself till his purposes are matured."

"Why, Begbie of the Red Hill, who saw him in Italy, told me he was frank and free, and fond of jest and harmless sport," replied John Ramsay.

"Begbie's a fool," answered the other, impatiently; "and for fools the earl can put on what character he likes. I saw Begbie as he came back through Paris, and he told me how the earl had shown him, at Geneva, little paper balls, which at his command rose into the air, and skimmed quite across the lake, and small figures of ducks and geese, that floated in a vessel of water, and came to whatever side he called them. Why, there is not a mountebank in France or England but would show him such wonders, and yet the fool took it all for magic, and half believed the earl to be a sorcerer."

"But if you have no charge against him," said his cousin, returning to the point, "I see not what can be done with the king."

Ramsay of Newburn mused. "If we knew a serpent to be in the garden," he said, at length, "and saw the grass moving towards a dear friend who lay sleeping there, should we not do well to wake him, even though we could not perceive the reptile under the covering through which it moved?" he asked, at length, in a slow emphatic tone.

"Assuredly," answered John Ramsay; "but we must be quite sure that there is a snake there, and afterwards seek for the beast to destroy it, otherwise our friend may be angry with us for breaking his slumber."

"Exactly so," rejoined the other; "and I think we can at least show that there is a snake in the grass, though perhaps not exactly where it lies. As to seeking the beast and destroying it, that must be done hereafter, if we find it venomous, as I believe it is."

"Come, come, to leave all such figures," said John Ramsay, "let me hear of what the king is to be warned. He is too wise and shrewd to listen to every tale that can be told, especially when he knows that the teller loves not the race against whom it bears. How shall I show him, or how will you show him, Andrew, that there is a snake in the garden? That is the question."

"I can do but little," answered his cousin. "Wild and reckless, seeking pastime and pleasure, and thoughtlessly getting into every kind of difficulty, I have neither reputation nor favour to back my words against the influence of a man so great; who has, moreover, a brother and a sister prime favourites at the court. You can do much, John; and I will tell you all I know, both that you yourself may see that there is just cause, and that your warning to the king may not prove vain."

"As to his brother," exclaimed John Ramsay, the object of whose greatest animosity at that moment was Alexander Ruthven, "he may indeed be a favourite at the court; but he is no favourite with the king."

"That matters not," answered his cousin. "My word would go for little, and even yours, perhaps, John, may not go for much; but I have no duty to perform, and you a great one. Yet I would not have you hardly and imprudently accuse the earl before we have stronger proofs."

"Then what would you have me do?" demanded the young man, interrupting him impetuously.

"I will tell you what," answered his more wily cousin. "I would have you point out to the king, how dangerous it is for some of his prime nobles to sojourn for weeks at the court of the Queen of England--the murderer of his mother, the unceasing enemy of his whole race--at the court of her who has ever promoted treason and rebellion in his kingdom, and received the banished traitors of Scotland as her best friends. I would point out to the king, how dangerous this is," he

repeated, "especially when the person who does sojourn there is, within a short remove, as near the throne of England as himself."

"I see--I see," answered John Ramsay. "I understand what you mean."

"I would, then," continued his cousin, "ask the king if he is aware that the Earl of Gowrie has spent some weeks in Paris, almost in the sole society of Sir Henry Neville, the English ambassador, seeing him every day at his own house, and going but once to visit the representative of his own monarch."

"But is this true? Did he do it?" inquired the other, eagerly.

"It is quite true, and can be proved by a dozen witnesses," answered his cousin. "I have a statement of the fact in the saddle-bags which lie there, given me by the master of the inn where the earl lodged in Paris. He did this, and even more. I would then ask the king if he is aware that honours almost royal were shown to this youth at the English court; that the guard turned out at his presence; that chamberlains and officers went down to meet him at the foot of the stairs on his approach; that the queen always styled him, cousin, and sometimes spoke of him as the nearest heir to her crown? I would ask if his majesty were aware of the nature of those private conferences which John Earl of Gowrie held with Robert Cecil and the Earl of Essex, besides numerous others of the court, whom the king may think more in his interests than they really are? I would also inquire whether King James had heard of a project for marrying the Earl of Gowrie to the Lady Arabella Stuart, and suffering the crown of England to fall quietly on his head?"

"By Heaven! if all these things be true, he should be arrested for a traitor the moment he sets foot in Scotland," cried John Ramsay, his impetuous spirit jumping at conclusions far beyond those which his cousin's words implied, or to which his intentions reached; "and I will do it myself, if no one else will do so."

"No, no!" exclaimed the other. "You are too impetuous, John. The arresting him on his arrival would but put all the other parties concerned upon their guard, and enable him by their means to conceal his treason by a skilful defence. Besides, the king dare not for his life make the acts of his good sister of England matter of accusation against her 'fair cousin of Gowrie.' Fie, man; for a courtier, thou art but little of a politician. Tell his majesty what I say. Ask him the questions which I have put. He hath information large enough, I will warrant; but if he want more, let him demand it of me. I have ligg'd for a fortnight in London, weak almost to death, and neglected by every one, but a few trusty friends, who brought me all the secrets of the court. There I heard of nothing but Gowrie, Gowrie. His star was in the ascendant; and I have doubts, strange doubts about his journey onward."

"Think you he will not come?" demanded John Ramsay, fixing his eyes upon him.

"I do not know," answered his cousin, thoughtfully; "but if he do, it will be for some purpose of which it were well to beware.--If he stay," he continued, very slowly, "he stays to be King of England. If he come back hither, it may be but to settle his affairs before he returns, or perhaps--but I would not carry my thoughts to the daring length to which it has been hinted he might carry his ambition. He has no claim upon the crown of Scotland, even were the king removed. The nobles of the land would never suffer it! What though his descent from Margaret Tudor may give him some show of title to the English throne; here he has no show of right whatsoever, and I will not believe it. Do not mention what I have said on this head, John," he continued, taking his cousin's hand and pressing it; "do not mention it, on any account. All the rest I can prove; but this is merely the rash suspicion of one who knows not our habits and our customs, and whom I am bound in honour not to name. He is a great man, too," he continued, thoughtfully, "but one whose views of policy and ambition have, I cannot but think, too wide a range--Do not mention it, on any account."

"I will put the king upon his guard, at all events," said John Ramsay, thinking himself very politic in giving no definite answer as to what he would tell and what he would withhold, while he was in reality meditating the very course on which his cousin sought to guide him. "It is frightful to think what might be the result if this young man had the ambition and the daring of his ancestors. Why, the king's life itself---"

"No, no!" cried Andrew Ramsay, interrupting him, "I do not think he would venture such an act as that. The worst I do believe he would attempt, might be to seize his majesty's person, and send him prisoner to England, like his mother."

"He should feel my dagger first," answered the young man with whom he spoke; "but I do not know, Andrew, how far these men's ambition may go. You cannot tell what has been taking place at our own court. If Gowrie is aspiring in one way, his brother Alexander is not less so in another. I will tell you what, Andrew," he continued: "there was a time last autumn when the king hurried away from his cabinet with Herries and John Hume, and took his road, as fast as he could go, towards the rooms where Alex Ruthven is lodged. I know not upon what information he acted; but I followed him to the foot of the stairs, and when I heard that the door above was bolted, and the king shook it till it was like to come down, I thought, Andrew----" he continued, dropping his voice, and pressing his hand tight upon his cousin's arm, "I thought that the next sound I should

hear would be the death cry of a Ruthven."

"No bad noise," said Andrew Ramsay, drily; "but you told me something of your suspicions by letter, John. How has this matter gone on since?"

"From bad to worse," answered the young man. "He went away for a while, and then returned; and since then he has been more daring than ever."

The conversation thus proceeded for about half an hour longer, when the clock struck one, and John Ramsay rose, saying, "Well, I will away to bed; but we shall meet to-morrow, before I depart for Edinburgh."

"If you go to-morrow I will ride with you," answered his cousin, "for I am bound thither too. We can talk farther by the way."

"So be it, then," answered John Ramsay; and with a few more words, to arrange their plans, they parted for the night, the younger man to sleep, after a short space given to agitated thought, the elder to meditate somewhat scornfully, though well pleased, upon the easy tool which passion renders the most impetuous and unruly, when duly and skilfully directed.

CHAPTER XXII.

I love not to leave Gowrie and Julia so long, and yet they are very happy without me. Doubtless they could do without Mr. Rhind either, as he sits there in the window of the old-fashioned inn, with its deep bay and its small lozenges of glass, and its heavy frame of lead and iron. Julia looks up at Gowrie, and smiles, and his eyes glance cheerfully. There must be some jest between them, light and happy, with none of the world's bitterness--the jest of two lovers' hearts. Would that I knew what it is; but the words are spoken in a whisper, for Mr. Rhind is there with his everlasting little volume bound in vellum, and I may as well leave them at Berwick, too, and go on before, to see what reception was preparing for them in a distant place.

I must convey the reader with me to the old royal palace of Falkland, without, however, giving any detailed account of a building, a much better description of which than any I can afford may be found in many an antiquarian record. Suffice it that it was large, roomy, and then in a high state of preservation. It was also surrounded by an extensive deer-park, called "The Wood of Falkland," which was perhaps its highest attraction in the eyes of King James VI., whose only virtue was the love of hunting.

The season, as every reader, whether skilled in woodcraft or not, must know, was not one in which St. Hubert permits the horned tenants of the forest to be chased by man, for it was as yet but the month of February. But that season of the year was a dull one for the Scottish monarch; and after being deprived of his favourite pastime, he sometimes found the exercise even of his "Kingcraft," as he termed the art of government, so tedious as to require relief, and the labours of learned dullness, in which at other times he indulged, very wearisome.

When this was the case, he would often retire for a day or two, either to Falkland or to Stirling, with a few chosen attendants or companions, to see how his "*beasties*" were going on, or rather to revive the memories of the sport in which he delighted, by the sight of gray woods in their winter bareness, and of the antlered objects of his pursuit stalking about familiarly through the glades at a period when they knew, by experience or tradition, they were free from the hostility of men and dogs. The king had that sort of tender admiration for the objects of his sanguinary pursuit, that strange mixture of affection and cruelty, which is not uncommon in the human tiger throughout the world. The libertine, with the creature of his pleasure, whom he chases but to destroy, affords merely a modification of the same selfishness, and no one could probably have entered into James's feelings more fully than good old Buffon himself, who begins his description of the stag with the kindly words, "Voici l'un de ces animaux innocents, doux et tranquilles, qui ne semblent être faits que pour embellir, animer la solitude des forêts, et occuper loin de nous les retraites paisibles de ces jardins de la nature;" and then he gives an account of the best and most approved means of tearing it to pieces.

However, it was in one of the alleys of the park or wood of Falkland that King James wandered on, in the latter end of February, 1600. Where he first entered the wood, the underwood was not very thick, and the sharp winter, just drawing to a close, had torn from the branches to which they clung many of the leaves which, like shipwrecked mariners, had held feebly on long after their brethren had been swept away. By his side, or rather half a step behind, was a young man, dressed, like the monarch himself, in Lincoln green, and some fifty paces further back was a well-armed attendant. The period at which the stags are dangerous had long passed, indeed; but still James was not usually ill pleased to have aid ever at hand in case of need, for he was accustomed

to say himself, "there are more vicious beasts in the world than harts and hinds." His pace was quick, though, as usual, shambling and irregular, and as he went he rolled his eyes about in every direction in search of some of the beasts of the chase.

"Whist, whist, Jock," he said at length, pausing, and pointing with his finger; "there's a fine fellow--an old stag, upon my life, as fat as the butterman's wife. De'il's in the beastie! he's casting his head gear already. Do you see, man, one side is as bare as my hand? We shall have an early summer and a hot one. Whenever the old stags, or the stags of ten, cast their horns before March, you may be sure there will be an early season. The young ones are always a bit later; but that's an old hart coming his ninth year. I'll warrant he's been down every morn to neighbour Yellowly's farm at the water, by the grease upon him. Let me catch you in the month of June, my man."

The king then went on to instruct his young companion in various parts of science connected with his favourite amusement, giving him all the French and Scotch and English terms for different proceedings in woodcraft, and for the qualities and distinctions of the deer.

The young man listened with all due submission and apparent attention, though, to say truth, he was somewhat impatient of the lecture, and thought that he understood the subject, practically at least, as well as the king himself. There was another source of impatience also in his bosom, for the truth was, he eagerly sought an opportunity of speaking upon a different topic; while the profound reverence for the kingly office, in which he had been educated, prevented him from introducing it himself, till the monarch's own words gave him some fair opening. He had watched his opportunity for weeks, but something had always intervened to prevent his executing his purpose; and now when he had fully expected to find the moment he sought, during the expedition to Falkland, it seemed likely to be snatched from him by James's long-winded dissertation upon hunting. He could almost have burst forth with some impatient exclamation as the king went on discussing and describing, and mingling his disquisitions with quaint scraps of Latin most strangely applied; but the opportunity was nearer than the young man thought.

"You see, Jock," said the king, "a young stag, or a stag entering ten, or even a stag of ten, may be forced and run and brought to bay easily enough; but an old stag is a wily beast, ever on his guard, and ready at every minute to give the dogs and the hunter the change. He knows well where his enemies lie, which way they will take, what they will do, and how to circumvent them."

"He must be very like your majesty, then," said the young man, with a low bow, adding, "at least, I hope so."

"Ha, man, what's that?" cried the king, looking round; but before John Ramsay could answer, the king had plunged into woodcraft again. "In the season when people cannot hunt," continued James, "he'll come out to the edge of the wood, or into the fields, and nibble the young corn. I've known one rout out an old wife's kail-yard; but as soon as the month of May begins, back goes the sleek fellow into the very heart of the woods and parks, and then you have to track him step by step, mark all his footprints, and sometimes in hot weather trace them contrariwise over the dry ground, in order to put the dogs on where the scent lies. Eh, man, he's a wary beast, and takes every means to hide his comings in and his goings out."

"So do some of your Majesty's enemies," said the young man, with peculiar emphasis; and James's attention was now fully caught.

"Ha! say you so, Jock?" cried the monarch, with a start. "There's something thou hast to say, lad--out with it, in God's name. You love your king well, I do believe. Come, tell the whole--keep farther back, Sanderson," he continued, raising his voice, and speaking to the man who followed. "Now, Jock, now, let's hear it all, and if you do your duty faithfully you have the king's favour."

"My duty I will do whether or no," answered the young man, bluntly. "I love your majesty too well to keep anything back from you, even should it make you think me indiscreet; and I know that your wisdom will soon see that which my poor wit cannot divine. I have had some doubts, as to whether I may not be doing wrong, in my own thoughts, to a noble gentleman; but if I tell you just what I have heard, which is my bounden duty, your majesty will soon see and judge which is the right of it all."

"That's a good lad--that's a good lad," repeated the king. "We will soon clear the matter up when we know the whole, and act according to judgment and reason. Kings were appointed of God, the judges of all things upon earth; but how should they judge if they do not hear? Now tell me, man, who it is you suspect. There are in every kingdom a great many fools who are always getting into mischief from want of wit, and a great many born devils always egging them on."

"I don't know that I've a right to say that I *suspect* the Earl of Gowrie," replied the young man; but the king instantly interrupted him, exclaiming, with a violent oath, "Why, what the de'il do you know about Gowrie? I had thought that all his tricks were known to myself alone--but what have you to say concerning him?"

"If your majesty knows all his proceedings," answered John Ramsay, "I have nought to say. The matter is in good hands."

"But how can you tell I know all about the matter, Gabie?" asked the king, impatiently. "Speak

out, man--speak out."

"Well, then, I would humbly ask your majesty," continued Ramsay, remembering the instructions he had received, "whether you are aware that during the whole time the earl was in Paris, he was in continual connexion with the English ambassador, Sir Henry Neville, seeing him every day, and that he only thought fit to wait upon your majesty's ambassador once?"

"Ay, did he so?" said James, musing. "He may find that he cannot lightly his own born sovereign without scathe. How got ye knowledge of this, man? You've no been in Paris yourself, unless you can be in two places at once."

"I had a cousin there at the time, your majesty, and he tells me that the thing was commonly remarked and talked about. Then I understand that her majesty, the Queen of England, showed somewhat more honour and grace to this Earl of Gowrie than one of your majesty's subjects should willingly have received."

"Ay, poor fellow, he couldn't help that," said the king, with a curious grin at his own affectation of candour. "If our good titty and aunt, Queen Elizabeth, like the other wild jade, Fortune, will thrust honours upon a man who does not want them, he must take them as they come. But what did she do that was worthy of mark?"

John Ramsay, in reply, recapitulated all that his cousin had told him; and, more from James's manner than any words that escaped him, judged the communication gave the monarch a slight uneasiness. The king, as was common with him when internally agitated, hurried his sort of limping pace into the thicker wood, pulling the sides of his breeches at the same time, and mumbling inward comments, of which not one word could be distinctly heard. Then sitting down on a broad stone bench, which stood at the side of the avenue, near a spot where a lateral alley branched off, he impatiently bade his companion go on, although the young man was already speaking as fast as he could.

"The only thing more I have heard, sire," said John Ramsay, who had by this time well-nigh finished his tale, "is that the earl was in constant communication, and that of a secret kind, with Sir Robert Cecil, the Earl of Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the Lord Cobham."

"The devil is in those fellows," said the king, abruptly. "They betray every one, first their own mistress, and then their own friend. They've softened all down to me; but I saw through them, lad, even before what you have told me. They could not blind my eyes so as to prevent my finding out that there was more under their fine speeches.--But you've got something else to say, Jock. I see it in your face, man.--Out with it!"

"It was only this, your majesty," replied the young man, "and I don't know, indeed, whether it is necessary to say it, for your wisdom needs no guidance; but the fact is, all the information I have received, comes from my cousin Newburn."

"None the worse for that, man, I dare say," said the king. "Why should not your cousin Newburn tell truth, as well as another, Jock Ramshackle?"

"I have thought, since I spoke with him, sire," answered Ramsay, "that he may be a little prejudiced, for he and the earl, it seems, are not on the best terms, one of the earl's men having nearly killed him in a dispute about a lady travelling under the earl's escort. Besides, my brother Dalhousie is a great friend of the earl's, and thinks very well of him."

"Tell your brother not to take his lot with him," said James, sharply. "He does not know what he mints at; and he'll bring himself to bad bread before he's done.--A lady, did you say? What lady might that be, I should like to know? Odds life! I trust he'll bring none of his Italian limmers here, or he'll have the kirk session on his back."

"They say she is a cousin of his own," said Ramsay, in a doubtful tone, "and that one of her relations in Italy dying, while the earl was there, committed her on his death bed to the earl's charge. They call her the Lady Julia Douglas."

"Whew!" cried the king, adding a long whistle, as if he were calling back a falcon. "So, my bonny bird, we shall get you at last. The Lady Julia Douglas! Why, this is the very lass, I'll pawn my ears, that Arran, poor body, was looking for so felly some eighteen years ago. Mayhap we shall hear something now; we shall get some inkling of all Morton's treasures which we could never lay hand on. This must be thought of quickly. We must have the lady in our own ward, Ramsay, for we are sair pressed for siller just now. I'll away to Edinburgh this very night, and see to this matter. Why, that man Morton had gathered together, what by scarting and what by nipping, enough to replenish the treasury of Scotland for a twelvemonth, and yet when he went to take the last kiss of the maiden of Halifax, he had not money enough in his pouch to pay the hangman. All that he had was forfeited to the crown, being attainted as a traitor; but he had either hidden all his gold away, or else the Italian lady and her father had carried it away with them, for we could never find so much as a crown piece, and I can tell you it sat ill upon my stomach and Arran's too. He was a feckless poor body, that Arran, or he'd have never let the old count and his daughter and the bairn get away. But we must watch for this good earl and the pretty lady, and we'll soon find out where the money is."

"Shall I set out at once, sir, with a party of the guard?" asked Ramsay, ever ready for action. "I'll arrest the earl the moment he sets foot in Scotland, if your majesty will but warrant me."

"Fie, now, lad. What a rash fool thou art!" said James, in a good-humoured tone. "No, no, boy. We must trust things that require to be done fair and softly to older and cooler heads than thine. There must be no violence, no show of force; but we must get the lady into our own ward cannily and quietly, and then deal with the earl afterwards, as he comports himself. I tell thee what, Jock," he continued, stretching out his hand, and pinching the young man's cheek, "I would not have all the wealth of the old regent Morton go to swell the riches of Gowrie for one half of Perthshire. They are too rich and powerful already, those Ruthvens; and I'll have no new Douglasses rising up in the land to outshine their king and beard him too. They used to call Dalkeith the lion's den, when Morton had it; but I'm not fond of such wild beasts, and these Ruthvens are a bit of the same breed. No, no; we'll take care of the lady, and provide for her marriage; but it shan't be to a Ruthven."

As the king spoke he rose, as if he were going to walk away, but the next moment he stopped, and turned round to his young companion, saying, "Now mind, Jock, what I'm going to bid you, and see that you obey. Hold your tongue about all that has passed between you and the king. Say not a word to any one, whatever you may see or hear; and above all things keep your hands, and your tongue too, off young Alex Ruthven, whom you are always bickering with, I'll take my own time, man; and depend upon it, if I want anything that requires a strong hand and a bold heart, and love and affection to a sovereign, I'll send for you, Jock; so you keep quiet and bide your time, as I shall bide mine. Kingcraft teaches a man patience, Jockie Ramshackle; but you'll need an awful quantity of drilling."

Thus saying, the king moved on along the avenue, till he came to the corner of the cross alley which I have mentioned, where he suddenly started and turned pale, on seeing a man, and that man a stranger, approaching with an easy, sauntering step, and within some five or six yards of him. With the impulse of courage, Ramsay, who was a little behind, placed himself at once at the king's side, although he could not but see there was no danger, for the stranger was quite unarmed; and James, at the same time, becoming conscious of that fact also, recovered his courage, and said, in a low tone, "Whist, man! wha the de'il is this, I wonder? Haud your tongue--he's going to speer something at us."

"I say, old gentleman," said the stranger, "I wish you would tell me my way out of this place, for I've lost myself, and cannot get back to the palace."

Now it is to be remarked, that James was not at this time an old gentleman, being then in his thirty-fourth year; but his hair was somewhat gray already, and the strange and awkward form of dress which he affected--quilted, loose, not always in very good repair, and here and there somewhat greasy--gave him the appearance of being at least twenty years older than he really was. Ramsay's cheek reddened at the man's familiar address to his sovereign; but James made him a sign to be quiet; and the stranger went on in the same cavalier tone, saying, "It's a long lane that has never a turning; but this has so many turnings, that it is as bad as the labyrinth of Didymus."

"Dædalus, you mean, young man," answered the king; "and you yourself make an ugly sort of Theseus, though I am not quite so frightful as the Minotaur."

"I never heard of that gentleman," answered the stranger; "but I dare say he was ugly enough. However, handsome is who handsome does; and if he behaved well in his capacity, no one could blame him for not being pretty. You cannot have more of a cat than its skin, or comb a monkey that has got no hair. However, I want very much to find my way out of this place, for like many another pretty piece of work that man gets into, it is easier in than out."

"I should like to know how you did get in," answered James, who was exceedingly amused. "You must have got over the wall, I think."

"Not I," answered the man; "I came round by the stables, and through the back court; but what signifies it to you how I got in?"

"It signifies very much," cried Ramsay, fiercely, for his blood had continued boiling during the whole conversation, at what he considered the man's insolence.

But James interposed, exclaiming, "Hout, lad, keep your breath to cool your porridge. How can the man tell that I am the head keeper? He's clearly a stranger here, by his tongue."

"Oh, if you are the head keeper, that makes all the difference," answered the other. "I know what belongs to parks as well as any one; and the head keeper is always a very reverend gentleman in my eyes. A man should never quarrel with his bread and butter; and I've often got a capital venison steak for being civil to the head keeper. So, sir, I'll tell you I got quite honestly in, as you can learn yourself, if you go back with me to the palace. I've brought a letter from my lord to his majesty the king, and as I've long had a great wish to see him, I told a lie, and said I was to deliver it myself; but the people at the palace told me that his majesty was busy in his cabinet on affairs of state."

"The lying loons!" muttered James, with a laugh.

"And so," continued the other, "I just put up my horse at the hostel, and walked through the gates into the park."

"And so you had a great desire to see the king, had you?" said James. "What might that be for? Why should you want to see him more than any other man?"

"For three reasons," answered the other; "because they say he is as wise as King Solomon; because he's fond of proverbs; and because he's the greatest hunter upon earth since Nimrod."

James chuckled, till his quilted doublet shook; and then he asked, "Who told you all this?"

"Why, my lord, the Earl of Gowrie," answered the man; and the king instantly turned a sharp and meaning glance to Ramsay's countenance.

"And so he told you," he said, "that the king was as wise as Solomon? Faith, my man, though I love the king, who is my master, as well as any man in the realm can love him, yet I think your lord was a little bit mistaken to tell you so."

"He didn't exactly tell me so," answered Austin Jute, whom the reader has already discovered, "but he told others so within my hearing."

"Then he followed the counsel of King Solomon himself," answered James; "and he must be a wise man, too. He spoke not ill of princes, I mean, otherwise would the birds of the air have carried the matter."

"Now, Heaven forbid that he should speak ill of his own born sovereign," answered Austin Jute, "or think ill of him either; but I pray you, good sir, without more conference, tell me my way out, for I fear that the king may go forth; and I have got to ride far to-night."

"What, you ride toward Berwick by the gloaming, I'se warrant?" said James.

"No, not so," replied Austin Jute. "I'm away across the country to Carlisle, and hope to meet my lord just as he crosses the border."

"Ay, comes he by Carlisle?" said the king; "but it's a wild country thereabout, my man. Aren't you afraid to ride without any arms?"

As he spoke, he moved down the avenue, back towards the palace; and Austin Jute followed, saying, "I have got sword and buckler at the hostel, and know how to use them at a pinch, I trust. He who bides a blow may spare a buffet; but you see, sir, I thought it was not right for a man of my condition to approach the king's palace with arms on my back, so I left all those things at the hostel till I had delivered the letter.--Now there goes a fine stag, upon my life! I would fain be as near him some fine summer's day, with a bow in my hand, and liberty to shoot."

"I should like to see thee right well," said the king; "and if thou comest here to me at Falkland some summer day, thou shalt have leave and licence to pick out three fat bucks, and kill them, if thou canst, with three arrows, but the first shaft that fails, so ceases thine archery."

"Agreed, agreed," cried Austin Jute, tossing up his cap in the air, and catching it again. "Thank thee, master keeper. If I pick thee not out some fine venison, or if I miss one buck, say there is no archer left in Lincolnshire; and thou shalt set up the horns over thy door, and give a pasty to the poor men of the village, that once in their lives they may taste king's meat."

"Soul and body! and so I will," cried the king, taking part in his enthusiasm; "and thou shalt have two crowns into the bargain, for each buck thou killest."

"Two crowns!" cried Austin Jute, taking a step back, and gazing at his companion. "That's good pay, master keeper, considering that the umbels are my own by old forest law."

"Well, well," said the king, "'twas a rash promise; but I like to see a good shaft shot as well as any man--don't look round, lad, for I'm taking thee straight to the palace--there you see the windows. Never mind that man; he's only one of the under keepers."

And as they passed the attendant, who had followed the king in his walk, the man dropped behind, and took up his station at the same distance as before.

"I've a notion," said Austin Jute, with his cap in his hand, "that eagles would be taken for rooks by foolish men, if they hid themselves in rooks' feathers."

"So thou hast brought a letter from the Earl of Gowrie," said James, without noticing the quaint observation, though it sufficiently indicated that his real rank was now suspected. "Well, he is a right loyal and well disposed young lord, I have heard. Have you got the letter with you?"

"It is here, sir," answered Austin Jute, producing it.

"Let me see it, let me see it," said the king.

The man hesitated for a moment, and then dropped upon his knee, saying, "I beseech you, sir,

to pardon me; but I have strange doubts I must have offended--unwittingly, as you will well believe--if you be really, as I now think, the king's majesty. But your attendants assured me confidently that you were busy in your cabinet on matters of great moment; otherwise I should never have ventured into your royal park."

"God's blessing on the vermin!" said the king, "for they have made me a merry minute or two. Give me the letter, man. I am the king; and for your mistakes you have our grace and pardon, for a dusty doublet may well cheat a man of no great conveyance."

Thus saying, he opened the letter and read. The tenour was as follows:

"Please your Majesty,

"If the bestowing of great benefits should move the receivers thereof to be thankful to the givers, I have many extraordinary occasions to be thankful to your Majesty; not only being favoured with the benefit of your Majesty's good countenance at all times myself, but also, that it hath pleased your Majesty to advance my brother and my sister to great grace at your royal court. Being anxious to give some more certain sign and vive testimony to your Majesty of my devotion to your royal person, I am now hastening to cast myself at your feet, in the hope that it may please you to command me in anything whereby your Majesty may have a proof of my prompt and faithful obedience in all things that may tend to your Majesty's satisfaction, together with the weal and prosperity of the realm.

"In the meantime I repose myself still in your Majesty's constant favour, till God grants that I shall see your Majesty in so good a state as I wish, which will give me the greatest contentment of all.

"So earnestly craving Heaven to bless your Majesty with all felicity and satisfaction in health, and with an increase of many prosperous days, I kiss most devoutly your Majesty's hands.

"Your Majesty's most humble subject, and obedient servant in all devotion,"

"GOWRIE."

"A right loyal and faithful letter," said the king. "Now walk straight forward into the house, my friend. Fill thy stomach at the larder. Get thee a good cup of wine at the buttery, and away with thee at once, to tell thy lord that the king is well pleased at his return, and waits impatiently to consult with him and other good lords upon many things concerning the good of the state. Tell him, however, that he will not find us here at our palace at Falkland, but at our poor house in Edinburgh--which, if he have any grace left," he added, in a low voice to Ramsay, "he will not like to walk about so well. Bid him make haste and come to us straight, for we are anxious for his presence, and desirous to show him favour.--Away with you, my man!"

The king waited till Austin Jute had taken somewhat more than a hundred paces along the avenue, and then said in a low voice, to Ramsay, "This earl is a false loon, Jock. See here what he says--that he is willing to show prompt obedience in all things that may tend to our satisfaction, together with the weal and prosperity of the realm. That's just their hypocritical talk when they intend to play the traitor. They always find something which is required for the weal and benefit of the realm, which may thwart their own natural prince, whom God appointed to rule over them, and made his vicegerent upon earth. He'd never have put in these words, Jock, if he were not minded to do all he can to cross us. A dour divot, just like all those Ruthvens. I can smell him out as well as my brack Barleycorn can smell the foot of one of those beasties."

"I hope your majesty will let him feel that it is so," said Ramsay, "and teach him that he cannot cross his king with impunity."

"No, no, lad. I shall handle him after my own way," said the king. "Have you never seen a bairn stroking bawdrans up the wrong way? So I'll just cross the grain with him in all kingly courtesy, then we shall soon see whether he turns dorty upon us, and then will be the time to wind off the pirl. But come along, Jockie, it's time that we should get home, for I must see to this lassy he's got with him. It may be she, I think--it may not; but if it be, it's high time to care for her."

Thus saying, the king walked on hastily, and, by a small side-door, entered the palace. Immediately after, some of his attendants were called to his presence, and questioned regarding the account which Austin Jute had given of himself. All they could tell, however, was that he had brought a letter from the Earl of Gowrie, and had said that he had been to Holyrood, but finding the king absent at Falkland, had come on direct. On this James made no comment, but, somewhat to the surprise of his attendants, ordered everything to be prepared for immediate departure for Edinburgh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Austin Jute's horse was a strong one, but it was hardly strong enough for his purpose. Austin Jute's own frame was hardened by much exercise, but it was barely firm enough to endure what he imposed upon it. He left the presence of the king with a very quiet though a quick step; and had the eye of James traced him along the avenue, he would have seen that easy, jaunty, somewhat self-satisfied air, which was natural to him--and is to most men who have always a proverb under their hand for a walking-stick--not in the least diminished by his late interview. But, alas! that which was natural to him at other times was now assumed. He would not have drooped a feather at that moment for the world. Even when he had reached the little hostel or inn, which had been set up as near the gates of the palace as decency permitted, and to say truth, by the connivance of the king's comptroller, somewhat nearer than in strictness it should have been, he maintained his gay and quite-at-ease demeanour: laughed with the good man of the house, eat something which had been prepared for him during his absence, and seemed to be trifling away his time, when suddenly a large clock, which then graced the front of the palace, struck one, and Austin started up with a look of surprise.

"Gads, my life!" he exclaimed, "is that one o'clock?"

"Oo, ay," replied the host, "that's the knock's just chappit ane."

"Then I'm an hour behind," cried Austin; and paying his score with due attention, he mounted and rode away, merely asking, in a common-place tone, which was his shortest road towards Carlisle.

His movements were all reported in the palace before half an hour was over; but when it was found that he had made inquiries about the Carlisle road, no further questions were put. But Austin Jute did not long continue on the road he first took. He had learned by some experience in his various travels to foil pursuit, even in countries that he did not know; and he was soon riding on a bridle path towards Lesslie, going on at a quick but not a violent pace, anxious to advance as rapidly as possible, but not to knock up his beast before he reached his journey's end.

To all human creatures whom he met on the road, to innkeepers, and even inn-keepers' daughters, he was uncommonly taciturn; but with his horse he held long conversations, which seemed to comfort the poor animal greatly.

"Well, you got over that last mile bravely, Sorrel," he would say; "a good heart's worth a peck of provender. But a peck you shall have at the very next village. If we cannot get oats we can get meal, that's one comfort, in Scotland. Thank Heaven, you are no way dainty, and I dare say would drink a stoup of Bordeaux wine if we could find it. Perhaps we may, too, at the next town. We never know where good luck lies."

He kept his word, and the horse justified his good opinion; for the wine was procured, and the beast drank it, seeming as much revived thereby as if wine were made to cheer the heart of beast as well as man.

On, on, the pair went, however; and as they passed over one of those wild moors, neither then nor now unfrequent in the land of cakes, Austin began to tell the good stout horse all about his interview with King James, in the full confidence he would never repeat it.

"I think I managed that right well, Sorrel," he said. "The covetous thief never dreamt that I knew him all the time, and had heard every word he said for a long while before. By cock and pie, if he had, I should have had both my ears slit, I'll warrant; the right ear for eaves-dropping, and the left for calling him 'old gentleman.'--You answer never a word, Sorrel. That's poor encouragement for a man to tell a merry tale. If thou wouldst but give a horse-laugh or anything, I would say thou art a witty beast and understandest a joke. But thou art weary, poor fellow," he added, patting the horse's neck, "and yet thou must go many a mile further ere morning. A merciful man is merciful to his beast; but I must not be merciful to thee, or my dear lord and lady may suffer, and thou wouldst not like that, Sorrel. Well, well, take the hill easily, then; I will get off and walk by thy side. Here's a pool of water, thou shalt have a drink."

In this sort went he on; and it is not too much to say, that by such cheerful conversation and a great number of little attentions, he kept up both his own spirit and the horse's.

It is no slight distance from Falkland to Berwick, take it which way one will; but when the distance was aggravated by having to cross the Firth of Forth, an operation disagreeable both to man and beast, it may easily be conceived that Austin's expectation of reaching Berwick before the next morning was a bold one. His journey also had been increased by the detour he had made at first setting out, and by a ride of five-and-twenty miles or more in the morning. He reached Kinghorn, however, about half-past three; and there, after sundry inquiries as to his best course, hired one of those large and excellent boats for which the place was famous, to put him over to Prestonpans. The wind was low but favourable, the sea calm, and neither Austin nor his horse

suffered so much as might have been expected; but still, the poor animal showed no great inclination to go farther forward that night. He eat his provender, however, with a good appetite, that surest sign of a horse not being near the foundering stage; and after an hour and a half's rest, the traveller set out once more by the light of the stars. Sorrel bore up well to Haddington, but between that place and Dunbar, his pace grew slower and more slow, till at length it fell into a walk.

"Well, I will not hurry thee, Sorrel," said Austin, "thou hast gone good sixty miles to-day, besides two ferries, and if we get to Dunbar 'tis but thirty more to Berwick. It cannot be eight o'clock yet, and thou shalt have some hours' rest."

Thus saying, he dismounted, and walked by the beast's side for the next five miles, till the sound of the ocean beating with a heavy murmur on the shore showed him that the town of Dunbar was near; and in a moment after he saw a light here and a light there, at no great distance before him. Mounting his horse, he rode quietly in, and stopped a sober citizen, who, with a lantern in his hand, was taking his way through the unlighted streets.

In answer to his inquiry for the best inn, the good man, as usual, directed him "straight on," adding the invariable "you cannot miss it."

He was so far right, however, that Austin did not miss it, and riding into the open yard, was soon in possession of the landlord and his myrmidons.

"Ae, ye've a tired beast there," said the good man, "and we must find a stall for him, though we've more than we can well lodge already; for the great Earl of Gowrie came in an hour or two ago with all his people."

"No, not with all of them," answered Austin Jute, "for I am one; and I hope and trust that the earl has not gone to bed yet, for I have kind greetings to him from the king's majesty, which I ought to give as soon as may be."

"In bed!" cried the landlord. "Fie! His supper's just put on, and the auld man has hardly finished his thanks yet for the good meat."

"If that's the case I'll let him have his meal in peace," answered Austin, "and after I have seen to poor Sorrel, you shall take me where the other servants are, that I may have some meat too; for, to say sooth, I've had but one cup of bad wine and a morsel since daylight."

"That is the way servants treat their lords," thought the host; "here is this man has a message even from the king himself, and he must first fill his beast's stomach, and then his own before he delivers it."

But he did good Austin Jute injustice, for without a strong motive he would have gone fasting to bed, rather than have provided for his own wants--whatever he might have done for his horse's--before he fulfilled his duty to his master. But, to say truth, he had a disinclination to the presence of Mr. Rhind when his tale was to be told, and having, with that acuteness which the lower orders exercise more frequently upon the higher than the higher imagine, acquired a thorough knowledge not only of Mr. Rhind's character but of all his little habits, he calculated very accurately what would be his proceedings. "He has had a long ride," thought Austin; "he will eat a good supper; he will drink a good cup of wine; and then he will go to bed directly. I must spend my time as best I may till then, and when the coast is clear, go in and tell my tale. It must be a long one."

"Don't you say a word of my arrival, good host," he continued, perhaps gathering from the landlord's countenance what was passing in his mind, and "fooling him to the top of his bent." "Servants must feed, you know, as well as their masters, and if they know I'm here, I may be sent for, and kept an hour before I get a bit of meat and a crust of bread between my grinders."

"Well, well," said the host, with a sigh; and after Austin had seen the corn duly poured out under Sorrel's nose, he was led into the inn kitchen, where he was at once received with such a shout of gratulation by his fellows, as to show the host that his new guest was a favourite with his equals, whatever he might be with his superiors.

Austin eat his supper in peace and merriment, jesting gaily with all around him, but still carrying on a course of under-thought in his own mind till his meat was finished, and then the landlord thought fit to hint that it might be as well for him to deliver his message, hoping perchance to hear the terms thereof; and the words of a king were great in the eyes of a Scottish host in those days.

"Your lord has all but done, I can tell you, my man," he said.

"Ay, all but and well nigh," said Austin; "has the old gentleman gone to bed yet? Supper is not over till he's gone, I think."

"No, he's not gone yet," answered the host, "but he's just dawdling over some nuts."

"Well, then, he'll entertain my lord till I've taken another cup," replied Austin Jute; and he set

himself to work again to make his companions laugh, with an affectation of insolence he did not really feel.

A minute or two after, however, the landlord returned, saying, "The old gentleman's gone now--and I'm thinking you had better not let your lord know how long you've been here."

"Oh dear, yes, I shall," replied the servant, starting up at once. "I never hide anything from him, Master Host, whatever you may think;" and away he went, without pause or hesitation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The supper had been gay and cheerful, the materials better than might have been expected in a small country inn of Scotland at the beginning of the seventeenth century; and Julia and Gowrie were alone once more, for Mr. Rhind had now become quite accustomed to his position, and forgetting all his sage decorums, consulted little but his own ease. The night was cold and clear, the fire in the large open chimney blazed bright and cheerfully, and a gay and happy sensation, as if the presentiment of coming joy, was in the heart both of the lady and of her lover. When they crossed the border, indeed, and re-entered the native land of both, their feelings had been different; a sort of dread had come upon Julia's mind--that kind of oppressive sensation which often overpowers us when some great fact, to which we have long looked forward, is accomplished, deciding our destiny for ever, and yet leaving the results hidden in darkness till they are evolved by time. When Gowrie had said, "Here we are, in Scotland," the land of her fathers, where they had ruled, and bled, and suffered--the land where her own fate was to be worked out; where the brightest happiness which the wildest flight of her young fancy could reach, or the deepest grief which a fearful heart could portray, was to be enjoyed or endured; an overpowering impression of great things, past and to come, fell upon her for an instant, and she could hardly sit her horse.

The feelings of Gowrie were somewhat similar. After a long absence, he, too, was returning to his native land. With him, too, there was much that was painful in the history of the past. In this land his father had perished on the scaffold; from it that father's father had fled an exile to linger out a few short years of sickness in a foreign country; while many and many a relation and friend had here wetted the scaffold with their blood. What was before himself? he asked; and as he crossed the frontier, he strove to cast his eye forward, as if to penetrate the dark and heavy veil which hides the future of all mortal fate: nor did he do so without dread.

Such feelings, however, had passed away. The morning had been clear, though cold. The scenes through which they passed were fair enough, and there was that blue freshness in the hues of the bright wintry landscape which compensates, in some degree, for the warmer colouring of the summer. All had gone well, too, on the road. Nothing had occurred to harass or disturb. The delicate complexion of the beautiful girl, nurtured under a softer sky, had acquired a brighter glow in the bracing influence of the northern air, and she looked lovelier than ever in Gowrie's eyes; while, as she turned a look to him, he seemed to ride with that prouder air which one ever feels inclined to assume when, after a long absence, we again tread the land of our birth and of our love.

Thus, by the time they reached the inn for the night, all dark fancies had been swept away; and now they sat with their feet to the bright lire, and with their hearts overflowing with those words of love which had been repressed during the day by the presence of another.

Austin Jute, Austin Jute, stay where you are for an hour! Break not yet the spell of happy dreams--cloud not yet the gleam of wintry sunshine. Let no shadow cross their path!

But it must not be. There was a tap at the door, and Lord Gowrie raised his head, and looked round with some surprise, saying, "Come in."

"I have ventured to intrude upon you, my lord," said Austin Jute, "having a message from his majesty, the king----"

At that moment he was followed into the room by the good host, who at once began to bustle with cups and platters; but Gowrie turned, saying, as he saw his servant stop suddenly, "You can leave those things, Master Fairbairn. I will send for you when I want them removed."

The man retired slowly and ill pleased, and Gowrie made a sign to Austin to go on; but the man paused for an instant, and then approached the door, saying, in a low voice, "By your leave, my good lord, I will see that there be no eaves-droppers."

There was no one at the back of the door; but the light that streamed out shone upon the figure of the landlord at the end of the passage. Austin stood for a moment and stared at him with

a full, determined, pertinacious gaze, till the man, somewhat disconcerted, walked slowly and sulkily down the stairs.

Then returning close to his lord's chair, and shutting the door behind him, Austin said, "I have a great deal to tell you, my lord, and have made haste to get back."

"The king's message first, good Austin. What said his majesty?"

"Oh, fine things, my lord," answered Austin Jute. "It's a bad mercer's where there's no silk, and a poor court where there are no courtesies. The king was full of delectable speeches upon your lordship's graces and fine qualities; and he bids you hasten on to his presence with all speed, as he wishes to consult you upon many things."

"What, then, you saw his majesty in person?" said Gowrie.

"Ay, did I," answered Austin Jute, "and heard him, too, and that before he knew it. Thus I had the sauce to my salmon ready made--that is to say, the interpretation of his majesty's speeches before they were spoken."

"Explain, explain," said Gowrie, somewhat eagerly. "I trust that thou hast committed no new imprudence, Austin?"

"Oh no, my good lord," answered the man. "I never commit any imprudences on your account: it is only on my own I venture. I would not play at pitch and toss with your fortunes as I do with mine for half your lordship's estate. But the matter is this: I went to Edinburgh as you told me, but at the palace--Holyrood, as they call it--I found that the king had gone the day before to another place called Falkland, and making myself familiar with the porter, I heard all about it, as how King James V. had died there----But that as nothing to do with the matter; so on with my tale. Well, this morning early, I set off for Falkland with the letter, taking----"

"This morning early?" said Gowrie. "Thou hast had a long journey for a winter's day----Stay, stay, my Julia. This may be news for you also."

"It is, indeed, my lord," answered Austin Jute, with a bow to the lady; "and I have, as your lordship said, had a long journey, for I took my way round that my horse and myself might have as little water as possible. Well, I got to Falkland about ten o'clock, and a fine place it is, better than Eltham a great deal. When I got there, I left my horse and my sword at the inn, brushed the dust off my jerkin, and went away to the palace. Well, I asked to see the king."

"Asked to see the king!" exclaimed Gowrie, almost angry; "in Heaven's name, man, what were you thinking of! Do you suppose that the king sees every servant who brings a letter of compliment from a gentleman of his court? You should have given it to an usher, or some other officer."

"Upon my life, my lord, I know not what possessed me," answered Austin Jute, "unless, indeed, it was that the porter at Holyrood told me the king had got a gentleman of the name of Ramsay with him, and the name of our friend in Paris was Ramsay too. So I wanted to see what was going on--I always want to know what is going on. However, the people at the palace told me that the king was very busy in his cabinet, transacting affairs of state. I answered, I would wait his majesty's pleasure, or come back again in an hour. Thereat the men laughed, which was not very civil, and told me I had better come back. Taking them at their word, I left the door, and was going back to the inn, when seeing some horses led about near one corner of the building, I concluded that there must lie the stable, and always having a love for horses, I went away thither to see if there was anything worth looking at. I found nobody there; but saw a door open, with a view into a park beyond, so I judged I might as well take a walk."

"Upon my life, I wonder thou hast come back with thine ears on," said Gowrie.

"One is born with luck, though years bring learning," replied Austin Jute; "and luck befriended me, my lord, all the way through. First I came to a garden with some fine trees in it. I did not know there were any such in Scotland; and then I walked across a wild piece of ground towards a thick wood I saw some way off, about a third of a mile or so. Well, it was a mighty pleasant wood, with a great many of the brown leaves still hanging upon the underwood, and alleys and avenues cut very nicely. I wandered here and I wandered there, till at last, when I wanted to get out, I could not find the way; and suddenly, just as I was going out of one alley into another, I heard two people speaking, and I stopped----"

"To eavesdrop," said Gowrie, with a glowing cheek; "for shame of yourself, sir!"

"Well, it is a bad habit, my lord," said Austin; "but all servants have it; and in this instance it is lucky I gave way to it."

"Tell me nothing about it," said Gowrie. "I will not have it said----"

"My lord, you must hear," replied the man, firmly. "If you drive your dagger into me the next minute, you shall hear what I have to say, for this dear lady's safety and your own, and the happiness of both, depend upon it. If people will take double ways with you, you must take double

ways with them; and I tell you the king is putting on a fair face to you, but intends you ill."

Julia dropped her head upon her hand, with a cheek which had lost the rose; and Gowrie, after a pause, said, "If such be the case, speak on. I must not refuse intelligence that may affect her."

"It's about her almost altogether, my lord," replied Austin Jute, "for there was a great deal had gone before, which I did not hear. However, I know that what seemed the younger voice said, 'If your majesty will give me a warrant I will apprehend the earl as he comes.' Now mind, my lord, I can't give you the exact words all through, but I'll give you their meaning. Well, when this voice had spoken, a fat thick voice answered, like that of a man with plums in his mouth; and it called the other a fool, and said he didn't understand policy, and a great deal more, and that he would deal fair and softly with your lordship till he had got occasion against you--I should have told you that this wasn't the first thing I heard, because it has all got mixed up in my head together; but I heard the young one say, 'They call her the Lady Julia Douglas,' which showed me it was you they were talking of, and my lady here; and besides, one of them said something about hating those Ruthvens."

"Make your tale short--make your tale short," said the earl. "What more said the king about the lady? As for myself, I will take care he shall have no occasion against me."

"Why, he said, my lord, that the lady and her mother had carried off from Scotland all the treasures of a gentleman he called Morton, who had been attainted for treason."

"Alas! alas!" said Julia, "I've often heard my grandfather say that we fled with little more than would carry us to Italy."

"What more--what more?" demanded the earl; and Austin Jute proceeded to give very accurately the substance of all that had been said by the king and Ramsay during the latter part of their conversation.

"In his ward!" exclaimed Gowrie. "She shall never be in his ward, if I can help it. No, no, my Julia. Your father's wealth was his ruin, for to seize it was the object of those who destroyed him. What he did with it has never been discovered; and now, fancying that you must either possess it or know where it is concealed, this avaricious king of ours would fain get you into his power. Heaven only knows what then might happen. But that shall never be!--What more said he, Austin?"

"Nay, not much, my good lord, but what he did say was not sweet;" and then, after detailing the rest, he added, "At those words I heard them get up, and begin to walk along, crushing the crisp leaves under their feet. So I went on and met them."

"You were mad," cried Gowrie.

"Oh no, my lord, never wiser," answered Austin Jute. "I put on a gay sort of sauntering air, and called out to the king as soon as I saw him, 'Halloo, old gentleman! I wish you would show me how to get out, for I have lost my way.' The young man looked as if he would have cracked my skull, but the old one took it as a good joke."

Moved as he was, Gowrie could not forbear from smiling faintly. "And how did all this end?" he asked.

"Why, sir, I treated him with no sort of ceremony for some time," said Austin Jute; "talked with him familiarly about the king, and for fear of getting you into a scrape, owned it was a lie that I had told at the palace about having orders to deliver your letter to the king himself, and said that I wanted very much to see the king, because I had heard from you he was as wise as Solomon, and the greatest hunter upon earth. We chatted very friendly for some time, I can tell you; and then he thought fit to let out that he was the king, never dreaming, I will answer for it, that I knew it quite well all the time. When he had got your letter, nothing could be more civil or complimentary than his majesty was. He bade you hasten your coming, as I told you before, and sought to know which road you took, so I told him by Carlisle, just to give your lordship time. If it does not suit you to bear me out, you can just say that it was a lie of mine, or a mistake, or anything you please. My ears are quite at your lordship's disposal."

"No," said Gowrie, thoughtfully--"no. Something must be determined at once. Go out into the passage, Austin, and see that nobody comes near.--No eaves-dropping, remember!"

"Upon my honour, my lord," replied the man, and took his departure.

"Oh, Gowrie, what is to be done?" exclaimed Julia.

Gowrie pressed her to his breast with feelings difficult to describe. "In truth, love, I hardly know," he said. "I must think calmly for a moment."

"Had I not better return at once to England," she asked, "and remain there till you can satisfy the king that I know nothing of this coveted wealth, or till we can be united?"

Gowrie walked up and down the room for a minute, strongly tempted, but he did not yield.

"No, love, no," he said; "if you go, I must go too. I will not leave you unprotected in another land; and, moreover, it might be dangerous even to myself. Listen, dearest Julia;" and seating himself beside her, he laid his hand upon hers, saying, "While we were in London, some subtle dark words were dropped by the ministers of Elizabeth, as to my having the power of being of great service to her majesty in my native land. I gave no encouragement to such conversation, and it ceased; but if she had you in her power, might not she try to use the strong love which she knows I bear you, to drive me to acts contrary to my duty and my allegiance? Trust you with her, I dare not. Trust you in James's hands I will not; for I doubt him, Julia--I doubt him much. He prides himself on dissembling; and his acts all show that he aims at absolute power. What is to be done, is the question, and only two courses seem open to us--either for you to give me your hand at once, when Gowrie's arm will find means to protect Gowrie's wife.--Nay, look not so sad; I know your scruples, dear one, and there is another course to choose. We have in this country of Scotland a district, as you know, called the Highlands, where law is little known, and to which the king's power can hardly be said to extend. Just upon the borders of that district, I have a mountain castle called Trochrie, where, I think, beyond all doubt, you would be in greater safety than in England. At all events, it would require an army to bring you forth; and I do not believe that James would think fit to do any violent act. It may be as well, however, that you should remain there in secret till I can prove to the king that neither his own avarice, nor the greediness of his favourites, would be served by taking you from me. The castle shall be well prepared for defence, however; and with justice on my side, and the good friends I have, I could hold out against him for ever. I will do no disloyal act myself, but I will endure no tyranny."

"Oh, let me thither," cried Julia, with a bright smile of hope coming upon her face again. "I will keep myself so carefully that he shall never dream that I am there. I will take exercise in the early morning, or in the evening twilight, so that people shall fancy I am a spirit; and the rest of the day I will pass my time in my lonely tower with my two maidens, like some enchanted lady that we read of in those books of magic chivalry."

"It is very hard to doom you to such a fate, my Julia--to send such a flower as you to bloom in such a desolate wilderness."

"Hard!" said Julia, enthusiastically--"hard, when it is for you, Gowrie! Have I not been accustomed to solitude too? It will but be living over again, for a short time, amidst the beautiful scenes of nature, with free fresh air and changing skies around me, the same life that I led so long in Padua, amongst close houses in a dull town. And then, perhaps," she added, with a smile, "Gowrie may sometimes steal away from courts to see me; and when I think the time of his coming draws nigh, what joy it will be to look out from some high window of the castle, over moor and fell, to see if I can perceive my dear knight coming across the distant plain."

"It is a fair picture you have drawn, dear girl, of a less fair reality," answered Gowrie; "but I will try, dear girl, to make it as bright for you as may be. Often, often will I come to see you, till the dear hour when I can call you my own. And I will bring some of my sweet sisters, too, to cheer you. We will store the old castle with pleasant books and instruments of music; and when I come you shall sing me the songs of the sweet south, till all darker things are forgotten. Still, still I could hardly consent to your plunging into such a scene, were not the bright season coming when our Highlands look the fairest, when the yellow broom and the purple heath succeed each other on the hills, and the bright sunshine softens the ruggedness of the scene. During the six long months which must elapse ere, according to our promise, you can give me your hand, the year still goes on brightening for us in Scotland. In truth, I see no other course we can pursue."

"Nor I," she said, eagerly. "Let me set out to-morrow early, Gowrie; and in the meantime you hasten back across the border again, take the way round by Carlisle, as the man said you were coming by that road, and so lull the king's suspicions, if he entertains any."

"But you cannot go alone, my Julia," answered her lover. "That will never do. Stay; my mother is at Dirleton with my young brothers. I have thought of a plan that will answer. You shall go thither under the escort of good Austin Jute and my servant David Drummond. She can then forward you on your way to Trochrie with Austin and some of her own people. Part of the way were better made by sea, for the waves will leave no trace of your passing, and the weather is now fair. To Dirleton you can go to-morrow, and on the following day proceed; but alas! I must not go with you, I fear."

Julia bent her head a little, gazing on the ground, and then said, in a low voice, "Will she receive me willingly, Gowrie?"

"As her own child," replied Gowrie, warmly; "I will answer for it, love."

"Though I am a stranger, an intruder, one who even now is bringing danger on her beloved son!" said Julia, almost sadly.

"You know not Dorothea Stuart," answered Gowrie. "Were the pursuers close upon your steps, my love, were every danger and misfortune following you close, it would only render you dearer to her--it would only make her whole soul rise to serve you. However, I will write to her this very night, telling her all I wish, and the reasons thereof. You shall carry the letter with you; and if everything is not performed as zealously and punctually as if I were there myself, my mother is changed indeed, and has lost all love for me. Now, dearest Julia, retire to rest; you shall be

roused in time, and everything shall be prepared for your departure: alas! that I must add, for our parting, too; but it shall not be a long one, dear girl. Whenever occasion serves that I can get away without observation, I will be on the way to Trochrie, for my heart will lie buried there with you, and even in the midst of crowds I shall be solitary."

Julia could not answer, for her heart was too full--it was like a cup brimming over, and the least thing that shook her would have spilt the precious drops within. One silent pressure of the hand, and they parted for the night; but when she was gone, Gowrie stood and mused with sad and painful thoughts, and ere she sought her pillow she bent her head and wept.

CHAPTER XXV.

There was a fine old house, as we should call it now, but which was then in great part a modern one, although the beating and buffeting of angry winds, and the dark breath of the storm, had blackened it ere more than sixty years had passed since the foundation-stone was laid. It was built in a style of which there are very few specimens in England, though several in France; but that is easily accounted for, inasmuch as during the greater portion of the short period assigned to that particular style, contentions of one kind or another had existed between the court of London and that of Paris, and the communication between England and Italy was extremely limited. Very different had been the case with Scotland, the connexion between which country and France had been cemented by many ties, while an infinite number of the young noblemen of the north completed their education either at Paris or at one of the universities of Italy. The Tudor architecture in churches is well known; and although there is something in the breast of every man of taste which tells him that there is a want of purity of conception and grandeur of design therein, yet it is very beautiful in its kind. So much, however, can hardly be said in favour of the social architecture of the period; and perhaps less still, in point of really good taste, were the pretensions of that Italian style, in which one front of Dirleton House was constructed. The windows were large and many, divided by stone mullions, and having pilasters between, light and airy, but of no order under the sun, and panels covered with rich and fantastic arabesques.

The whole had an air of lightness and richness, notwithstanding its incongruous and unmeaning details; but at the hour of which I speak, and at which a little cavalcade consisting of seven horses approached the front, nothing could be seen of the elaborate ornaments, and the whole building lay in the midst of the grey woods that surrounded it, a large and sombre pile of building, with a cheerful light streaming through two or three of the casements. Weary with travelling, anxious and apprehensive, Julia looked up to Dirleton House with a cold feeling of dread and gloom. Vain had been Gowrie's assurances of a kind reception: she felt that she was a wanderer--a fugitive, claiming protection and aid, even to their own peril, from persons on whom she had no claim, and who were strangers to her in all the kindly relations of the heart. Her timidity became more and more great as she approached the principal entrance of the house, which projected before the rest, with a sort of terrace and flight of steps of its own. Fancy was very busy, and showed her the strange looks with which she would be at first received, the stately lady of royal race, the two or three tall and lordly striplings, her sons, all gazing upon her as a stranger, and wondering what brought her there.

"I will send in the letter first," she thought; "they will then know who I am, at least; and I shall soon see by my reception whether I am a welcome guest or not. It will be bad enough at the best---Here, Austin," she said, when, having ridden up to the terrace by one of the two slopes at the sides, the man sprang to hold her rein, and assist her to dismount,--"here, Austin, take this letter in. Deliver it into the Countess of Gowrie's own hand, and tell her that I wait her pleasure without."

The man looked surprised, but took the letter, and approached the great door, by the side of which hung an immense massive iron ring, notched all over the inner side, with a small iron bar beside it suspended from a chain, Austin gazed at this strange-looking instrument by the faint light, and felt it with his hand, but could make nothing of it. He was looking for some other means of making their presence known within, when the other servant, David Drummond, a heavy, sinister-looking man, started forward, and taking hold of the ring, soon produced a sound, by running the iron bar over the notches in the inside, sufficient to call two or three servants to the door.

Austin was immediately admitted, and disappeared from Julia's sight, while the other servant shook hands with an old friend, one of the domestics of the countess, and seemed to explain who the fair guest was, for the porter came instantly forward, and with a civil tone, but in such broad Scotch that she could scarcely understand him, asked if she would not alight and come in, as he was quite sure his mistress would be very glad to see her.

"I will alight," said Julia, accepting his assistance, "for I am very weary of my horse's back; but

as to the rest, I will wait;" and springing to the ground, she leaned her arm upon the saddle, the tired beast standing quite still by her side.

She had not long to remain in uncertainty, however, for hardly two minutes had passed when she heard a female voice, as some one approached the door from within, exclaiming, "Where's my bairn? Where's my dear child?" and immediately after a tall and commanding woman, somewhat past the middle age, issued forth with a quick step, and approached her. Her gray hair, falling from under a black velvet coif, and mingling with a lace veil attached thereunto, her long black velvet garments, in the fashion of the reign of Queen Mary, her fine, though worn countenance, her tall figure, and her quick step and eager look, all struck poor Julia with a feeling of awe, which was only dissipated by the warm and tender embrace in which the countess folded her, kissing her repeatedly, and saying, "And did ye doubt, poor thing, that Gowrie's mother would not take ye to her heart? Come, come, my bairn, you do not know me yet; but Dorothea Ruthven is no false friend or fleeching courtier, to say one thing and mean another. Come you in, and rest all your cares upon a mother's bosom; for, God willing, I will be a mother to you as to my own bairns."

Thus saying, she took her by the hand, and led her through the wide vestibule into a small but richly decorated room on the ground floor. Then stopping in the midst, where the full light from a large sconce filled with wax candles fell upon them both, she turned to look upon her fair companion for the first time.

As if struck and astonished by what she beheld, the old countess suddenly loosed her hold, and clasping her two hands together, she exclaimed, "Ae, but you're bonny!" Then instantly throwing her arms round her, she pressed her to her heart again.

Julia wept with agitation and joy, and the gentle clasping of her small soft fingers upon the old countess's hand conveyed without words all that was passing in her heart.

"Now sit down, my dear child," said Lady Gowrie, taking her own seat, and pointing to another close by her; "you're weary and frightened, I dare say, for I see from the first few lines of Gowrie's letter that something has not gone quite right with all your plans; but you must not let that put your heart down, my bonny bird, for this is a wild land, and if we were to let little things scare us, we should live in terror all our lives. My two young lads have gone out, and not come back yet, but they will be right glad when they return to find their new sister, and then we'll have our supper, and you shall go to bed and sleep."

"Oh, read Gowrie's letter first, before you are so kind, dear lady," said Julia, wiping the tears from her eyes; "you will see that my coming with him has first brought embarrassment upon him on his return to his native land, and perhaps you may not love me so well afterwards."

"Not a bit less, my child," said the old countess, in a firm, but sad tone. "I have ever loved those I loved, best when misfortune came upon them. Did I not love his father well," she continued, raising her eyes to heaven, "the day the axe fell? And yet, woe is me! bitter was that day of love, indeed! Well-a-well, I will read my boy's letter; but mind, my dear, you are to call me mother, for a mother I will be to you, come fair or come foul;" and wiping away the tears from her eyes, she held the letter nearer to the sconce, and read.

While she went on, Julia gazed at her with a look of anxious interest; but her longing to know what would be the lady's feelings on hearing all the particulars of her situation, was soon lost in scanning the worn but noble feelings, and tracing the strong likeness between her and her son.

"Fie, fie!" cried the old lady, at length, when she had read the somewhat long epistle to an end; "this is but a scratch, and you and Gowrie have taken it for a wound. Our good king is fond of gold, and he has those about him who are fonder still; but when they find that you have none, my child, they'll leave you at peace right willingly. It will all come to nothing, you'll see. However, in the meantime, like a dutiful mother," she continued, with a smile, "I must do what my son bids me, though I'm loath to part with you so soon. But first I must take care that the servants are tutored to speak carefully. All my own people I can depend upon; can you on yours, my child?"

"I trust so," replied Julia; "the two girls can speak no English, so they are safe; and of the men, one is faithfulness itself. The other I do not know so well, but he has been with Gowrie long, I believe, and came with us all the way from Italy."

"What's his name?" asked the countess; and when she heard it was David Drummond, she shook her head with a rather doubtful look. "He's what we call a dour creature," she said, "but faithful to his trust, I believe. He killed a man here in a fray, and I sent him over to John to get him out of harm's way. John warned him well, that if he played so with his hands again, he should suffer; but I believe he is honest, only ill to manage when he takes a grudge at any one. I will have the people up into the vestibule, and tell them to be secret. They've been used to things that would teach fools discretion."

Thus saying, she rose, and taking a small silver bell from the table, went out into the vestibule, where Julia heard the bell ring, and after a short pause the sound of many feet moving. Then came the voice of the countess speaking loud and slow. A few short sentences, with long pauses between, concluded her harangue; but in a moment after there was a considerable movement

and bustle; and when Lady Gowrie returned, she had on either side a fine tall lad, bearing a strong resemblance to her eldest son. Each of the boys gazed forward with natural eagerness to see their future sister-in-law, and the colour mounted somewhat more warmly into Julia's face; but all embarrassment was over in a moment, for one after the other advanced with frank grace, kissed her fair cheek, and called her Julia and sister.

"Now, William, my boy," said the countess, "we must have supper soon and to bed betimes, for Julia must on upon her way early to-morrow, and you must go to guard her, with five or six of the men and her own people."

"Early to-morrow!" cried the lad, in great surprise; "I thought that she was going to stay with us here. Where is she going?"

"Ask no questions, lad," said his mother, gravely; "it does not become youth to inquire, but rather to obey. You will have your directions to-morrow ere you set out; and those you must entirely keep to yourself till you come to the end of your journey. Now go and order them to set on the supper. Your dear sister is tired and hungry, I doubt not."

"No, indeed, dear mother," replied Julia; "fear has taken all appetite from me to-day."

"Fear, poor frightened bird!" said the old lady. "We must strengthen your heart with mountain air--not to make it harder, but more firm. Fear nothing here, my dear, for we will guard you well. You come of an eagle's race, and he who checques at you is but a goshawk."

While she had been speaking, her son William had left the room, and in a minute or two it was announced that supper was served. Putting her arm through that of her fair guest, the countess led her to a small hall, where supper was found upon the table; but as they went the elder lady said, in a low voice, to her young companion, "You shall have a little chamber next to mine, and your two maidens beyond. I will wake you before daylight, for ever since Gowrie's death I rise at four. But, in truth, you must warn the girls yourself that you set out early, for though I could once speak French I have lost it now, and Italian I could never conquer."

Weariness of body and of mind performed for Julia the part of peace; and she slept as soon as her head touched the pillow. Her sleep was disturbed and full of dreams, however; and on the following morning she woke with a start and a feeling of terror, when some one knocked at her chamber door. For a moment or two she knew not where she was; but she was soon recalled to the recollection of all the circumstances of her fate, by the voice of the Countess of Gowrie warning her that it was time to rise for her journey. All that kindness could do was performed to soothe, comfort, and encourage her; and her lover's mother affected to laugh at her fears, though she bewailed the necessity of her going at that season of the year into the wild and solitary scenes where she was about to take up her abode.

In her directions to her son William, the old countess was very particular, remaining closeted with him for nearly half an hour. No one was informed of the ultimate end of the journey about to be taken but Julia and himself; and instead of directing their course by land towards Trochrie, the party proceeded in a straight line towards the sea, and took boat, thereby increasing the length of the journey some thirty or forty miles. The servants, who were acquainted with the country, might well be somewhat surprised when they found where they landed, and in what direction they afterwards bent their course; but not the slightest expression of astonishment was seen upon the countenance of any one, and not one word of comment was uttered amongst them. With much unquestioning obedience they followed where their young master led, in a manner which perhaps was only seen in Scotland at that time. Towards Julia, William Ruthven was all brotherly kindness and attention, cheering her to the utmost of his power, and attempting, in his young zeal, to amuse her with tales of the different places through which they passed. But it is sad to say, that almost every little history--such had been for many years the state of Scotland--ended with a tragedy; and he soon found that the subject on which Julia was most inclined to speak was that of his brother Gowrie. He indulged her, then, by many a question with regard to the earl's stay in Italy, and to their journey home; and thus indeed he did contrive to while away several hours, till at length, on the evening of the third day, they arrived in sight of a large and somewhat gloomy-looking building, which William Ruthven pointed out as the castle of Trochrie. During the whole of the latter part of their journey the mountains had been rising up before them, and all the beautiful scenery of Athol, with which every English traveller is well acquainted, presented itself to Julia's sight. The day was peculiarly favourable, too, though that which preceded it had been dark and lowering. The sun, journeying towards the north, had made, as it were, an effort to dispel the clouds; and, towards evening, the heavy masses of vapour floating away upon the light wind, only served to cast dark shadow upon some points of the landscape, while the rest remained covered with bright gleams; and the sinking sun flooded the glens with light, and sparkled in the streams and waterfalls. At the distance of about a mile from the castle a man was sent forward to have the gates opened, and as they rode over the drawbridge, which had been lowered to give them admission, William Ruthven said, in a kind tone, "Welcome to Trochrie, dear Julia."

Julia knew not why, but a cold shudder crept over her frame at the words; and looking up at the dark arch under which she was passing, she asked herself involuntarily, "In what case shall I pass these gates again?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

We must now turn to follow the course of the Earl of Gowrie, who hurried to horse as soon as he could force himself to part with Julia, the 28th of February, and he spared not the spur till he had reached Carlisle. The distance was not far short of a hundred miles, although knowing the country well, till he reached the borders of Cumberland he took the shortest cuts towards his destination. Nevertheless, by twelve o'clock on the following day, he had reached the city of the British chief, and halted there for three hours, to rest those horses which were capable of going on, and to purchase three or four others, to supply the place of those which were knocked up. The journey was then resumed, at a slow and orderly pace; and the earl once more approached the frontier of Scotland, on the western side. Such rapid progress as he had made during the last thirty hours was not at all suited, of course, to the habits of good Mr. Rhind; and that worthy gentleman was left behind, with a request that he would tarry for a day or two at Dunbar, and then proceed slowly to Edinburgh, preserving perfect silence as to the events which had lately taken place; which, it must be remarked, puzzled him greatly, as the earl was not inclined to enter into lengthened explanations on the subject. On the discretion of the servants who accompanied him, the earl thought he could depend; and he consequently satisfied himself with giving them merely two commands--namely, to avoid mentioning to any one their previous journey to Dunbar, and if asked what had become of the lady who had accompanied them to England, to state that he, the earl, had sent her to a place of security some way before they reached Carlisle. This having been done, they rode on towards Langholm, where the earl proposed to pass the night. On his arrival, however, at the only inn which that place contained, he found the court-yard in a bustle with numerous horses and servants, and perceived also two or three of the king's guard loitering about. The announcement that the place was quite full, therefore, did not surprise him; and, in answer to his inquiries, the host informed him that the Lord Lindores had just returned with his suite, after having visited the border that morning.

Gowrie smiled at the name of one of the especial companions of the king; and finding, in answer to a quiet inquiry, that the noble lord had arrived from Edinburgh late the night before, he was confirmed in the suspicion, that the object of Lindores' coming had been to claim the wardship of Julia in the king's name.

Innocent of all offence himself, however, he did not scruple to send up a message to the courtier nobleman, requesting that he would spare him a part of the accommodation of the inn; but one of Lord Lindores' servants had been beforehand with him in communicating his arrival, and before the host, whom Gowrie charged with his message, could leave his side, the gentleman to whom it was to be delivered was seen descending the stairs, which, as was then very customary in Scottish inns, came down at once on the outside of the house, from a covered gallery above, into the court-yard. His dress and appearance were sufficient to indicate his rank, although Gowrie had not seen him from his boyhood; but Lord Lindores, forgetting his prudence, advanced at once towards the young earl, holding out his hand, and saying, "Ah, my noble Lord of Gowrie, how goes it with your lordship? Welcome back to Scotland after a long absence."

"Many thanks, my lord," replied Gowrie, shaking hands with him. "My absence has indeed been long enough for old friends to forget me. But I find your lordship has engaged the whole house; can you not spare me a room or two?"

"I should be sadly wanting in courtesy else," replied the other, whose eye, during the whole conversation, had been wandering over Gowrie's followers. "We will put some of the men into the cottages or houses near. What will you require?"

"Only a room for myself," replied the earl, who was somewhat amused by the puzzled look upon his companion's face--"only a room for myself, and an ante-room for two or three of my servants. The rest must shift as they can. We will not put you to inconvenience."

"That will be soon arranged," replied Lord Lindores; "and as my supper will be ready in a few minutes, your lordship must honour me by partaking thereof. I will just speak a word or two to some of my men, telling them to seek lodgings elsewhere, and rejoin you in a moment."

Gowrie remained near the foot of the stairs till his return, with an air of the most perfect indifference; but he did not fail to observe what seemed eager question and answer pass between his brother peer and one of the men who had been in the court-yard when he arrived.

"Now, noble earl, permit me to show you the road," said Lord Lindores, returning; and he led the way up stairs to a small guest-chamber, prepared for the evening meal, but which was also ornamented by a truckle bed. After some ordinary compliments, Lord Lindores fell into thought for a moment or two, and then looking up, he said, "Had I not thought that your lordship would not arrive in Scotland till to-morrow, I should have prepared better for your accommodation; for,

to say the truth, I was led to expect the pleasure of seeing you on the border if my business detained me here a day or two."

"Indeed! How so?" demanded Gowrie, looking up; for he, too, had fallen into thought.

"Oh, very simply," replied the other lord. "His majesty, when sending me yesterday to inquire into some of the affairs upon the border, informed me that he had had a letter from your lordship, and, as you were returning by Carlisle, I should most likely meet you somewhere here. He bade me greet you well on his part, and say that he was anxious for your arrival."

"His majesty is ever gracious," said Gowrie, drily; "I trust to kiss his hand the day after tomorrow at the farthest."

"He taught me to believe, my noble lord, that I should find a fair lady in your company," said his companion, assuming a jocular look and tone; "the most beautiful of the beautiful, I understand; a gem that you have brought us from southern lands."

"Oh, no," answered Gowrie, in a light and easy tone; "his majesty has been misled. Such a lady as you describe did travel part of the way hither under my convoy; but I left her behind before I reached Carlisle."

"Indeed!" said Lord Lindores, with a look of mortification and surprise. "But perhaps the journey was too fatiguing, and she will follow you?"

"Oh dear, no!" answered Gowrie, with a laugh. "She is very well where she is, I doubt not, and will remain there for some time."

"On my life," cried the other, resuming his jocular tone, "I think your lordship is jealous of us poor lords of Holyrood."

"To be sure I am," answered Gowrie, at once; "and fully resolved I am not to bring her to that court till I bring her as my wife. You see, my good lord, I am frank with you; but you will own that there is cause to fear that I might lose my bride, if I carried her amongst such gay cavaliers as the Lord of Lindores."

His companion, who had already seen the middle age, laughed gaily; for I know neither age nor circumstance in which vanity will not do its work. He seemed perfectly deceived, however, and indeed was so, concluding that Gowrie, from some cause, suspecting the king's purpose, had left his fair companion on the other side of the border. He was not well satisfied, indeed, with the result of his mission, for he had calculated upon gaining considerable credit with the king by skilfully executing a somewhat delicate task. Their meal passed over gaily, however; and Lindores, who was somewhat of a bon vivant, had taken care that the table should be supplied with better wine than could be procured at Langholm. Of this he partook abundantly, and hospitably pressed his guest to do the same; but Gowrie was upon his guard, and contrived to avoid the glass, without his companion noticing that such was the case. In the meantime, Lindores, imagining that each large double bottle was shared equally between him and the earl, drank more than his due proportion, and passed through most of the stages of inebriety, from loquacity to drowsiness. In the former stage, however, the wine being in and the wit out, he laughed joyously at the thought of the king's disappointment, and told his companion, as a profound secret, the end and object of his journey to the border.

On the following day early, the earl and Lord Lindores set out together for Edinburgh; but Gowrie thought fit to stop for the night at Selkirk, while his companion pushed on somewhat farther, in order to bear to the king the news of his disappointment in person. He arrived in the capital at a somewhat early hour the next day, and proceeded at once to the palace, where James's ill-humour knew no bounds.

"That is just like those Ruthvens," he said, in the presence of Sir Hugh Herries and John Ramsay, who were in the king's closet when Lindores told his story. "They are all as wise as serpents, but not as innocent as doves; and this lad is at the head of them. If he were not at heart a rebel to his own liege sovereign, wherefore should he leave the lass in England? Does it not give our good aunt Elizabeth a hold upon him, which no foreign sovereign should have over one of our subjects? Can she not twist him thereby what way she likes? Maybe his treason is already consummate, and he has left the girl behind him as a pignus or pledge for his carrying it out to our destruction. We must deal softly with him, nevertheless," he continued, seeing that his words had sunk deeply into the minds of those around him, and having, perhaps, the example of Henry II. before his eyes--"we must deal softly with him, till we find occasion against him; mind that, lads, and let not one of ye cross him, so as to make the matter into a private quarrel. He has many friends and great wealth, so we must go gently to work with him till the time comes."

Notwithstanding his injunctions to others, the king could not altogether restrain his own demeanour, but remained sullen and irritable all day. He inquired twice whether the earl had arrived in Edinburgh; and when told that he had come to the house of one of his relations, whither a number of the old friends of his family flocked to meet and congratulate him, he exclaimed, "The fickle fools! They go as blithesome to a burial."

The following morning, as he was seated with the queen, receiving some of the nobles of the

court, with the Duchess of Lennox, Gowrie's sister, on one side of Anne of Denmark, and Beatrice Ruthven behind her chair, some loud shouts, uttered in the streets of the town, made themselves heard even in the royal apartments.

"What are the fools skirling at now?" cried the king; "is it another Tolbooth fray?"

"Not so, your majesty," replied Lord Inchaffray, who had just entered; "as I rode hither a moment ago, the young Earl of Gowrie was passing up the street with a large number of noble gentlemen, his friends; and some hundreds of people were running after his horse's heels, shouting and wishing him joy on his return."

James's brow darkened immediately, and lolling his tongue in his cheek, with a bitter and meaning smile, he said, loud enough for several persons to hear, "There were as many people who convoyed his father to the scaffold at Stirling."

The Duchess of Lennox instantly turned deadly pale, and fell, so that she would have struck her head against the queen's chair, had she not been caught in the arms of her sister Beatrice.

The court was immediately thrown into strange confusion; and the king, as if totally unconscious that the illness of the young duchess was produced by his own act, exclaimed, "De'il's in the woman! What's the matter with her? The rooms not so hot."

"But your majesty's words were sharp," said Beatrice; "my sister is not accustomed to hear the death of a father she loved made sport of."

"You are saucy, mistress, I think," said the king, frowning upon her.

"And your majesty unkind," said Beatrice, boldly; but Anne of Denmark interfered, and caused some of the gentlemen present to assist in conveying the duchess to another room.

James himself felt in some degree, it would appear, that he had acted in a cruel and discourteous manner, for he said, in a low but somewhat apologetic tone, "Fegs! I forgot she was the earl's daughter. One cannot always remember, in this good land of ours, who is of kin to those who have had their heads chopped off."

He then turned to other subjects, seeming soon to forget altogether what had occurred; and when, a few minutes afterwards, Gowrie himself was introduced, unconscious of all that had taken place, the king received him with the utmost cordiality and kindness, displaying remarkably, on this occasion, that detestable hypocrisy which he considered one of the essential parts of kingcraft. If anything, his manner was too condescending and gracious, approaching to a degree of familiarity more repugnant to the feelings of the young earl than haughtiness could have been. After having given him his hand to kiss, he pinched his ear, called him a truant, and insisted upon examining him in what he called the humanities, much to the annoyance of most of the gentlemen of his court, many of whom understood neither the Latin nor Greek languages, and some of whom did not understand their own. The earl's replies gave his majesty satisfaction, at least apparently; and he went so far as to pronounce him a good scholar and a credit to the country.

This gracious speech he followed up by commanding him to come to his breakfast on the following morning, and there he commenced a conversation with the earl, who was standing behind his chair, the coarseness of which, in point of language, prevents it from here being written down, but the nature of which may be divined, when I state that it referred to the murder of David Rizzio, and the fright which that horrible event had occasioned to the unfortunate Mary when about to become the mother of the very monarch who spoke.

Gowrie felt that the choice of the subject was intended as an insult to himself, from the part which his grandfather had borne in that lamentable transaction; but he repressed all angry feeling, not alone from respect for the royal authority, but also because he had a deep internal conviction that the conduct of his ancestor on that occasion could not be justified, and that the king had a fair subject of reproach against his family, which, upon every Christian principle and every honourable feeling, should have been restrained to silence, considering all that had passed since, but which might naturally be remembered, if not rankle, in a weak grovelling mind. He made no reply whatever then, and left the conversation to seek another course, when suddenly, to his surprise, Colonel Stuart entered the room, and was greeted by James as an invited guest.

The spirit of his race now rose in his bosom. He saw before him, invited apparently to meet him there that morning, the man who, when his father, after an imperious order from the king to quit the realm within fourteen days, lingered for a few hours longer at Dundee to settle the affairs of his family, and to hire a ship to carry him abroad, pursued him to the very port where he was about to embark, and brought his head to the block. His patience could not endure any more, and drawing back a step, he said, "I think, your majesty, it may be better for me now to retire."

"Come, come, my Lord Gowrie," said the king, "I will not have you look down upon Colonel Stuart. He is a worthy gentleman, and has done this crown good service. Neither will I have you seek quarrel with him in regard to passages long gone."

"Sir," answered the earl, with a low bow, "I will never seek that man, but it is not fit that he should cross my path. As to seeking quarrel with him, *aquila non capit muscat*. I now beseech your majesty to pardon me for retiring;" and he withdrew slowly from the royal presence.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The whole court of Holyrood was now busied principally with one subject. It is the vice of all petty courts to have their whole attention taken up with personal quarrels and small passions, not the less venomous for their minuteness. The Earl of Gowrie was not a favourite--that had become evident within one week after his return from the continent; and although he neither held nor coveted any place about the king's person, all those who were mounting the frail ladder of courtly favour marked the coldness between the king and himself with satisfaction, and augured the fall of those members of his family who had obtained appointments in the royal household. At all events, as far as he was personally concerned, Gowrie prepared to cut the matter very short, by taking leave of the king within ten days after his arrival in Edinburgh, upon the plea of visiting his mother, and examining the condition of his own estates. Still he himself, and his relations with the court, continued to occupy the thoughts of men. From his wealth, from his connexions, and from his extensive property, he was much too important a person to have his movements, his demeanour, or his intentions considered lightly; and, far superior to most of his fellow peers, both in acquired knowledge and intellectual scope, he had shown so decided a leaning to that rational freedom which was repugnant to all James's ideas of authority, that courtiers readily learned to hate him because their royal master showed that he feared him. Nevertheless, with the great majority of his equals in rank he was very popular, and by the poorer classes he was universally and dangerously beloved. The people cheered him when he appeared in public, even while the courtiers were drawing back from his brother and sister, in terror of the plague-spot of disfavour. Yet the effect of his coming had been very different upon different men who had been united in opinion before his arrival. Sir Hugh Herries, commonly called Doctor Herries, who had a strong personal dislike both to the earl's brother Alexander and to the Lady Beatrice, and who had extended this feeling of animosity to the earl himself and all his family, seemed but to be confirmed in his rancorous ill-will by the presence of Gowrie himself. Nor did he at all attempt to conceal it, replying to any observations the earl addressed to him, in few words and with a repulsive tone; and calling him in private, proud, overbearing, and ambitious, although he himself had personally no cause to accuse him of such faults.

John Ramsay, on the contrary, grew grave and thoughtful. He did not seek the earl's society, but he did not avoid it; and the kind and friendly tone which Gowrie assumed towards him, treating him as the brother of an old and dear friend, his frank and open manner, and some instances of calm and generous forbearance, when the young man gave way to the impulses of a rash bold temper, appeared at once to pain and to soften him.

"He is a noble creature," he said, one day, speaking to Herries, who had been decrying the young lord. "He may be ambitious, he may be proud, and he must bear the brunt of his faults if they lead to acts; but he is a noble creature, Sir Hugh; and when I look at him, I cannot help thinking that he is like a gallant stag that has been marked out for the slaughter."

"That is very likely," answered Herries, with a cold sneer. "One generally chooses the finest beasts to lay the hounds at their heels; but I've a notion, Ramsay, that a stag which carries its head so high might become dangerous if one did not run him down before his antlers were fully grown."

"Perhaps so," answered Ramsay; "more's the pity;" and he turned away and left him.

While this brief conversation was passing, Gowrie was seated with his brother and sister in a small room of the palace, talking quietly with them just before his departure. They were all careful in what they said, and the subject of the king's conduct and demeanour to the earl since his return was never mentioned, for James's ubiquity was well known in the palace, and no one was sure where the monarch might be at the moment.

"Well, Gowrie," said Beatrice, "I shall try to get leave of absence for a day or two while you are at Dirlton, and come and see you and my mother; for there are a thousand things I want to talk to you about, which I have never been able to speak of in this place, and never should if we were to live here till we are gray-headed."

"Of no great moment, I dare say, dear Beatrice," replied the earl, "or you could have come to talk over them all at my lodging in the High-street."

"You men are all alike," said Beatrice, laughing; "you think all women such frivolous creatures, that we can never have anything important to say. Now, if I were to speak to you of the lady with

the dark eyes, whom you were bringing over from Italy, and who has never yet appeared amongst us, would not that seem of moment, my lord and brother?"

"Hume has been telling tales," said Gowrie, laughing.

"Not a whit," answered Beatrice; "it is your own dear mother who told the tales four or five months ago. She sent me your dutiful and humble letter, my lord--I suppose to teach me to behave myself. But what have you done with the dear girl? I long to see her soon.--Where have you hid her?"

"In a place of great security, child," replied her brother, gaily, but still upon his guard; "and you shall see her, too, as soon as I have proved to his majesty--who has taken it into his head that she has got all the Earl of Morton's treasures--that her whole dowry consisted of two thousand gold ducats, and that she and her grandfather have been living in actual poverty ever since they fled from Scotland, nineteen years ago."

"But what could put it into the king's wise head that she had got the regent's wealth?" asked Beatrice.

"Such a thing was not as unlikely as you think," replied Gowrie. "The king has a shrewd scent for such things; and so convinced was he that it was the case, he sent Lindores to meet me on the road from Carlisle, and claim my poor Julia as a ward of the crown. Lindores was vastly mortified when he found I had left her behind; and the same night, to console himself, he got drunk, and told me the whole story in his cups."

Beatrice laughed, and Alexander Ruthven laughed; but Gowrie went on, saying, "I cannot venture to speak to his majesty on the subject myself, and I have looked in vain for him to speak to me. I have thrown the ball at his foot a dozen times, but he would not kick it; though I have a shrewd notion, Beatrice, he would rather have me wed a dowerless girl like this, than marry a rich bride."

"Hie, Alex, boy! Alex!" cried the voice of the king, certainly not very far from the door. "Alex Ruthven, I say, is your good brother gone?" and James himself entered the room unattended.

Every one instantly rose; and the king rolled on towards a seat, with that peculiar ungainly shambling which was more conspicuous when he was either moved by any strong emotion or wished to appear peculiarly gracious. It was almost always a certain sign that the monarch was dissembling favour when he approached any one with that roll very strongly apparent.

The only one in the room, however, whose clear sight and long observation enabled her to judge the truth, was Beatrice Ruthven, and she stood and gazed sidelong at the king, while Gowrie hastened to advance a chair.

"Weel, ye've an unkie cosy family council here," said James, seating himself; "but, my good lord earl, there's something I wish to say to you before you go--just in a private friendly kind of way."

"Now comes the matter of my fair Julia," thought Gowrie, and he replied, "I am happy to be here to receive your majesty's commands."

But James had made up his mind not to utter one word upon the subject which Gowrie thought he was about to touch upon, till the earl spoke himself; and whether he had heard any part of the preceding conversation or not--which will ever be a mystery--he kept his resolution. "What I was about to say is this, my lord," he said. "We are now at the twelfth of March, and on the twenty-third of the month we propose to hold a council of our peers, to lay before them the necessities of the state, which can only be subvented by the devising of some new tax or subsidy from our faithful people, which may enable us to carry on the work of government more at our ease--and very little ease do we get for crowned kings, as the devil in hell kens, who gives us so many troubles," continued James, in his more familiar tone. "Now, my good lord, what I wish to say is, I must have your advice and assistance in this matter, with other noble lords, like yourself, and therefore I trust you will be back in time to give us counsel, as you are sworn."

"Most assuredly, sire," replied Gowrie; "I will not fail to obey your majesty's summons whenever it is sent. I shall be found at Dirleton, or at my poor house in Perth."

"Moreover," continued the king, seeming hardly to notice the reply, "I trust you will, as folks say, lend the king your shoulder in this matter; for I can tell you, my lord, that we are sorely pinched and straightened at this present, more than befits a king to be; and trusting to your loyalty and affection, we believe that you will farther us to the extent of your ability."

"If it cost me half my estate, I will, sire," replied Gowrie, frankly; "it shall never be said that my king was in need, and I refused to do my share as far as my private fortune would go."

"Well said--well said!" replied James; "I always knew you for a loyal and faithful subject. But I fear, my good lord, that what any good friend to the crown would do in his individual capacity--not that I mean to refuse any free gift or kindly aid to the royal treasury, all which should be repaid in bounties hereafter--but I fear it would go but a little way to supply the vacuity in the

finances--it would be but a drop in a draw-well, man; and we must have a general tax, which would spread the burden lightly and evenly upon all the good people."

"When your majesty's views are fully developed," replied Gowrie, seeing that the king paused for an answer, "I will, according to my bounden duty, offer you in all humility my conscientious advice upon the subject."

"Ay, say you so, man?" said the king, with a slight frown upon his brows; "well, I hope you will, and that your advice and my views may run together. Go you first to Perth or to Dirleton, my lord?"

"Not to Perth, may it please your majesty," answered Gowrie; "I have not yet seen my dear mother, thinking it my duty first to offer my humble respects to you."

"There you were right--there you were right," said James; "the king is, as it were, father to the whole land. When set you out?"

"This evening, sire," answered the earl; "and if I could obtain your permission, and that of her majesty, I would fain take this wild girl with me, as she has not seen me, before this last week, for seven years, nor her mother for as many months."

"My leave you have, with my whole soul," replied the king; "and grace go with her; for she found little here, brought little here, and will leave little here. As to the queen, I doubt not her majesty will grant her licence--soul of my body! if she doesn't, the lady is very likely to take it!"

Gowrie's cheek turned a little red, for he had been long unused to a coarseness of speech which was as different from frank honesty as it was from courtly polish; but he replied not, having steadfastly resolved to bridle his tongue on all but great and important occasions, and to avoid every occasion of offence.

After a momentary pause, during which the king did not seem either disposed to speak or move, Gowrie said, "Then we have your majesty's permission to apply to the queen?"

"Ay, ay, lad!" answered James, in a dull heavy tone, rising, and moving towards the door; "I dare to say she will not refuse you leave to take her where you please." And then he muttered between his teeth as he passed out, "and the de'il gang wi' ye."

Alexander Ruthven had opened the door for the king's exit, and after closing it again, he said drily, as a sort of comment on the words he had heard distinctly enough, "He means me: but I wish he had expressed his permission more clearly."

"Meant you! by what, Alex?" demanded Gowrie.

"By the devil," answered Alexander Ruthven; "for he said to himself as he was going out, 'The de'il gang wi' ye;' but we can't both be away at the same time, I know, so I must even stay where I am."

"Besides, you have had your holiday, Alex," answered Beatrice; "and like most boys when they return to school, came back no wiser or steadier than they were before. But I'll run away to the queen, and ask permission on my bended knees; then, if I get it, I shall be ready when you will, Gowrie. Oh! how I shall rejoice in a wild gallop over the hills!"

"Away!--away, then!" answered her brother; "and if Alex will give me paper, I will write a letter to a friend in the mean time."

Away sped Beatrice to the queen's presence, and kneeling down on the footstool before her, she preferred her petition.

"You must ask the king, love," said Anne of Denmark, who, with all her many faults, and not very steady principles, was a kind-hearted and amiable, as well as highly accomplished woman. "I can but ill spare you, Beatrice; but far be it from me to keep you from any joyful expedition; but you must ask the king's permission. You know he is fond of despotic rule, even in his own household; and though I struggle every now and then for the rights and liberties of women, till he is fain to give way for the sake of a quiet house, yet I dare not altogether take the rule even of my own maidens into my own hands."

"But the king's permission has been obtained, dear lady," replied Beatrice; and seeing a slight shade of displeasure come upon the queen's face, as if she thought she ought to have been first asked, the young lady added, "Gowrie asked the king himself, your majesty."

"Well, that is right," replied Anne of Denmark. "Tell your good brother for me, that I regret we have had no means, since his return, of entertaining him at our court; but we shall have balls and pageants soon; and I trust to show him that we people of the north are not so far behind his bright Italians. Now, kiss me, child, and go and prepare."

Beatrice Ruthven needed no long preparation; but she went first to make her arrangements with her brother, and it was agreed that he should go back to his own dwelling in the town, and return for her in a couple of hours. While speaking together, she caught sight of two notes he had

written during her absence, and with a blush and a laugh laid her finger on the back of one, as he held it in his hand, ready to send. "I can see the name, Gowrie," she said.

"Well, wild girl," he answered; "I will not send it if you dislike it. It is only a note of invitation to Hume, asking him to meet us at Dirleton. Shall I tear it?"

Her only reply was a playful tap on the cheek, and away she ran to get ready.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was about three o'clock in the evening when Gowrie and his sister, followed by eight or nine servants on horseback, set out from the gates of Holyrood. She looked bright and happy, and Gowrie gazed at her from time to time with a look of thoughtful affection, tracing in the beautiful young woman the same lines he well remembered in the beautiful child.

"Well, dear Beatrice," he said, "your little heart seems full of rejoicing, and your cheek looks as fresh as the rose, and your light limbs, though they be not at the largest, quite ready for any exertion that may be needed."

"Oh, I am equal to anything," said Beatrice, in the confidence of young strength and health. "I think, on this nice jennet which the queen gave me, and with you, my dear brother, by my side, I could ride over half Scotland."

"Perhaps I may try you," said Gowrie, with a smile.

"What mean you, brother mine?" asked Beatrice, gazing at him. "You look dark and mysterious."

"How far can you fly in a night, busy bee?" asked Gowrie.

"As far as a swallow," answered the young lady, looking up in his face.

But Gowrie, after a moment's thought, said, "No, sixty miles is too far; still we will go on as far as we can, and then stop for the night."

"Man of mysteries, what do you mean?" cried Beatrice, in her usual gay tone. "Whither are you going to take me? To some deep dungeon of one of your castles in the mountains, to keep me a prisoner there during your good pleasure?"

"Yes," answered Gowrie, "I am."

"But what has your poor sister done?" cried Beatrice, laughing. "I have divulged none of your secrets. I have discovered none of your plots. I am not even going to marry without your leave."

"You have asked indiscreet questions," said Gowrie, assuming a gruff tone--"indiscreet questions about a lady with black eyes. Is not that offence enough to a tyrant brother like myself?"

"Oh, I understand, dear brother--I understand. Let us get on, let us get on to-night. I long to see her, and to tell her how I will love her."

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Gowrie, in a low tone; "if you are as indiscreet as that, I will not take you. Everything," he continued, almost in a whisper, "depends upon secrecy; for I must give the king no hold upon me, Beatrice; and although, perhaps, with the explanations I can afford in regard to the wealth he supposes her to possess, he might not be so anxious to obtain her as his ward, yet I will not put it in his power to refuse me her hand, or to make it an inducement with me to do anything I think wrong."

"There you are right," answered Beatrice. "I have learned to know more of courts and kings than when you went away, Gowrie; and I would not that any one I love was in the hands of that man for all the wealth in Europe." A sort of shudder seemed to pass over her as she spoke; but, after being silent for a moment, she continued, "Do you know, Gowrie, I am very anxious for one thing, which is, that Alex should withdraw from the court. I wish you could persuade him to give up his post, and either go to travel, or betake himself to Dirleton."

Gowrie turned and gazed at her with surprise. "I am astonished, dear Beatrice," he said. "I should have thought that, in your situation at the court, you would have been right glad to have Alexander with you."

"For my own sake, I should," she answered; "and yet that is not wholly true either; for I am

kept in such a constant state of anxiety, that his presence is more pain than comfort."

"But what is the cause? What has he done?" demanded her brother, with still increasing surprise. "You seemed the best friends possible."

"And so we are," replied his fair sister. "It is for him that I fear, for him that I am anxious. As to what he has done, or rather to his whole conduct, I cannot well speak of it, Gowrie. He has done nothing wrong, I do hope and believe; but he has been very imprudent. He has many great and powerful enemies. The king loves him not, and will some day or another work him ill. Sir Hugh Herries hates him mortally; and he and young John Ramsay are always bickering. Because Ramsay's education has not been equal to his own, and his manners are more rough and less polished, Alex looks down upon him, and makes him feel it. But it is the king I fear."

Gowrie asked some more questions, but he could not get a satisfactory reply; and, in the end, Beatrice said, "Ask Hume, Gowrie--ask Hume. He will tell you more about it. He must have heard and seen enough."

At this point of their conversation, however, they were interrupted by one of the men riding up and saying, "This is the road to Dirleton, my lord, which you have just passed."

"I know," answered Gowrie, with a smile. "I have not yet forgotten the way, Archy; but I have a friend whom I must see to-night. Take three of the men with you, and ride away to Dirleton. Give that letter to the countess, and assure her I will be with her the day after to-morrow. Tell her that business which she wots of calls me over into Perthshire; but that I will not spare the spur to be with her soon. The lady Beatrice goes with me, and we will join her together. There, look not surprised, but go. Leave Wilson and Nichol with me." Thus saying, the earl turned his horse, and rode away at a quicker pace towards Queensferry. "You must even abide a bit of sea, Beatrice," he said; "for we have not time to ride up the river to-night; but we shall get over in daylight."

"Oh, I mind it not," answered Beatrice. "Speed, speed, Gowrie, is the thing now. I will race with you, for all your horse's long legs."

"Spare your beast--spare your beast," replied her brother, as she was pushing her jennet into a quick canter. "You would make a bad soldier, Beatrice, and a worse courier, if you spent all your horse's strength in the beginning of a long journey. I doubt not that we could reach Kinross to-night."

"Oh, farther than that," answered Beatrice. "It is now hardly four o'clock. We shall be over the ferry in half an hour, and at Kinross by seven. We might even get on to Perth before midnight."

The earl smiled. "You miscalculate your time, little lady," he answered, "and your horse's strength, too. Besides, what should I do with you in Perth? There is nobody but Henderson and an old woman in the great house; and they'll be in bed by nine."

"Let us go to Murray's Inn, then," said his sister; "that will be open, I'll warrant. If you dare me, I'll soon show you that my calculations are correct, both as to time and the jennet. I have ridden forty miles upon her before now, Earl of Gowrie. It is you who do not know what a Scottish girl and a Spanish horse can do."

"Well, we shall see," replied the earl; and on they went.

Queensferry was soon reached, and speedily passed; and during nearly an hour longer the sun shone upon their way. They had been lucky in the tide. They were lucky in the evening; for the wind, which had been high, went down before sunset, and, for an afternoon in March, the weather was mild and pleasant. Having talked of all that was sad or threatening, Beatrice's gay spirits returned in full tide; and, keeping her own jennet at a good sharp pace, she would sometimes playfully whip her brother's horse to make it go on, declaring it was the laziest beast she ever saw, or else that he was determined not to take her to Perth that night. Notwithstanding a short halt at the inn at Blair Adam--where, we are credibly informed, there has ever been an inn since the days of the arch-patriarch whose name it bears--they reached Kinross by eight o'clock, and Gowrie admitted that they could reach Perth easily, if his sister was not tired.

"I have only one objection," he said, bending down his head, and dropping his voice, "which is, that we might be detained in Perth till late to-morrow, and besides, I told the king I was not going thither. It may attract attention and create suspicion, if I either attempt to conceal myself, or hurry on instantly after my arrival. I am not very sure of Henderson's discretion."

"Nor I of his fidelity," said Beatrice. "But what do you mean, Gowrie? Is not the dear girl at Perth?"

"No; at Trochrie, in Strathbraan," replied Gowrie. "Why, I told you, silly girl, that there was no one at the great house but Henderson and some old woman."

"I thought you meant with an exception," answered Beatrice. "But, if that is the case, we had better not go there at all. I tell you what, Gowrie, I have a plan that will answer very well. Let us go to Rhynd, and then up the Tay. At Rhynd we shall find good Mr. M'Dougal, the minister, poring over his books; and right glad will he be to see the yearl and his bonny titty Beatrix; and

we shall have rare bringing out of bottles and glasses; and if I am not compelled to drink some strong waters, it will be by dint of vigorous resistance. Then we shall be able to go on to-morrow without any one knowing aught about it, for M'Dougal will ask no questions, and forget we have been there the moment we are gone. I am thinking you might have taken a shorter road to Trochrie, though; but I suppose you have grown so Italianized, that you have forgotten all the byways of Scotland."

"No, no," answered Gowrie; "but I came this way, that, in case of any inquiries, we might puzzle the pursuers. The stags teach us, Beatrice, to cheat the hounds; and so we get lessons from even the beasts we hunt. But the difference is very small; and we shall arrive in good time to-morrow. I like your plan well, dear sister, if you know the way to Rhynd in the dark."

"That do I well, Gowrie," she answered. "I believe my head was intended for a geographer's, and got fixed on my shoulders by mistake. I will send it back if ever I can find the right owner."

"Ask Hume's leave first," said Gowrie. "I should think he would not like to part with it."

And on they rode through the darkness, Beatrice fully justifying the account she had given of her own geographical talents. Not a step of the way did she mistake, but even led her brother straight to the best passage of the little river which joins the Tay near Rhynd, but the name of which I forget, and thence up to the door of the minister's manse. Her reception and that of her brother was as joyous and hospitable as she had anticipated. The old man had known them both well as children, and had seen Beatrice often since. But I must not pause to give any detail of how the evening or the night passed; of how the minister brought out his choicest stores for the earl, and sought his assistance in translating a difficult passage of Hebrew; of how he lodged Beatrice in a chamber all covered over with pieces of quaint embroidery, worked by the hands of a defunct sister; or how he gave up his own room to the earl, and laid strong injunctions on his maid-servant to redd it up--otherwise make it tidy--which, to say truth, it needed not a little.

Beatrice slept soundly, and though the earl was kept awake for some time by joyful thoughts of his meeting with her he loved, they were both on horseback again within half an hour after daybreak; and the good old man, after seeing them depart, returned into his house, to spend his time, as usual, between books and bottles, sermons and good cheer. It would be difficult to say whether nature had not originally intended him for a monk, if John Knox had not been born a century too soon, and compelled, what would have made an excellent Benedictine to become a Presbyterian minister. He was a good man and a kind one, however, acting by pleasant impulses, with a great deal both of the corporeal and of the mental in his mixed nature; and, if not possessing quite sufficient of the spiritual, altogether to curb the appetites of the one part and the energies of the other, so as to leave the purely ethereal her full exercise, yet he had a great many negative virtues and some active ones, which might, in a mass, compensate for a few not very violent failings. Mr. M'Dougal's blessing, as his two young guests departed, and his prayers for a pleasant and happy journey to them, seemed granted at once. All went gaily and easily with them as they rode on; and when the castle came in sight, with the wild and romantic scenery around--somewhat bare and desolate indeed, but beautiful and characteristic, Gowrie strained his eyes eagerly forward, gazing over the dark masses of gray stone, as if he would fain have seen through them into the chambers within. By the side from which he approached, Trochrie could be seen at a considerable distance. True, it was lost again behind the shoulder of a hill very soon; but, as he gazed at the walls, he thought he saw something like a figure, clad in dark garments, move along the battlements, not of the keep or donjon, but of the lower towers, which were backed by the body of the principal building. He said not a word, for love is timid of raillery; and he feared even the gay spirit of his young sister. But the moment after his doubts were removed, for the figure at the angle of the western tower stood forth against the clear sky, and he could see her pause, and, as he thought, turn round and gaze towards the spot where he and Beatrice were riding.

"See, Beatrice, see," he cried, "she is upon the ramparts, and looking out for me, as she promised she would."

"She has nothing else to do," answered Beatrice, "except to gaze at wild moors or gray stones, or the few scanty trees left of Birnham wood. See what a difference there is between gay, wild, enthusiastic love and calm, sober sense, Gowrie. You are all in a glow because you think that she is watching for you, and, my life for it, she has been looking at the corbies building their nests, just for nothing else to look at."

"Did you not look for Hume?" asked the earl, somewhat vexed, if one must speak the truth.

"Not I," answered Beatrice. "He found me and Alex quarrelling, or rather, me scolding him, and Alex, pouting--but I do think there is a woman on the battlements; and now she is moving away again. It may be a man in a cloak, but yet it looks like a woman too.--Now don't expect her to come down and meet you at the gate or on the drawbridge, for, if she has any sense of her own dignity, and the subjection in which woman should keep man, she will remain just where she is, and know nothing of your coming till you go to tell her."

At that moment the hill hid the castle again, and when, passing some woodland, they came once more within sight of Trochrie, they were close under the walls. Gowrie looked up, but Julia was no longer to be seen; but, as he mounted the ascent, his heart beat with joyful feelings to see

Beatrice's light prognostication falsified. Beneath the deep arch of the castle gateway, which stood wide open, with portcullis up and drawbridge down, stood a figure which it needed no second glance to identify. In an instant he was over the bridge, off his horse, and by her side; and as Beatrice rode up, followed by the servants, Gowrie took Julia's hand in his, and led her a step or two forward to meet his sister.

"She is not so coldhearted as you are, Beatrice," he said, gaily, "and so did come down to meet us."

But Beatrice was off her horse in a moment; and certainly her greeting of her brother's promised bride showed no great coldness of heart. Casting back the waves of her own bright brown hair, she kissed her tenderly, saying, "I have teased him sadly, dear Julia, as we came, just to prevent his impatience from breaking all bounds; but never you think that I do not love you, whatever he may say. Have I not ridden well nigh seventy miles to see you, with all the greater pleasure, because it is so secret that it feels almost like treason, which is the greatest of all possible delights to a woman. But come, let us into the castle. You have neither veil nor coif on; and the mountain air is not delicate, especially for those who have lived long in southern lands;" and twining her arm through that of her new friend, she led the way into Trochrie, with all the chambers of which she seemed well acquainted.

No servant presented himself as they went; and with open gates and lowered drawbridge, the castle seemed at the mercy of any one who might choose to attack it. Gowrie looked round with displeasure.

"This is dangerous," he said, as they walked on across the outer court. "Where are the men you brought with you, dear Julia? I should have thought that Austin would have been more careful."

"Austin is watching in the tower," said Julia; "and the women are milking in the field behind; but the rest of the men are gone out, I believe, to catch game in the valley on the other side of that great hill. We found the place scantily supplied with provisions, and they seem to have been accustomed to take such means of getting what they want."

Gowrie mused. "This was what I feared," he said; "but we must see that you are better guarded for the future, love; and I am sure my mother, if she knew the state of the castle, would have sent up all that was needful for you."

"And so she has, indeed," answered Julia. "Several horse loads arrived this very morning--everything she could think of, indeed, to while away the time; but, doubtless, the men, accustomed to a more active life than I am, and not having so much to meditate upon, find it dull."

"They must learn better," replied the earl; and with this comment, they walked on to a large chamber above, which Julia had made her sitting-room, and decked out as best she could with the books which Lady Gowrie had sent her, a lute, and a mandolin.

A slight cloud in the morning often leads in the brighter day. Gowrie was displeased with the negligence of his followers, and when they returned soon after, he reproved them sternly for their want of caution. Only two attempted to excuse themselves--the man who usually remained in charge of the castle, who, with humble tone, and with the deference of a clansman to his chief, declared that he had not been made aware of his lord's wishes or the necessity of caution; and the man, David Drummond, who had accompanied Julia thither, and who replied to his lord in a tone of dogged sullenness, which Gowrie bore with more calmness than either Julia or Beatrice had expected.

"You must be more upon your guard, Donald," he said, speaking to the first, "and, moreover, you must have some additional force here. You must call in the tenants to the guard of the castle, and never suffer it to be without ten men within at least. Give notice, too, that they be prepared on the usual signals to come in with every man that they can muster. The men of Athol, too, will come down to help you in case of need. I will write to my good sister to-night, for I know not, from moment to moment, what may happen; and it is my command to you to hold out to the last against any force which may be sent to surprise Trochrie, let it come under whatever authority it may. But we will speak more to-night before I retire to rest. David Drummond, you go with me to Perth to-morrow--be prepared."

With these words, the cloud passed away from his brow and from his mind, and the rest of the evening went by in unmixed happiness. Oh, it was a dream of delight to a spirit like that of Gowrie--or, rather it was the realization of a dream as bright as ever filled the mind of man. Often, often on their way homeward from Italy, when gazing on the fair face of her he loved with that mixture of ardent passion with the purer, the higher, the more elevating tenderness which exalts passion to the dignity of love, he had thought he saw the bright being now before him sitting with those who were bound to him by the ties of kindred and of early association and long affection, winning their love as she had won his, becoming the child of his dear mother, the sister of his sisters. And now, as she sat by Beatrice, with their fair hands often locked in each other, and their arms sometimes twined together, and their eyes gazing into each other's faces to scan the features they were so ready to love and to print on memory, till a passing blush or a gay smile

was called up by the earnestness of the glance, he would almost fancy that all dark auguries were swept away, and that happiness was placed beyond the power of fate. He himself was very silent with much joy; but Beatrice spoke cheerfully, and led forth Julia's more timid but more deep-toned thoughts; and the sister gazed and smiled with strong grave interest at the fresh spirit and the eloquent originality of the brother's promised bride, and declared aloud, that it was charming, that it was unlike anything of the earth, that it was like an angel sent down now into a world of evil and of care, of which she knew nothing.

Then as the hours wore on, and night fell, and lights were lighted in the hall, Gowrie persuaded Julia to sing; and the full rich tones of the melodious voice pouring forth a finer music than was yet known in the north, filled the old hall, and made the small panes vibrate in the leaden frames, calling into being, in Beatrice's heart, deep-seated emotions, the very germs of which she knew not to exist in her bosom till occupied by the sunshine of the song. Sometimes she almost trembled as she heard, and sometimes she well nigh wept; and even the servants, lured by the sweet melody, peeped in and listened through the partly opened door.

Oh, it was a happy evening that, full of every sort of pure enjoyment, and willingly, right willingly would I pause upon it long, and tell the words of joy and hope and love that were spoken by all, and try to depict feelings that brightened the passing hour. Willingly, too, would I draw back from the darker scenes before me; willingly would I linger in the sunshine, so bright in contrast with the dark cloud coming up upon the wind. But the cloud advances--Fate is moving slowly, but inevitably, forward. It cannot be! We must on!

CHAPTER XXIX.

In the beautiful town of St. Johnstone, of Perth, on the west bank of the river Tay, and in a line with the streets called Spey-street and Water-street, the former of which, I believe, now bears the name of South-street, stood, at the time I speak of, one of the largest and most magnificent houses in Scotland, which well deserved the name of The Palace which it sometimes obtained. It was generally called, however, Gowrie House, or Gowrie Place, and occasionally, by the Earls of Gowrie themselves, was termed "The Great House," to distinguish it, probably, from their other mansions, of which they possessed several. The extent of this building may be conceived, when we recollect that the great court in the centre of the building was an oblong of sixty feet in one direction, and ninety in the other. Round this immense area rose four massive piles of building, raised at various epochs, and of very different styles of architecture, but united into one grand and imposing mass of masonry of a quadrangular form, and having but one break, in the centre of the west front, where stood a large and handsome gate of hammered iron, the view from which extended down the whole line of the South-street. The gardens, which were very extensive, and kept with remarkable care, lay at the back and to the south, stretching in that direction to the town wall. At the south-eastern angle of the garden rose a curious and very ancient tower, called the Monk's Tower, from some tradition which has not reached me. The parts of the building towards the Tay, and those towards the south, were of an unknown antiquity, with walls of immense thickness; and legends were current, even at the time of which I speak, of persons having been confined by former lords, in secret recesses within those heavy walls, and left to perish miserably. The northern and western sides of the quadrangle were far more modern, and had probably been erected either by the Countess of Huntley, who once possessed the palace, or by some of the early Lords of Ruthven. By whomsoever they were built, much pains had been employed to remodel the internal arrangements of the older building, so as to make it harmonize, within at least, with newer parts; and each successive Earl of Gowrie had expended large sums in improving the accommodation which the great house afforded, so as to meet the advance of his country in luxury and refinement. Nor was decoration wanting; for in the south range a number of small chambers had been swept away to form a gallery, which was one of the finest at the time in Europe; and it had been the pride of William, the first earl, to collect from all countries, for this large chamber, pictures by the greatest artists of the day.

At each corner of the house was a tower or turret, and both at the south-east and north-west corner of the great court was a broad stair, leading to the rooms above. Several smaller stairs opened also into the court, and one especially, in the south-west corner, led direct to a large chamber at the western end of the gallery, called the "gallery chamber," to which was attached a cabinet, named, the earl's study. The large dining-hall and a smaller one were in the more ancient part of the building to the east, and the lodge of the porter was by the side of the great iron gate in front.

This long description is not unnecessary, as the reader will find hereafter; but it may be necessary now to proceed with the narrative, begging the reader, however, to bear in mind the particulars which have been mentioned.

Towards the afternoon of the 14th of March, 1600, a man was standing with his back towards

the great gates of Gowrie Place, which were partly open. The court behind him was vacant, and there were not many people in the streets, for the labours of the day were not over in the industrious town, and nobody was to be seen but a man slowly crossing the South-street, or a girl wending her way along that which led in an opposite direction. The man who thus stood gazing up and down the street was a short, somewhat stout man, with a ruddy complexion, and a light brown beard and hair. He was by no means ill-looking, and yet there was a certain degree of shrewd cunning in the expression of his face, especially about the small black twinkling eyes, which did not prepossess a beholder in his favour. If one might judge by the half-open mouth and narrow jaw and chin, there was also in his character that species of weakness by no means incompatible with cunning. He was habited in a good brown suit of broadcloth, and a short black cloak, with no sword by his side, but a small dagger in his girdle, and might well have been taken for one of the substantial citizens of the town, had it not been for a sort of cringing air for which the worthy burgesses of St. Johnstone were never famous. From time to time, he turned and looked back into the court, as if he expected somebody to appear therein, and once he muttered, "De'il's in the wife! she's long ere she comes to take the keys." But a minute or two after, he took a step forward with a joyous air, as a man on foot entered the South-street, and nodded and beckoned with a smile.

The man advanced with a quick step towards him, with a "Good day, Mr. Henderson."

"Ah, Wattie!" said the man, who had been standing at the door of the great house, "what has brought you to Perth, and how are you and all your people, and good Sir George Ramsay, your master?"

"They're all well, sir," answered the man; "though, to speak truth, I have not seen Sir George this many a day. I've been with the court, Mr. Henderson, trying what I could do to better my fortune--all with my good master's leave, however; and his brother John is doing all he can to help me."

"Well, I hope you will have good luck," replied Andrew Henderson, the Earl of Gowrie's factor, or bailiff. "I wish I could do you any good, Wattie; but the earl has been so long gone, that he can help little; and as to Mr. Alexander, the wild lad and I are not such great friends."

"You can help me, nevertheless, very much, Andrew," replied the other; "for you are just the man who must do it, if any one does."

"How's that--how's that, Wattie?" asked Henderson. "I will do anything I can, man."

"Why, the case is just this," answered Sir George Ramsay's man: "the old supervisor at Scoon is dead; and I'm to have the place, which his majesty has graciously condescended to promise to Master John Ramsay, if I can get the earl's factor's good word. Now, who's the factor but yourself, man?"

"Then my good word you shall have, Wattie," replied Henderson, slapping him on the shoulder. "Didn't your wife's cousin Jane marry my half-brother's second son? I'll write you a letter commendatory, in a minute, to the honourable comptroller of his majesty's household. But where have you put your horse, man?"

"Oh, I just left him at Murray's Inn," replied the other; "not knowing whether I should find you or not. Come and take a stoup of wine, Andrew; and you can write the letter there."

This proposal was readily agreed to, for Andrew Henderson was a man who by no means objected to that good thing called a stoup of wine. He called to an old woman who was now in the court, saying, "Here, Nelly, take the keys; I'm going to Murray's Inn." And the two were soon seated in the public room of Murray's Inn, as it was called, with several other persons who were drinking there likewise. George Murray, the keeper of the inn, was a man of good family, though it is supposed of illegitimate birth; but what is certain is, that he had the best wine in the town, and that his house was frequented by all the principal gentlemen in the neighbourhood. Henderson and Sir George Ramsay's man were soon supplied with what they wanted, and sat drinking and talking for about half an hour; at the end of which time a horse's feet were heard to stop opposite to the inn, and a minute after, David Drummond, the dull looking servant of the Earl of Gowrie, entered the room and looked round. The cheerful countenances of Andrew Henderson and his friend Wattie changed the moment they saw him; and Henderson exclaimed, "Ah, Davie, is that you, man? What brings you to Perth? Is the earl coming?"

"Ay, is he, Henderson," answered the man, looking heavily at Sir George Ramsay's servant. "He'll be here in five minutes, and sent me on to tell you. So you must get up and come away to the Great House directly, for I've been there seeking you."

Henderson was rising at once; but his friend Wattie laid his hand upon his arm, saying, "Just write me those few lines to Sir George Murray first. It will not take you a minute, Andrew."

"Hold your tongue, you little stupid pock-pudding!" cried David Drummond, in an insulting tone; "do you think he's going to neglect his natural lord and master, to attend to such a thing as you are, Wat Matthison?"

"Ah, David Drummond, David Drummond," said the other man, with his eyes flashing fire; "you

killed my niece's husband, and you'll come to be hanged by the neck, for all you think yourself so safe."

"It shall be for killing you, then," said Drummond, who was a very powerful man; and he struck him a violent blow with his fist.

The other, though not so strongly made, instantly returned it; and a regular battle would have ensued between them, had not the master of the inn and all the other persons present interfered, and pushed them by main force into the street. There they kept them apart for a moment, and tried to pacify them; but soon getting tired of the task of peacemaking, they left them to themselves, and Drummond rushed upon Walter Matthison again. The two grappled with each other, and struggled vehemently for a moment, the spirit and resolution of Matthison supplying the want of physical strength.

"Call the bailie! call the bailie!" cried Henderson, loudly. "De'il's in it, Jock, can you not part them? Here, Murray, help us."

But at that moment Drummond was seen to put his hand to his girdle, and the next moment Matthison loosed his hold and reeled back with a sharp cry, exclaiming, "Oh! the man's killed me!" and before any one could reach him, he fell back on the pavement with the blood pouring in torrents from his side.

David Drummond, without staying to take his horse, or to look what he had done, ran off as hard as his legs would carry him in the direction of the Great House, pursued by a number of the people. He reached it before them, however, rushed through the iron gates, which were open, into the court, where several horses and men were standing, and then flinging-to the gates in the face of the pursuers, turned the key in the lock. This done, he attempted to rush into the house, but was suddenly met by the Earl of Gowrie himself, who was seen to seize him by the collar, and point with his hand to what was probably a mark of blood upon his arm. The next instant, the people who were gazing through the gates saw the murderer handed over to two of the other servants, who at once proceeded to strap his arms together with one of the stirrup leathers, while Gowrie, advancing to the gate, said to the people near, "I wish, my good friends, some of you would call one of the bailies to me, and ask him to bring the guard. I have a prisoner here who must be handed over to his custody."

"Long live the Earl of Gowrie!--Long live the great earl!--Long live our noble provost! He will do justice," cried a dozen voices, while two or three men ran off to bring the bailie.

"Ah, my lord, this is a sad business," cried Henderson, coming up. "I'm glad to see your lordship returned safely to your own place; but it's awful to think that one of our people should shed blood in the streets before he's been ten minutes in St. Johnstone. It's that wild beast Drummond has done it, and it seems he has fled hither."

"There he stands in custody for the deed, Henderson," replied the earl; "and I give notice to all men that I will visit any offences committed by my own people even more severely upon them than I would upon others; and justly too, for most of them have been well nurtured, and all are well paid and well fed. They have my example before them, which I trust will never lead them to do wrong, and have always had my commands to abstain from doing injury to any man. If they fail then, their crime is the greater; and I will by no means pass it over. Who is the man he has wounded?"

"Wounded, my lord!" cried Henderson; "he's as dead as a door nail. David Drummond there stabbed him to the heart, and he was dead in two minutes, before one could lift his head up. His name was Walter Matthison; a good, quiet, harmless man as ever lived. Ay, here comes Bailie Roy."

"Some one open the gates," said the earl; and advancing through the crowd, he met Bailie Roy, a little, fat, pousy man whom he did not know, with every sign of respect for his office.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Bailie," he said, "in consequence of a horrible occurrence which has just taken place in the town, in which one of my servants, named David Drummond, has, I understand, slain a man, called Walter Matthison. I have caused the accused person to be instantly secured, and I now hand him over to you to be dealt with according to law. You will be pleased to have him removed to the town jail, and tried for the offence in due course. I myself shall return to Perth as soon as the king's service permits me, and will hold a justice court immediately after my arrival. If more convenient, however, to the magistrates of Perth to proceed to the trial earlier, I beg that it may be done without either fear or favour, for my presence is not absolutely necessary; and the prisoner would certainly meet with nothing but simple justice at my hands."

"My lord, your lordship is extremely gracious," said the bailie. "The magistrates will of course wait your lordship's leisure, as they would not on any account be without the honour of your presence as our lord provost on such an awful and important occasion. I beg leave to felicitate your lordship very humbly upon your auspicious return."

This speech was accompanied by sundry bows to the great man; and then turning to his own followers, he said, in a more authoritative tone, "Take hold of the atrocious villain, and away with

him.^[1] Our noble lord provost, my friends, will take care that there is no bully-ragging in the town of Perth."

The earl was too much vexed and annoyed by all that had taken place to afford a smile; and as soon as the prisoner was removed, he dismissed the worthy bailie with a gracious speech, and retired into the house with his factor, Henderson. Having seated himself in the lesser dining-room, he inquired more minutely into the circumstances of the transaction, of which he received an account very nearly, if not quite true.

"But who is this Walter Matthison?" he asked, after Henderson had told him what he had seen with his own eyes. "Was he a married man? Had he any family?"

"He was a good, peaceable man, my lord, as ever lived," replied Henderson, "and an old servant of Sir George Ramsay's, who was always a kind master to all his people. Married he was too, poor fellow, and has three or four children."

"I grieve to hear it," said the earl; "something must be done for them. Let me have paper and ink. I will write to Sir George directly."

When the letter was written and sealed, the earl turned his thoughts to other matters, and gave the orders which were necessary for putting the Great House at Perth into a condition to receive him at any time when he might like to come.

"You must find me out a trustworthy person as porter, Henderson," he said, "and engage whatever other people may be needful for the service of the house, cooks, and sewers, and such persons. From what I see--we must have the help of women's hands also, in order that everything may be put into a better state, for the place is in a sad dusty condition, Henderson. I am sorry to see that it has been so neglected."

"Why, you see, my lord," said the factor, who was one of those men who never want an excuse, "her ladyship your mother would but allow two poor old feckless women while you were beyond seas. They could not do much, poor bodies; but what they could do, they did do, I will say for them; but I'll see that your lordship's orders are obeyed, and everything put straight before you come back. Where I'm to get a porter, I do not know--oh, ay, there's Christie, I forgot him; he may do well enough--a quiet, stout man, just fit for a porter; and he's seeking service, too. Would your lordship like to see any of the accounts to-day?"

"No, Henderson, no," answered the earl; "I must away to Dirleton as soon as possible. Let me have a cup of wine. This sad business distresses me sorely. I love not to have blood shed the very moment of my entering the town."

"Nor I either, my lord," said Henderson. "It's a bad sign."

The last words were spoken in a low tone to himself; and retiring, he brought the earl a small silver flagon and cup with his own hands. Gowrie drank; and after giving some farther orders, and waiting till the horses had consumed their corn, he remounted to ride on; but hardly had his horse gone fifty yards from the gates, when he was met by four men carrying a board, on which was stretched the body of the unfortunate Walter Matthison, followed by a number of the town's-people. Gowrie immediately stopped, and asked some questions, by the answers to which he found that the body was being removed to the house of a cousin of the deceased, named Symes, living in Water-street.

"Tell the good man," said Gowrie, "that I grieve much for what has happened; that I have written to Sir George Ramsay about poor Matthison's family, and will myself take care that they are provided for according to their station."

A murmur of applause and thanks followed, and the earl rode on, having gained rather than lost in the esteem of his fellow-townsmen by his demeanour on so painful an occasion.

It was late at night before he arrived at Dirleton; but his mother was still up, expecting him, and he was soon pressed warmly to her bosom. His two young brothers also were there, all eager to claim affection; but after the first joy of meeting was over, the first question was, "But where is Beatrice?"

"The dear girl chose to stay behind," said Gowrie, "to comfort and cheer another like herself. I have to crave forgiveness, my dear lady and mother," he continued, kissing the countess's hand, "for having gone to Trochrie before I came to Dirleton; and I trust you will not think I failed in duty."

"It was quite natural, John," said his mother. "Hearts are like trees, my dear boy: they must be taken from the parent stem, and grafted on another, in order to bear good fruit. I have loved myself, Gowrie, and have not forgotten what it is."

"Love alone would not have carried me thither before seeing you, dear mother," answered the earl; "but I feared that so strict and careful a watch as is needful might not be kept up; and my suspicions were only too correct. I found the castle gates open, and not a man in the house but my English servant Jute. However, I have now spoken seriously to Donald Mac Duff, our baron

bailie, and taken such measures as to guard against all chance of surprise. In case of need, Athol will come down with help, and the clans would not be found wanting. And now, William," he continued, throwing his arm over the stripling's shoulder, "many, many thanks, my dear brother, for all your care and kindness to one dearer to me than myself, and to you, my dear mother, for your affectionate greeting of her, which made her no stranger in the land of her fathers, or in the family of her future husband, though she had never beheld either before. I shall stay with you here for two or three days, and then go to bring Beatrice to you."

"It is well you have come, Gowrie," said his mother, "for here is a summons from the king to attend the council some ten days hence. The messenger inquired curiously where you were; and we told him you were gone to Perth, but would be back to-night. The king, perchance, may send to seek you there."

"He will find I have been to bonny St. Johnstone," said Gowrie, laughing, "and to-morrow, by dawn, I will send off a messenger to show him that I am now here. He will hear of my journey, too, most likely, from other sources; for I am sorry to say a sad affair took place in Perth between one of George Ramsay's men and David Drummond, who stabbed him to the heart."

"The cankered beast!" cried the old countess, "I wish I had not saved him to kill another honest man!"

"In that former business," said the earl, "both were in fault, so there might be some excuse for him; but now the wrong was all on his side, as far as I can learn; and so I have left him a prisoner in the hands of the town. He shall have no favour from me, for he has been well warned, and is greatly criminal. And now, dear mother, let us talk of happier things----alas! your hair has turned sadly gray;" and he smoothed it affectionately upon her brow.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was a gay sight in the town of Edinburgh, as, on the morning of the twenty-third of March, all the principal nobles of the land rode, gallantly attended, to the council for which the king's summons had gone forth, and many were the persons assembled to see them pass. No great joy or satisfaction, however, shone upon the countenances of the good citizens of Edinburgh, for the rumour already had spread through the city that a new tax was in contemplation to support the extravagance of the king, and to enrich the minions of the court. Never was a greater mistake made than that which is attributed to David Rizzio, who is said to have expressed an opinion, when warned by Sir James Melville of the peril which menaced him, that the bark of the Scotch people was worse than their bite. On the contrary, history proves that the bite, and that a sharp one, came frequently before the bark. On the present occasion, there were no loud expressions of popular feeling, except perhaps, when one of those barons in whom the people had confidence happened to pass; but a dull and menacing sort of gloom hung over the crowd, and whatever they thought, it was expressed in low tones to each other. Gowrie was one of the first on the way, and a shout greeted him when he approached the crowd assembled near the palace gates, for there the council was held; but the noise soon died away, and he was riding on, when a half-witted man ran out from amongst the rest, and laid his hand upon the earl's rein, saying, "Don't you vote for the tax, Gowrie! Don't you vote for the oppression of the people. We poor folk can hardly bear it."

Gowrie said some kind but unmeaning words to the poor man, and passed quietly on his way, arriving at the gates a few minutes before the appointed hour. At the door he was met by the king's porter, who informed him that his majesty had not yet left his apartments; and with a slow step and very thoughtful countenance, the young earl was walking across to the foot of the staircase, when young John Ramsay came hastily forward from the fireplace, by which he was standing, and accosted him, saying, "My lord the earl, I wish to speak to you."

"Ah, Ramsay!" said Gowrie, turning round, and holding out his hand, "I did not see you!"

The young man, however, drew a little back, and replied with a haughty and somewhat overbearing air, "There are some matters to be settled first, my lord, before I know whether we are friends or enemies."

"It may be just as you please, sir," answered Gowrie calmly, gazing at him with some surprise; "what is the matter?"

"I understand, my lord," replied the young man, "that one of your servants has murdered, in Perth, my brother's man, Walter Matthison--a person whom I protected."

The tone was very offensive; and the first answer that rose to Gowrie's lips was, "Your protection, it seems, proved of little avail;" but he checked the reply before it was uttered, and

merely said, "I am sorry, Ramsay, that such is too truly the case."

"Then you will remember, my lord," said Ramsay, "that we will have blood for blood. No great protection shall avail here, whatever it may do in France; and serving men shall not wound or slay as good or better men than themselves, however powerful or wealthy their lord may be."

Gowrie's cheek reddened, and his heart beat quick; but he mastered the feeling of anger, and asked, though in somewhat of a stern tone, "Have you heard from your brother lately?"

"No, I have not, my lord," replied Ramsay. "What of that?"

"Simply that if you had," answered the earl, "I think he would be sorry both for your words and for your bearing. You have been deceived, Ramsay," he said, in a milder tone; "certainly, with regard to what has taken place in France, and I think with regard to what has taken place at Perth. The murderer of your brother's servant--for I can call my man, David Drummond, no less--was immediately seized by my orders, and handed over to the justice of the town. I myself shall sit as provost at his trial. I have invited your brother to be present, and let me tell you, John Ramsay, that I say--which is something more than what you say--that if all the power in Scotland, except the king's grace, were exerted to save him from justice, he should die if he be proved guilty, as I believe him to be."

Thus saying, the earl turned upon his heel, and walked up the stairs, leaving Ramsay feeling himself painfully rebuked in the presence of a number of bystanders, who, to say truth, had the ordinary amount of love for their rivals, the favourites of the court. There are two things from which the mind of youth usually takes its impressions, its own prejudices or passions, and the opinions of others. It is an after operation of the mind, in nine cases out of ten, to seek for and to ascertain facts, and to form our opinions upon them. Ramsay was naturally rash, bold, and resolute; and though he afterwards, as Lord Holderness, showed some signs of greater powers, at the time I speak of they were all in abeyance, and he was ready to receive all the opinions of others, and tincture them strongly or weakly, according to the prejudices and passions already existing in his own mind. He remained near the fire, then, for a full quarter of an hour longer, gnawing the bitter lip, and angry without cause for anger. At length, one of the ushers came down and whispered in his ear, "The king is in at the council, sir. He's been in some time."

"Pshaw!" said Ramsay, impetuously, and turned his back to the man who addressed him.

Another quarter of an hour passed, and various noblemen, who arrived somewhat late, went up the stairs without Ramsay noticing them. At length, one of them, who was acquainted with him, hurrying in, remarked him standing by the fire, and said, "Ah, I am glad to see you there, Ramsay. I was afraid the king would be gone in to the council, for I was detained by----"

"So he is," answered Ramsay, abruptly; and the gentleman hurried up the stairs without waiting to finish his sentence.

The young gentleman followed with a slow step; and when he entered the council chamber, a scene presented itself which I must attempt to depict. The king was seated in a large arm chair, or throne, a few steps in advance of the private door through which Ramsay passed. Before him stretched a long table, or council board, at which were seated almost all the great nobles of the land. Behind the king's chair, and nearly filling up the vacant space between it and the wall, were a number of the gentlemen of the royal household. Amongst these were Sir George Murray, Sir Hugh Herries, Sir Thomas Erskine, Mr. Alexander Blair, David Moyses, and nearer to the door, Sir David Murray of Cospetrie, afterwards created Lord Scoon, a man of more mind and intelligence than James was usually inclined to tolerate.

It would appear that the tax which the king wished to inflict upon the people had been proposed for the consideration of the lords; and that the debate, if it may be so called, had proceeded some way, for it is known that the first three or four who spoke briefly expressed their approbation. At the moment when Ramsay entered, however, the Earl of Gowrie was on his feet, in the act of addressing the council. But that he had spoken for some minutes; and that the argumentative part of his speech was over was evident, for the only words which Ramsay heard were, "For these reasons, my lords: because the tax would be burdensome in its nature; because it would be unequal in its pressure; because the people in this realm have not the means of meeting so large a claim upon their loyalty; and because the actual necessity of so great a demand, either for the purpose of maintaining the king's royal dignity, or for securing the peace and safety of the country, has not been clearly shown to exist; I, for my part, would humbly petition his majesty, according to his great wisdom, to devise some other means more easy to his loyal subjects for meeting the necessities of the time---and," he added, after a moment's pause, as if hesitating whether to utter the words which rose to his lips, "and in his gracious condescension, and in that love and affection which he is known to bear to all his subjects, to confine his requirements to the limit of their means, and the most pressing exigencies of the state."

The earl sat down, and a murmur of applause ran round the lower end of the table; but Sir David Murray turned towards Sir Thomas Erskine, and said, fixing his eyes direct upon the Earl of Gowrie, "Yonder is an unhappy man. They are but seeking a cause for his death; and now he has given it."^[2]

Sir Hugh Herries, who was standing near, looked over his shoulder with a dark smile; and Murray, as if he felt that he had imprudently committed himself, quitted the room in some haste.

A moment after, one of the ushers whispered in Ramsay's ear that his brother was below, and wished to speak with him; and imagining that the debate was likely to be long, the young gentleman went out, made an appointment to meet Sir George in the evening, and returned. When he reached the council chamber, however, he was only in time to open the private door for the king to retire to his own apartments; but James, who seemed in high good humour, gave him a sign to follow, as he had previously done to Sir Hugh Herries; and when they reached the royal closet, the monarch cast himself upon his thickly-cushioned seat, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"Well, bairns," he said, "that's done, in the teeth of Gowrie's earl; and we shall get the money."

"You would not have got it, sire, if he could have prevented you," said Herries, with the true malignity of a court.

"Ay, man; but we were too strong for him," said James. "He that wrestles with a king who understands his craft had need be a stalwart chiel."

"I hope he may get a fall some day," said Ramsay, bluffly.

James looked at him with a significant smile, "And so he will, Jock," he said, "such a fall as may break his neck, perhaps; but we must give him time. It's always better to let such lads weary themselves out, keeping a watchful eye upon them, Jock, lest they play us a scurvy trick. Soul o' my body, man, but he made a fine speech, though; well delivered, with just enunciation, and every sentence well put together. Not so bad for the matter either, if it had not been against his king and his duty. He's a sharp-witted callant, if he was not somewhat traitorously disposed, like the whole of those Ruthvens, every mother's son of them."

"I would soon stop their treason, if I were your majesty," said John Ramsay; "however, you walk by wisdom and I by indignation, so your majesty will of course walk best."

"No doubt of it," answered James; and then, mingling a coarse familiarity with an affectation of dignity, which only rendered the one grotesque and the other ridiculous, he proceeded to say, "And now, Jock Ramshackle, as you have rendered us many and signal services, we are determined to confer upon you a high honour and dignity, by giving you a clout upon the shoulder"--or as the king pronounced it, *shoother*--"so go your ways; tell Tammy Elliot to bring us a sword; but bid him carry it discreetly on the cushion, with the hilt towards our hand, and to take care that it does not pop out of itself. They are but kittle weapons."

We must leave the learned reader, who may be so inclined, to retranslate the king's speeches into the fine vernacular in which he usually spoke; for we have only attempted, though somewhat more than half a Scot ourself, to put in a word or two of the original dialect, here and there, for vigour's sake; and, to say truth, we fear if we had either the capability or the desire of rendering each speech of his majesty word for word, most of our readers would be puzzled as to the meaning, and many of them not a little shocked at expressions, which we have omitted--for reasons which shall be fully assigned at some future period in a dissertation which we intend to write upon the oaths and blasphemies of Our late Sovereign Lord, King James, Sixth of that name of Scotland and First of England, of happy memory.

Young John Ramsay hurried away with a proud and joyous step to seek the instrument which was to bestow upon him the honours of chivalry; and, in the meantime, the king spoke more rapidly, and in a lower tone, to Herries than was his wont, every now and then pausing and saying, "Ha, man." To which Herries invariably replied, "Yes, sire, I understand your majesty. It was the wisest course;" and to this general approbation of the king's views he added, just as Ramsay was returning with Sir Thomas Elliot and the sword of state, "But you'll need cold iron before you've done."

Ramsay instantly started and turned round, with a glance of keen inquiry at the king's face, upon which James burst into a fit of laughter, exclaiming, "Look at the young slothound, how it pricks up its ears! I'll answer for it, put him on a trail of blood, and he'd follow it till he pulled his man down."

The youth coloured, for there was something in the comparison he did not altogether like; but, kneeling at the king's feet, he received the honour of knighthood--with the sheathed sword, however, which he did not altogether like either. The king then dismissed him, with the directions that he might have given a child, to "go and play himself;" and for his own part, he remained shut up with Herries for nearly an hour. At the end of that time, James and his counsellor came forth together, and walked towards the queen's apartments, the monarch concluding their conversation by saying, "Bide a wee; you'll see. We'll frame such a cunning device that the birdie shall walk into the trap, and if ever he gets out again, it will be the fault of the fowler's friends, and not his who set the snare. But mind, man, not a word or a look, as you'd have our favour. We shall ourselves be all kindness and courtesy; and you must make our looks your glass, that you may not scare the quarry from the net."

"Don't be too civil, sire," said Herries, bluntly, stumping after the king with his club foot. "He must feel that your majesty can't love him: and I've known many a man put on his cloak when he

saw the sun shine too fair in the morning, because he knew it would rain before noon."

"Hout, tout! Would ye school me, man? Faith, you are too bold," said the king; and he walked on with an air of pique.

CHAPTER XXXI.

In one of the good old houses of the good old town of Edinburgh, and in a handsome and commodious room, hung with polished leather stamped with various figures of birds and flowers, in a fashion of which hardly a vestige now remains, sat Sir George Ramsay and his younger brother, just after the sun had gone down. The younger was in high spirits, for, mere lad as he was at the time, he had many of the weaknesses of the child still in his nature: varying in mood, easily elated; when checked or disappointed, moody and irritable; when prosperous, successful, and unopposed, gay, good-humoured, and even placable. That morning he had been greatly irritated by the news--for news travelled slowly in those days--that his brother's servant, and that one of his own favourites too, had been killed by the Earl of Gowrie's man, David Drummond; and the very calmness with which Gowrie had met his intemperate insinuations and haughty bearing had not served to calm him; but the knighthood just received had done more than any arguments could have effected to soften and improve him; and now he was talking cheerfully with one of much stronger sense and more amiable character than himself, who knew him well, and how to direct his mind to better purposes.

"Well, George, well," he said, "I am glad to hear what you tell me of the earl. I have no wish to think ill of Gowrie, and if he has acted as you mention, perhaps he had a right to be offended at the way I spoke this morning; and I will apologize. A man who is ready to fight another at any time, need not fear to apologize; but Newburn stated the matter very differently."

"A man of honour need never fear to apologize when he knows himself in the wrong, whether he be prepared to fight in a bad cause or not, John," replied his brother, with a quiet smile; "and nobody, I think, will suspect our house of wanting courage. As for Newburn, he is a firebrand, and being now deprived of the power of doing mischief himself by the consequences of one of his own insolences, he seeks alone to set others by the ears. I have now had the whole story from good William Rhind, who was in the carriage at the time. Newburn first looked into the lady's face, with an insulting laugh, and then, when the curtain was drawn, pulled it violently back, and thrust his head quite into the carriage."

"Then he deserved what he got," replied John Ramsay, frankly; "but as to this other business, you must look to it, George; for I feel sure that Gowrie is a man who will stand by his own people."

"Doubtless, when they are in the right," replied the other; "but not when they are in the wrong. I tell you, he seized the scoundrel with his own hand, as soon as he saw him flying with the poor fellow's blood upon him, and instantly gave him into the custody--not of his own followers, as he might have done, and no one said him nay, but--of the officers of the town. I forgot to tell you, too, that he has given a pension upon the lands of Ruthven to the widow, and her two daughters--fifty marks a year to each."

"That's noble--that's kind!" exclaimed John Ramsay.

"It is," said his brother; "but nevertheless, I shall go to Perth on the day of the trial, not from any doubt of Gowrie's justice, but for my own honour's sake. Thus, I beseech you, John, listen to no more tales from Newburn, who would only deceive you. As for my part, I tell you fairly, cousin or no cousin, he shall never darken my doors again. I stood by him as long as a gentleman and man of honour could; but in this business he sought so grossly to pervert the truth, that I will have no more to do with him."

Young John Ramsay mused for a minute or two; and his brother, thinking that he was pursuing the same train of thought, added, "You cannot deny, John, that his whole conduct through life has been disgraceful."

"I was not thinking of him, Dalhousie," said the younger brother, with a laugh; "I was wondering what Gowrie can have done with this same beautiful lady--this Lady Julia Douglas, and what can have made the king all in a moment seem to care so little about the matter. Either his majesty, with his cunning wit, has found out where she really is, and knows she is out of his power, or else he is waiting for the return of the messenger he sent to Italy to inquire about her treasures. The earl's movements have been very strange, as I told you, and though so strictly watched----"

But at that moment the door was quietly opened, and a servant said, "The Earl of Gowrie, Sir George, is waiting at the stairfoot to know if he can visit you."

The colour came somewhat warmly into John Ramsay's cheek, for though he had spoke of an apology, he did not think the opportunity of making it was so near. His brother, however, instantly started up, and went down to meet the earl, who took him kindly by the hand, saying, "'Tis a strange hour to visit you, Ramsay; but I have been engaged all this day, and hearing you had arrived, I would not let another pass without coming to see you."

"Welcome at any hour, my lord," replied Sir George Ramsay; "but how is it--alone, and on foot?"

"Even so, George," replied the earl; "had it been a visit of ceremony, it should have been in the morning, with horses and attendance enow; but as it is a visit of friendship, alone and on foot is best. I am now the student of Padua again, and far more happy so than as Earl of Gowrie."

While this conversation was passing, they were climbing the somewhat steep and difficult stairs of a house in the old town of Edinburgh, with a servant going before to light them; and when they entered the room where young Ramsay had remained, Gowrie seemed somewhat surprised to see him, but held out his hand frankly.

The other took it, not without grace, and feeling that he must speak then or never, he said, "I have to offer my excuses, my lord, for some rashness this morning, brought about by representations I now find to be false, and I trust----"

"Mention it no more, I pray, Sir John," replied Gowrie, seeing he paused and hesitated. "I understood full well that you had been deceived by that idle jade, Rumour, and had I not been in haste to get over a most painful duty, I would have stayed to explain more fully. Trust me to do simple justice in the case of the poor man who was so foully slain at Perth; and when I have done so, never let misconception of any part of my conduct breed coldness between us more. And now, let me congratulate you on the honour I hear you have this day received--none worthier, I am sure, and none who will do more honour to knighthood."

Seating himself quietly between the two brothers, Gowrie soon carried the conversation away from things personal, and from all that could excite one unpleasant feeling, or even difference of opinion. Having mingled more in the world at large than either of the two brothers, having seen more of mankind in every respect, he could always lead where Sir George was very willing to follow, and mingling from time to time some classical allusion for the elder, with conversation of hawks and hounds, and courtly pastimes for the younger of the two, he brought a brightness over the next half hour, which gained wonderfully upon John Ramsay. So much indeed did it gain upon him, that he became alarmed. He felt that he was beginning to like and admire a man whom he wished to hate; that he could not believe all that he desired to believe of him; and perhaps that he might learn to love the person whom he was destined to overthrow.

There was certainly some impression of the kind upon his mind. I do not mean to say that it was any superstitious presentiment, for it might have its rise in natural causes. The monarch to whom he had devoted himself had so often displayed his jealous antipathy towards the man beside him, had so frequently pointed to a coming struggle between the sovereign and the subject, and had so clearly indicated him, John Ramsay, as the person upon whose courage, faith, and resolution he relied, that it was not wonderful, he should see in Gowrie a man whom he was fated, sooner or later, to encounter as an enemy, and with whom it were better to enter into no bonds of friendship.

These feelings impelled him to rise at length, saying, "Well, Dalhousie, I must away back to the court. We are but servants after all, though our master be royal; and we must perform our service. I give you good night, my lord, and am happy that occasion has served for my explaining conduct which must have seemed rude."

Gowrie shook hands with him; but he said to himself, as the young man departed, "Nevertheless, he loves me not, and will love me less when he comes to think over what he will daily consider more humiliating."

"Well, Dalhousie," he continued, aloud, "you and I need no explanations. Your brother is a gallant youth, but young in mind as well as years. It is a fault time and experience sorely mends, and I doubt not he will do honour to your noble name."

"My lord," said Sir George Ramsay, in an eager manner, "pardon my abruptness, but I have much wished to speak with you alone, and feared every moment that you would go before my brother."

"What is the matter?" asked the earl, gazing at him. "I had hoped that all chance of dissension was at an end."

"With my brother, assuredly it is so," replied his companion; "he now knows you better than he did, and all foolish doubts with him are at an end. But, my dear lord, I wished to warn you that you are not well at the court. You know I would not speak unadvisedly upon so serious a subject. The king does not love you."

"Of that I am well aware," answered Gowrie; "why or wherefore I know not, and indeed it matters not. But I have done his majesty no wrong. I have advised him, when called on to advise, as I think best for his honour, his prosperity, and his peace; and there is no treason in that, Dalhousie. But, indeed, his dislike began before that--even from the first day of my arrival. I thwarted some of his plans, Ramsay, and he does not soon forgive that. But the storm will blow by, and he will find that I am a loyal subject though a sincere one, and forget his anger."

"The matter is more serious than that, earl," said Ramsay. "The king is jealous of your wealth, your power, your influence at the court of England, your popularity with the people of Scotland. My lord, I tell you you are in danger."

"I cannot think it," replied Gowrie; "I have given no cause for such animosity. I defy any one to show a disloyal or even a suspicious act, and I will give them no occasion, Dalhousie. My innocence be my shield."

"No disloyal act, if you will, Gowrie," replied Sir George Ramsay, in the tone of strong friendship, "but as to suspicion, it is different. The court is full of suspicions, and all aiming at you; and be you sure, Gowrie, that when suspicion takes possession of the mind of a coward, it makes him cruel as well as unjust."

Gowrie mused. "If you can point out the causes of suspicion, Ramsay," he said at length, "I may perhaps remove them, at least I will try, provided that I can do so without sacrificing my duty to myself, to my country, or to my God. I have offended the king by opposing him, but in truth have done him good service rather than otherwise; and I can neither regret what I have done, nor promise not to repeat it; but as to causes of suspicion, I know none."

"I find," replied Sir George Ramsay, "that the first doubts were created by your frequent intercourse with the English ambassador in Paris. Then came the extraordinary honour shown you by Elizabeth herself---"

"Exaggeration!" exclaimed Gowrie. "There were no extraordinary honours shown me. The Queen of England was kind and civil, expressed an interest in my favour, spoke of my father as I loved to hear, and once or twice called me cousin; but I am her cousin, as near in blood, though not in succession, as any relation that she has. King James is the undoubted heir to her throne. He has no right to be jealous of me."

"Your relationship is a dangerous one," said Ramsay; "and when with it is united the fact of your opposing strongly the views of a vain man, an obstinate man, and a timid man, you may well fear suspicions. But they have been increased by other things. You have been very closely watched since your return to Scotland; and your course has appeared somewhat mysterious. It is now known that you first crossed the border near Berwick, then suddenly returned into England, and came round by Carlisle. Again, you had an English servant with you, whose southern tongue betrayed his country at once. You sent him with a letter to the king, and he has since disappeared from your train, for the king caused him to be sought for, wishing to cross-examine him after his own peculiar fashion.--Let me go on, that you may have it all before you. Shortly after your arrival you quitted the court, taking your fair sister with you, and leading the king to believe that you were going to Dirleton. Instead of so doing, you crossed the Firth, and went into Perthshire---"

"I told the king I was going both to Perth and Dirleton."

"But you must have gone somewhere else than to Perth," said Ramsay, "for although it is not known where you did go, yet they have ascertained that you did not reach Perth till the fourteenth of the month--in short, that you were two nights absent, neither at Perth nor Dirleton, and moreover that you did not enter Perth from the side of Edinburgh."

"I have other estates I might wish to visit," said Gowrie; "and I did visit them, Ramsay. But if every movement of a Scottish gentleman is thus to be watched, life in this land would be very little worth having."

"I ask no questions, my lord," said Sir George Ramsay. "I speak but as a friend anxious for your safety, and wishing you to know all and see where the danger lies. Upon slight grounds men will build up strong fabrics of suspicion, especially against those whom they hate and fear; and although I know not exactly in what direction the king's doubts point; but I can easily conceive that, from the supposed honour shown you by the Queen of England, from the appearance and disappearance of a certain servant, from your various movements, and the secrecy which has attended them, he may imagine that you are engaged in some intrigues with Elizabeth, and we all know well how unjustifiably she has meddled with the affairs of this land."

"On my honour and soul, Ramsay," answered Gowrie, "I know of none of her intrigues, if she has been carrying on any. I hold no communication with her whatsoever. I have heard nought from her, sent her no information, and never will consent to a foreign sovereign taking any part whatsoever in the internal affairs of this land--nay, not to save my head from the block."

"I do believe you, my noble friend," answered Ramsay; "but still suspicion, if raised to such a pitch as it has been here, is as dangerous when false as true, when groundless as just; and I tell you that you are in danger."

"Of what?" exclaimed Gowrie. "Does he propose to arrest me, to try me? Let him do it. He will only bring disgrace upon his own head for persecuting a loyal subject who has done no wrong. I have never given the slightest cause, Ramsay. I never will; and I dare him, I dare the whole world, to find any flaw in my conduct which can give an opening to a plain and straightforward accusation."

"That is likely too," answered Ramsay, shaking his head, "and I do not believe that any straightforward accusation will be made. The times are past when men could be murdered under form of law; and greatly as all men must regret the anarchy and confusion which reigned in the land so long, yet they have acted as a purifying fire, and produced that freedom which is the best safeguard of justice. But there are other means, Gowrie, for ridding oneself of an enemy or of a suspected friend--secret means, much more easy to hide beforehand from the victim, and to cover over after with the mantle of authority, than the coarse expedient of manufacturing charges or corrupting judges."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Gowrie; "and is this Scotland?"

"Ay, even so," answered Ramsay. "I will not suppose that the king would order or attempt such a thing; but there is many a ready hand prepared to execute what is believed to be the royal wish, many an eager eye watching to discover what that wish may be. Recollect what happened in England when Becket, the proud opposer of the crown, a churchman, fenced in with all the hedges of Rome, was slain at a mere hint from the sovereign he had offended. We have as rash men amongst us as Tracy and his companions; and, in your case, you have none of the safeguards which Becket had. How many accidents could happen by which the Earl of Gowrie might lose his life?--a street brawl even, with which he had nothing to do--a chance shot during a hunting party--a blow struck in apparent sport; I could name a hundred ways in which the thing might be accomplished, without danger to the perpetrator of the deed, or imputation upon the prompter."

Gowrie rose, and walked up and down the room, thoughtfully; and, after a short pause, Ramsay continued. "I have spoken my mind freely, my dear lord, from our boyish friendship, and from sincere esteem. I have ventured to say things which put in your power, even perhaps my life; but I know your generous nature too well not to feel sure that my confidence will never be abused."

"Be you quite certain of that," answered Gowrie, pausing and taking his hand. "But what would you have me do, Ramsay? I see the dangers of which you speak; but I perceive no way of avoiding them."

"There are but two ways that I know of," answered Ramsay. "If you can remove the king's suspicions, and convince him of your loyalty and devotion, the danger will pass away."

"Remove some of his suspicions, I might," said Gowrie, thoughtfully; and his mind rested on Julia's situation, and the chance that existed of his being able to prove, to the king's satisfaction, that she knew nought of her father's wealth, and had never possessed any part of it. Could he do so, and obtain the royal consent to his marriage with her, the mystery attending some of his late movements could be explained at once. But he resolved at all events, whatever might be the risk, not to divulge the place of her concealment till she actually was his wife. He repeated, then, after thinking for a minute or two--"Remove some of his suspicions, I might, and I will try to do so, if it can be effected without a sacrifice which not even safety could compensate. As to proving to him my loyalty and devotion, I know no way but that which I have already followed--to be loyal and devoted in seeking what are really his best interests."

Ramsay shook his head; and the earl replied to this mute answer--"Well then, Ramsay, I can do no otherwise; if it costs me life itself I will not abandon the cause of civil and religious liberty. I will be no consenting party to the oppression of the people. I will not be the stay of despotism, nor the tool of arbitrary power. Let him take my life rather than that; for I will not hold the fee-simple of existence on the tenure of dishonour."

"There you are right," answered Ramsay; "and your views are mine; but the difference between us is, that you, by your high position, are called upon to act and speak in dangerous circumstances, when I may be still and silent. However, try what you can do to remove the king's suspicions--to account, at least, for some part of your conduct. Nay, smile not, my dear lord, for things that seem very simple to you, magnified by the optic glass of jealousy, grow into vast importance.--Try, I say, what you can do, but wait a few days, till the remembrance of this morning's work is somewhat softened. There is no present danger, I do believe. Such schemes take long in hatching; and you will have time to see how the king bears with you. If he is dry and sharp, you may doubt his intentions; if he is wondrous kind and over familiar, showing you great favour and unwonted friendship, then be you sure he meditates mischief. That is the time for taking the alternative,--quitting the court, and keeping yourself out of harm's way. I will take care that you shall have every information that is communicated to me, except that which comes under the seal of secrecy; but I beseech you, my dear lord, linger not too long, but trust in my word that I speak not without good cause, and perhaps suspect more than I say. For the plucking of such a goodly bird as yourself," he continued, with a faint smile, "would furnish many a poor half-moulted fowl of the court with golden feathers for the rest of life."

Gowrie thanked him again and again, and then took his leave; and, in a very thoughtful mood,

returned to his own house.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It is a hard task for a frank and honest mind to assume an easy and a careless air when there are dark thoughts and heavy doubts within. Gowrie did not return to the court on the day after his conversation with Sir George Ramsay. He felt that he could not banish the impression that he had received from his demeanour. On the following day, however, he did go to Holyrood, and was extremely graciously received; and for a week more he continued to frequent the court with other men of his rank and station. The queen always received him with peculiar favour; and in her circle he met with many of those whom he loved and esteemed, so that he gradually regained all his cheerfulness, although he was not inclined to share in the somewhat boisterous mirth of the king, or to take part in his vulgar pleasantries, which had full scope and licence on the first of April. On the third of that month, however, he craved a private audience of the monarch, and, after some little hesitation, was admitted.

James was in the midst of books and papers; and his manner, though exceedingly condescending, was somewhat embarrassed. "We would not put you off with a poor excuse, my lord," said the monarch, "for we could not tell what you were wanting; but you have chosen an ill time for a long confabulation, as we were writing a disquisition for our poor people of Scotland, and perhaps for the good folks of England too, upon the nature and property of witches and warlocks, and how to discriminate them justly."

"I crave your gracious pardon for my intrusion, sire," replied Gowrie, "and can well wait your majesty's pleasure. The matter is one entirely personal to myself, and therefore should not for a moment be allowed to interfere with your more important avocations. I will, therefore, by your majesty's leave, retire, and wait upon you at some future period when you have more leisure."

"No, no--stay!" said the king. "Let's hear what it's about. We shall always find great pleasure in doing what we can to show our favour to you, Earl of Gowrie. Speak, man, speak. What are ye seeking?"

"Merely your gracious leave and permission, sire, to wed a lady to whom I am much attached."

There was a small spot on James's forehead just above the eyebrows, which the monarch was accustomed to contract when eager and attentive, and that spot now grew very red.

"What, with the Lady Arabella Stuart?" he said. "So runs the rumour. We have heard of it. But you are cousins, my Lord of Gowrie; and we like not cousins marrying."

"There would be a thousand other objections to such a union, please your majesty," Gowrie replied, "all of which I see and appreciate fully----"

"Then what the de'il makes ye seek it?" asked James, abruptly, and evidently in a very angry mood.

"Such a thing never entered into my contemplation, sire," answered the earl, "nor did I ever hear that rumour had done me such a needless honour till this moment. I am in no way ambitious, sire. I neither seek to augment my fortune, raise my family, nor increase my influence. That lady's hand may well be bestowed upon some sovereign prince, but not upon the Earl of Gowrie."

"Ha, my lord, you speak well," said the king; "but some trick has been put upon us. We have not long since been told that our good sister and cousin, the Queen of England, had offered you the lady's hand when you were at her court of London."

"Doubtless, sire," replied Gowrie, "gossip and jealousy, together, have connected many a tale with my short residence there, equally false with this. The queen never mentioned the Lady Arabella's name to me; and, as she happened to be absent from the court, I never even saw her. Had such a thing been proposed, I must at once have declined, without even troubling your majesty upon the subject, inasmuch as I am attached to another lady, and contracted to her by promises which I neither can, nor desire to break."

James had listened attentively while the earl proceeded, and it was evident that he felt much satisfaction at what he heard; but he spoke no more of the Lady Arabella.

"Promises," he said, when Gowrie paused, "promises before witnesses?"

"Before one witness at least, your majesty," replied Gowrie.

"That is not a congregation," said the king. "By word of mouth or by writing?"

"By both, sire," answered Gowrie, decidedly. "I am bound to her in every way that man can bind himself."

"That is serious, my lord," said James. "You would have acted more wisely and more dutifully too, if, before undertaking such things, you had consulted us--not to say asked our consent as pater patriae. It is serious, good earl, I say; but we'll find a means to liberate you."

"But, sire, I do not desire to be liberated," replied Gowrie, with a smile. "I desire to be faster bound than ever, both to the lady and your majesty, by your graciously consenting to our speedy union."

"That's a joke, man, but not a good one--" said the king, laughing grimly; "considering all things, it's not a good one. Now you are all obedience, you see, and humbly asking my consent, which I dare to say you would do without, if it were refused."

Gowrie felt some embarrassment, for he could not bring himself to say he would not, and yet he did not like openly to set the king's authority at defiance. James, however, relieved him by saying, "But who's the lady, man? Let's hear all about her."

"I met with her in Italy, sire," replied Gowrie. "She was then living, I may say, in poverty, with her grandfather, the Count Manucci."

"Ha, ha! now we have it," cried James, laughing loud. "I know all about the story now. The daughter, or the reputed daughter of black Morton."

"His real and lawful daughter, sire," replied Gowrie, "as these papers will show your majesty. The originals are in the lady's keeping; but the names of the witnesses put the matter of her birth beyond all dispute."

"Ah," said James, taking the papers in his hand, and casting his eyes slowly over them, "it's good and honest to be lawfully born; but that is all she'll get by these rags of papers, for the estates of old Morton were all confiscate to the use of the crown, and were granted long since, with the advice of our council, to better deserving people than himself."

"I fear it is as your majesty says," replied the earl, calmly, "for I have looked over the papers well, and do not believe that, even this small act of settlement upon the lands of Whiteburn can be now maintained."

"Ha, say ye so, man?" cried the king. "You're a lawyer too, it would seem, and in this case a good one. I can tell you that the parchment on which this is drawn is not worth an old bull's hide. However, she ought to have a goodly tocher, for Morton had been scraping money together all his life, and as nobody could ever find where he put it, there's no doubt it was carried off by this lassie's grandfather and her mother."

"I can assure your majesty that you are in error there," said Gowrie. "Count Manucci lived in absolute poverty from the time he quitted Scotland, having been expelled from Florence, as your majesty probably knows, on account of his religious opinions. He received a small pension from the Earl of Angus up to the day of his death, which the earl would certainly not have paid if the count had obtained possession of all his uncle's wealth."

"That looks like truth," cried James. "I should not wonder if Angus had got the money himself."
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"Of that I know nought, sire," answered Gowrie; "but I can assure your majesty that the only wealth this dear girl brings with her to me is herself, and three thousand ducats which her grandfather had saved."

"Sorry to hear it," said the king. "We could have wished you a wealthier bride, my lord;" and there he stopped.

Gowrie remained also silent, anxious to hear what the king's consideration of the subject would lead him to, and at all events to get some definite answer upon which he might act. He thought that the next question might be, where he had left Julia, but he was prepared with an answer even for that, although he much wished to avoid being compelled to give it. James, however, notwithstanding his despotic principles and his anxiety to establish a complete absolutism in church and state, was constitutionally timid with those of whose resistance he had had any experience; and he did not like to drive the earl to refuse an answer. He therefore merely said that which precluded him afterwards from acting upon the information he had really obtained, giving the earl greatly the advantage.

"And so the lady is in Italy?" he observed, after a somewhat lengthened pause.

"No, sire, she is not," answered Gowrie. "Her present abode I have engaged to keep secret, till such time as I may be permitted to present her to your majesty as my wife. Immediately that such is the case, and that we can be married, I will go to seek her, with your majesty's leave."

"As far as the court of London, I suppose?" said James, somewhat bitterly.

"No, sir, not above one quarter as far," replied the earl. "I should have been very sorry to have given any foreign prince a hold upon me, even through my affections."

James remained silent, and seemed to hesitate, for he played with the points of his doublet, and shuffled about the papers on the table.

"Well, my lord," he said at length, "the question is one of some difficulty. We must consider of the subject fully. All those Douglasses, even to the second degree, are banished men--exiled from the land; and it cannot be decided just in a moment whether we shall open the door to any of them. Besides, it might make strife and contention. Here, you see, is a sort of claim set up to the lands of Whiteburn, long since bestowed upon our faithful servant, Andrew Stuart."

"I will give an undertaking, sire, under my hand, that those claims shall never be pursued," said Gowrie, "under the penalty of forfeiting five times their value."

This wasn't exactly the end, however, at which James wanted to arrive; and, affecting a little impatience, he exclaimed, "There, then, man, you've had your answer. We will give the matter our consideration, and after due deliberation had, we will say yea or nay, as may seem fitting. There, now, gang your ways, my lord. We have other things in hand just now."

Thus unceremoniously dismissed, Gowrie retired from the king's presence with no slight feelings of impatience and disgust. Delay was evidently the object, but to what end this delay could serve, seemed difficult to divine; and during the next ten days he was frequently tempted to recall the subject to the king's mind, with as urgent application as that of Buckingham for "the earldom of Hereford and the moveables." He refrained, however, anxious not to injure his own cause; and still the king abstained from giving any direct answer, although, with a varying favour, he treated him one day with somewhat too familiar kindness, and the next with cold indifference.

This playing with his expectations wore his mind and depressed his spirits; and his long absence from her he loved kept him in a state of irritable impatience, for he had fondly hoped to bear to Julia the tidings that the king's consent was given.

He found consolation, indeed, in the frequent society of his sister Beatrice, who, wise beyond her years, yet gay and sportive as a child, at once counselled him aright and cheered him on his way. Seeming never to fear anything, she was nevertheless watchful and alive to all that passed at the court, which could in any degree affect her brother; and much information did both she and Gowrie gain from her gay lover, Sir John Hume.

Day passed by on day, however; and the king seemed to have totally forgotten the subject of the earl's application, till at length, in speaking with his sister, Gowrie said, "I can bear it no longer, Beatrice. I will away to Perth."

"If you get to Perth," answered Beatrice, "you will not be long away from Trochrie, Gowrie."

"Perhaps not," answered the earl; "but I will write to the king first, Beatrice. If he refuses his consent, I will do as best I may, though it may be dangerous, if the law does really make her a ward of the crown; but I doubt the fact where there are no lands to hold. If he consents, it is all well; but I must and will have some answer."

"Be not rash, Gowrie--be not rash," said his sister; "a day very often brings forth important things."

"I am for Perth to-morrow," replied her brother, in a determined tone; "but I will soon return, and perhaps my absence may recall me to the king's mind more than my presence."

Without taking any leave of the court, Gowrie set out on the following morning, and rode with all speed to Perth, where he remained two days arranging his household, and seeing that everything was prepared for resuming his residence in his native city. He was then absent for one whole day and a great part of the next; and the reader need not be told where he spent his time.

On his return he was informed that the prisoner, David Drummond, desired to see him at the town jail; but although the message was brought by no less a person than Bailie Roy, the junior magistrate of the town, the earl refused to visit the prisoner.

"Tell him, good Master Roy," he said, "had he not been one of my own servants, I would have come to see him at his request; but such being the case, I will deal with him no way privately before his trial."

When the worthy bailie departed, Gowrie expected to hear no more of the matter; but he was surprised, about half an hour after, as he was walking somewhat sadly in his garden, to see Bailie Roy posting up the path towards him.

"I most humbly beg your lordship's pardon," said the good magistrate, approaching; "but I am forced to intrude upon your private recreation by another message from that dour divot, David

Drummond. He bade me tell your lordship that if you would not see him he would apply to the king, and might tell him some things that he would be glad to hear."

"Then, by all means, let him pleasure his majesty," said Gowrie. "I would not for the world deprive him of any valuable or agreeable information. In short, Master Roy, I will not see him; and he should know me well enough to be sure that when once I have said so I will not alter."

Notwithstanding this determined answer, the prisoner's message left the earl thoughtful and anxious. "The only thing he can tell," thought Gowrie, "is the retreat of my poor Julia. The king has sent no answer to my letter. I will wait till noon to-morrow, and then go to demand one myself--I do not think he would venture to attempt to take her from my protection by force; but we shall soon see, and, thank God, everything is prepared."

No letter came on the day following, and Gowrie set out for Edinburgh after the noon meal. He arrived too late to visit the court that day, indeed; and was sitting down with all the evil anticipations of an impatient spirit under prolonged anxiety, when the clouds were suddenly dispelled, and a brief gleam of sunshine broke through the canopy of storm that was fast spreading over him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Gowrie, Gowrie, Gowrie!" cried the voice of Sir John Hume from the antechamber, almost as if he had been calling to a dog; and the next moment the gay knight entered with his face all radiant. "Where are the once sharp ears of the noble earl?" he continued, "ears that would have heard the hunter's, halloo, from Stirling to Linlithgow. Why, I called to you out of my high window in the High Street as you rode by, till the echo at the Blackford hills shouted out Gowrie; and you spurred on as if you had stopped your ears with wax, like Don Ulysses when in danger of the fair ladies on the shore. Would to Heaven all our mariners would do the same when they first land."

"I did not hear you, Hume," answered Gowrie, in a grave tone. "In truth, my friend, my heart is very sad, and my outward faculties have little communication with the spirit within. But what makes you look so joyful?"

"One of the strange revolutions of the court of King Solomon," answered Hume; "whether his majesty has found out some sovereign remedy for dispelling the black humours, or for warming and comforting the spleen; or whether his favourite brack has cast him a litter of peculiarly fine pups; or whether Queen Elizabeth has declared him heir to the throne of England, or the Queen of Sheba has sent word to say she will be here to-morrow, or--But never mind, something or another has turned the gall and verjuice into honey and sweetness, and especially towards your dearly beloved family. He ran after Beatrice to-day to the queen's very knees, vowing he would fasten her shoe, while I was forced to stand by looking demure; and he actually gave Alex a hawk--it is not worth a bodle, by the way, but still the gift was something, considering who it comes from."

"I wrote to him from Perth," said Gowrie, "beseeching him to give me an answer to the suit, which I told you I had preferred, and he has never replied my letter."

"Done on purpose to fret you," answered Hume; "he said so before the whole court this very day, and called you a love-lorn gallant."

"I care not what he calls me," replied the earl, "so that he do but consent freely."

"He does consent," replied his friend, "and all your troubles on that score, Gowrie, are at an end. So smoothe your wrinkled brow, my noble lord, and give cold care to the wind."

"Are you quite sure?" demanded the earl, hardly believing the joyful tidings.

"Surer than of my own existence; for that I know nothing about," answered Hume, "had it not been for that overt act, I should have doubted his majesty's sincerity, for his sunshine is not always summer. But deeds speak for themselves. I will tell you how it all happened.--Three days ago he was in an awful mood, and pulled more points off his hose than he had money in his coffers to put on again; but just then came in the news of Stuart of Greenallan's death without heirs, and all his moveables are seized to the crown, besides a large sum in ready money, which he left by will to the king--knowing he would take it if he did not. Well, this windfall mollified him mightily, and he has been improving ever since. But this morning he has had a dispute with three ministers touching church government, and Heaven knows what besides, and he quoted all sorts of books that nobody ever heard of before--long screeds of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, till I believe, upon my life, the poor bodies were quite, as they said, *dumfounded*, and fairly gave in. I

would wager my best horse against a tinker's donkey, they did not understand a word, and the king himself not half of what he poured forth upon them; but they owned in the end that his majesty was right and they were wrong, for they could not confute his arguments or reply to his authorities. One old fellow, indeed, made some fight for it, and answered in Greek and Hebrew too; but the king had two texts for every one of his, and so he too was beat in the end. From that moment he has been all frolic; and this afternoon he held up your letter before dear Beatrice's eyes, and asked if she knew who that came from. So she answered, gaily, 'From one of your majesty's sweethearts, I suppose.' 'Faith, no such thing,' said James, 'but I'll try and make him a sweetheart before I've done, and that by giving him his sweetheart too. It's from your own brother, John, saucy lassie--a most disconsolate epistle, because I forgot to tell him he should have the bonny bird he's so brodened upon. But he shall have her notwithstanding; and I trust she'll plague him till she makes him more complutherable.' Then Beatrice burst into a peal of laughter, so clear, so merry, so joyful, that it set the whole court off, king and queen and all, till James, wiping his eyes, told her to 'haud her guffaw,' or she should not be married herself for a month after you; and then she laughed more gaily than before, but petitioned that she might be permitted to write to you, and tell you of his royal grace. That, the king would not hear of, saying, 'No, I forbid any one to write him a scrape of a pen. Then shall we have him coming with a face as long as a whinger, and his heart full of disloyal repinings, to know if we are minded to condescend to his request.' But the dear girl answered, with her own good sense, 'More chance of his heart being full of sorrow lest he have offended your majesty.' However, the king would not consent that any one should write to you, saying he wished to see what you would do, and exacted a promise that neither Beatrice nor Alex would say a word. Me, he did not so bind; but yet it were better not to let him know that you have been informed."

"I am a bad dissembler, John," replied the earl, "and I fear that the joy in my heart will shine out on my face, do what I will. However, I will do my best to look sad; but is not this a strange person for a king--a strange scene for a court?"

"You would have thought it stranger still, had you but seen the whole," answered Hume. "All the time he was speaking, he held the hawk I have told you of on his hand, and kept stroking it down the back, at which it screamed, and then his gracious majesty called it sometimes greedy gled, and sometimes courtier, till Herries, who thinks he can venture anything, asked why he called it courtier."

"What did he answer?" inquired Gowrie.

"Why, he put on what he would call a pawky look," replied the other, "and said, 'Because it is like the horseleech's daughter, doctor. It aye lifts up its neb, and scrawks for more.'"

Both Gowrie and Hume laughed gaily at this sally, the one in hearing and the other in telling; for the young earl's heart was lightened, and such creatures of circumstance are we, that, with a mind relieved, a reply seemed to him full of humour, which a minute or two before he would have thought nought but a coarse and vulgar jest.

"How did Herries bear the rebuke?" asked Gowrie; "for to him it must have been a severe one."

"Oh, with his own bitter humour," answered the knight. "He said, 'Ay, sir, it is sad how we are led by example. Every one, man and beast, follows his master.' To which the king replied, good naturedly enough, 'Haud yer peace, ye doited auld carle! If you followed your master I'se warrant you'd no pluck but be plucked--you'd be the doo and no the gled.' However, I think that Herries is not so great a favourite as he once was; and I am not sorry for it, for he was ever an enemy to both your house and mine, Gowrie, and is one of those cold-blooded, ever-ready men, who never miss an opportunity to do ill to another by a quiet insinuation pointed by a jest."

"I know him not at all," answered Gowrie. "Alexander and Beatrice love him not; but one need never fear an open enemy. It is the covert attack, the blow struck behind one's back, the quiet lie spoken, forsooth, in confidence, that one fears; for they are like the poisoned weapon of the Italian bravo, which slays, though the wound be but a scratch."

"For the present I do not think you need fear him in any way," replied Sir John Hume; "but go early to-morrow, Gowrie, and take advantage of the tide of favour at the flow."

The conversation then took a more general turn. The various characters of the personages of the court of King James were discussed by the earl and his friend, and the prospects of the country generally were spoken of in a lighter and a gayer spirit than the earl could have shared in an hour before. Some little word--one of those accidental expressions which often set the mind galloping in a different direction from that which it was previously pursuing--led the earl's thoughts suddenly to his brother; and he said, "By the way, Hume, Beatrice seems to think that Alex is even in less favour than myself with his majesty, and I could not induce her to explain the matter fully. She referred me to you, saying you would be able to inform me what was the cause of James's dislike."

"The simplest in the world," answered Hume. "The king dislikes him, because he thinks the queen likes him--too much. The truth is, James is jealous; and, like all suspicious people, hates the object of his suspicion, endures his presence at the court simply for the purpose of

entrapping him, and watches for every opportunity to find a motive to take revenge."

"But is there any cause for this suspicion?" asked Gowrie, very gravely. "Can Alex have been mad enough, wicked enough, to have afforded any just grounds for such jealousy?"

"On my life I believe not," replied Hume. "The queen makes no secret of her liking for handsome young men; and Alex is certainly as fine a looking lad as ever mounted a horse or drew a sword. She contends strongly, too, for that liberty of action which we northern people do not conceive a privilege of fair ladies. She will go where she likes, do what she likes, and see whom she likes, without being responsible to any tribunal but that of conscience. This is her doctrine; and, by Heaven, she practises what she preaches. The king may make himself as absolute as he will out of his own house, but he will not be despotic there very easily. Then again, her majesty likes the gallant part of the old chivalry, and thinks that love and devotion are every lady's due from every courtly gentleman. There must be a touch of romantic passion in it, too, to please her; and she goes into these little amourettes in the most light-hearted way possible, without a thought of evil, I do believe. It is all too open--too bold, to be criminal. But the king, on the contrary, takes a very different view of these matters. While he claims to himself the right of the utmost familiarity of manner and lightness of speech with man, woman, and child, he would have all ladies as prim and demure as nuns, and as obedient as a spaniel dog. In point of policy, Alex committed a great error in attaching himself to the queen instead of to the king, for, it is sad to say, one cannot be a favourite with both."

"I would rather he were a *favourite* with neither," said Gowrie. "He might serve both, love both, merit the friendship of both; but to be the minion of either king or queen is not for one of my race."

"Well, well," answered his friend, "he is still a very young man, but right at heart, I am sure; and I trust he will see that these gallantries with the queen, however innocent, are, at the least, improper."

"I must make him see it," said Gowrie, and turned the conversation, which ended soon after by Hume leaving him to his own thoughts.

The following morning broke cold and cheerless; but at as early an hour as was consistent with propriety, Gowrie presented himself at the palace, and was readily admitted to an audience. The king was in the act of pushing out of the room, with his own hands, in a jocular but somewhat rude manner, no less a personage than Sir Hugh Herries, saying, "There, get along with you. You are a saucy body, and were we not the best natured monarch that ever lived, we should not bear with your gibes.--Ah, my Lord of Gowrie! Now you've come for an answer to your letter, I ween?"

"If it may please your majesty to give me one," answered Gowrie, with as grave a face as he could put on, while the king retired into his cabinet again, and took his seat.

"You see, my lord," said James, with a very serious air, "this is a matter of much importance, and which requires full consideration and deliberation on our part. Now I'll warrant that you're for wanting to cut the matter short, and to be married to the lady directly;" and he looked up slyly in the earl's face.

"My own inclination would of course lead as your majesty supposes," replied Gowrie; "and I think, in many points of view, it would be the best plan; but the lady herself desires that our union should be delayed till the month of September next, if it please your majesty to consent for that time."

"She's a very discreet young lady," said the king. "Feggs! most lasses would be all agog to be a married woman, and Countess of Gowrie. Well, my lord, we'll consider of it."

Gowrie now felt alarmed and mortified. Whether the king had changed his mind since the preceding night, or whether he was merely sporting with his feelings for his own amusement, the young lover felt a degree of impatience which he was afraid would break forth in some angry words if he stayed longer; and therefore, with a silent bow, but a heated cheek and disappointed air, he retired towards the door.

James let him reach it and lay his hand upon the lock, but then stopped him, exclaiming, "Hoot, man, come hither--don't go away in the dorts, like a petted bairn. Come hither to your king, who is willing to act as a good and kind father to you and to all his leal subjects, if they will let him."

Gowrie returned with a brighter look. "There, now," continued James, who in many instances was acute enough; "you are laughing now; and I'll warrant that your titty, or the lad Alex, has been telling you of the grace and favour we intend to show you."

"I can assure your majesty," answered Gowrie, "that I have neither seen nor heard from my brother or sister during the last four or five days; but I can perceive, by your majesty's countenance, that you intend to deal graciously with me in this matter."

"I'm thinking you're a false chiel," said James, laughing; "and you think that a fine fleeching speech, about my countenance, as you call it; but I'll tell you what, earl, if I thought my face

would tell what I'm thinking of when I didn't want it, I'd claw the skin off it with my own ten fingers; for let me inform you, sir, it's a principal point of kingcraft to be able to speak with a sober and demure countenance, whatever the matter in hand may be, whether merry and jocose, or sad and serious. Men should never be able to tell, by the looks of a sovereign, whether he be thinking of a burial or a marriage, a birth or a death."

"But wise kings, sire," answered Gowrie, "are ever apt to double the value of the favours they confer by gracious looks and words."

"That's well said," said the king, with an inclination of his head. "That's spoken like a prudent and well-nurtured lad; and we do intend graciously towards you, and will give you proof thereof. We will consent to your marriage with this lady in the month of September next, as you suppose; and, moreover, we will give you that consent in writing, for there are certain conditions which, as you know well, you yourself agreed to, and which we have embodied here in this paper, as a sort of proviso, qualifying our consent."

Gowrie was a little startled by this announcement; but the king soon relieved him from all anxiety, by showing him the paper, which was to the effect that he, the king, authorized and consented to the marriage of John Earl of Gowrie and the Lady Julia Douglas, a ward of the crown, upon the condition that the Lady Julia Douglas should previously execute, in due form, a renunciation of all claims, founded upon any grounds whatsoever, to the lands of Whiteburn, and to all other estates, money, goods, or chattels whatsoever, once in possession of the last Earl of Morton. Otherwise the authorization was to have no effect. The sense was enveloped in an immense mass of legal verbiage, which would have been totally unintelligible to any one unacquainted with the language of the Scottish courts; but Gowrie had made a point of bestowing some study upon the laws of his native land, and the meaning was quite clear to him.

"To these conditions I agree at once, sire," he said; "and am willing to give your majesty an undertaking, under any penalty you please, that the renunciation specified shall be made."

James caught readily at this idea; and being fond of showing his skill in such matters, he at once drew up, with his own hand, the form of undertaking which was proposed, and to which Gowrie willingly put his hand, on receiving the written consent of the king to his marriage.

"And now, my lord, away to Trochrie," cried the king, as Gowrie kissed his hand, "and bring your bonny birdy out of her nest.--Ay, you may stare, and look stupified, but if you think you can hoodwink your king like a gyr falcon on its perch, you'll find yourself mistaken, like many another man has been.--Well, well, say nothing about it. We forgive you, man; and if you don't think us the most gracious monarch that ever lived, you're an ungrateful lad."

"Indeed, sire, I do think your majesty most gracious," replied Gowrie, a good deal moved; "and I will do my best to prove my gratitude; but before I go to Trochrie, I had better have this renunciation drawn up in due form by some people of the law, that I may at once obtain the Lady Julia's signature, and lay it at your majesty's feet."

To this plan James cordially acceded; and Gowrie, taking his leave, was retiring to share his joy with his sister Beatrice, and to endeavour to persuade his brother to withdraw from the court, where his presence was a source of jealousy and dissension, when there was a gentle tap at the door, and an usher put in his head, saying, "Here is the Italian merchant, may it please your majesty."

"Bring him in--bring him in," cried James. "Stay a little, my good lord; this is a man from the country you know so well, bringing wares to show us, and we will have your judgment upon his bonny toys."

Gowrie would fain have escaped, but there was no resource; and the Italian merchant, as he was called, though in fact he might have ranked better as a pedlar, was brought into the king's presence. The young earl instantly recognised a man from whom he himself had occasionally purchased wares in Padua, which was at that time famous for its manufactories of silk; and the merchant himself, after saluting the king, made him a low bow.

"Ah, you two have met before, I suppose," said the king. "But come, open your chest, man, and let us see what you've brought."

The goods were soon produced, consisting principally of ribbons and laces, which might have better suited the examination of a lady than of a king; and James selected several articles for purchase with not the very best taste in the world. He asked Gowrie's opinion upon them before he concluded his bargain; and the earl, though not a very excellent courtier, was sufficiently learned in that craft not to speak disparagingly of the king's taste. At length an exceedingly beautiful ribbon was produced, wrought with figures of blue and gold, so thick and massive, that it seemed better fitted for a sword-belt than anything else; but James fixed eagerly upon it, declaring he would present it to the queen. He soon after suffered the earl to depart, keeping the Italian merchant with him; and as soon as the door was closed, he said, in a familiar tone, "You knew that lad in Italy, I suppose, my man?"

The Italian replied in the affirmative; and James, whose curiosity was inexhaustible, proceeded to question him upon all he knew regarding Gowrie's history. The good man had no idea

whatsoever of doing harm; but we all know how one tale leads on another, especially under the hands of one skilful in extracting anecdotes; and although almost all the Italian had to say was favourable to the earl, though he told how he had been elected unanimously Lord Rector, at a very early period, and how his conduct had given such satisfaction, that the university had placed his portrait in the great hall, yet he went on to add that he believed the earl had conceived some disgust in the end from the treatment of one to whom he was much attached.

James proceeded to question him eagerly on this hint, and soon drew forth the Italian's version of the history of poor Manucci. Truth and fiction were mingled in the usual proportion of a tale so told; but magic and witchcraft were favourite topics with the king; and from the gossiping style in which it first began, his conversation gradually deviated into disquisition, and afterwards almost took the form of a judicial examination, as he questioned and cross-questioned the poor merchant in regard to Manucci's skill in diabolical arts, and Gowrie's connexion with him. The good man, anxious to curry favour with the monarch, and restrained by no very great scruples of conscience, would probably have said anything that the king liked, and certainly, in the matter of suggestion, James did not fail to supply him with indications of his own opinions.

The belief in such arts as sorcery and witchcraft seems in our eyes at the present day so ludicrous, that we can hardly bring our minds to believe that in former times the great mass of all classes, high and low, were fully persuaded that power could be obtained by mortals over certain classes of evil spirits. But such was undoubtedly the case at the time I speak of; and the effect was often most disastrous. In the present instance, James took care not to inform the Italian of the conclusions to which he came in regard to Gowrie; and it may be sufficient in this case to state that when he dismissed the merchant, he remained with an impression very unfavourable to the young earl, which, combined with other causes, did not fail to produce bitter fruit at an after period.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Can you tell me where I shall find my sister, Ballough?" said the Earl of Gowrie, addressing the usher of the queen's chambers, after he left the king.

"She's gone out with her brother, my lord," replied the officer; "and I think they took their way to your lordship's lodgings."

"I do not think it, Ballough," said the earl. "I must have met them; or at least they must have seen my horses at the gate."

"They went the other way, my lord," said the man. "I saw them go towards the physic garden. I heard the Lady Beatrice say that that would be the quietest road, as they were on foot."

"Can I pass through there?" asked the earl.

"Not through this passage, my lord," replied the man, "but if you go round by the portico, you'll find the little gate open, and that will lead you straight."

The earl accordingly dismissed his horses and servants, and took his way through a part of the gardens of Holyrood, or "the abbey," as it was frequently called in those days, issuing forth into the more busy part of the town by a gate at some distance from the palace. The door itself was closed but not locked; and, as he was approaching it, he heard a voice saying, "We have not starved your horse, you foul-tongued southron! Now, ride away as fast as you can go; and mind, if you say one word, you will be put into one of the dungeons at Stirling, and treated to a taste of the boot you saw the other day. There, away with you!" And these words were followed by the loud crack of a whip.

"A whole skin is the best coat that ever was made," said a voice which Gowrie thought he knew well, and passing through the door at the same moment, he looked eagerly up the street, his eye guided by the clattering of a horse's feet at a rapid pace. On that side appeared no other than the figure of his own man, Austin Jute, mounted on the very horse which he had ridden to Trochrie; and turning sharply round, the earl saw on the other hand, walking away towards the palace, the stout form and club foot of Dr. Herries, and another gentleman attached to the king's household, named Graham.

Gowrie asked himself what could be the meaning of this. Could Jute be really betraying him after serving him so long and so faithfully. "I will not believe it," he said to himself. "The tricks of these courts would make a man suspicious of his best friend. Yet it is very strange--but I will wait and see. I shall soon discover, by the man's manner, if he is concealing anything from me;" and with matter for musing, he walked on his way. Neither brother nor sister did he meet as he went

on, but found both waiting for him at his dwelling in the town.

"We thought to catch you before you set out, Gowrie," said Beatrice, as soon as she saw him, "for Hume wrote me word this morning that he had seen you. However, I trust, from your look, that all is safe and right, and that the king's good humour, which waxes and wanes like the moon, has not decreased since yesterday."

Gowrie sat down by her side, and told her all that had occurred, the whole account being tinged with the joyful hopes of his own heart. Beatrice looked pleased, but less so than he expected; and she asked, somewhat abruptly, "And now, Gowrie, what do you intend to do?"

"To set out for Trochrie as soon as this paper of renunciation is drawn up," he replied; "and then transplant my wild rose to Dirleton."

"Take my advice, and do no such thing," answered Beatrice. "Depend upon it, Gowrie, she's safer where she is. You do not know the king as well as we do. With him the sunshine often prognosticates worse weather than the clouds; and I very much doubt his motives in this matter. That you have got his written consent is a great step, certainly; and we may well be joyful thereat; but he is famous for baiting traps; and if he once got her into his power, think what a hold he would have upon you. It would cost him more men and more money than he can collect, to take her by force from Trochrie; and he has no excuse for attempting it; but if once she were at Dirleton, he would soon find means of bringing her to Edinburgh, and then your freedom of action would be gone."

"You are a wise counsellor, Beatrice," replied her brother; "and I like your advice well. 'Tis only that Trochrie is such a lonely and desolate solitude for the dear girl, that makes me hesitate."

"You can easily render it less solitary," said Alexander Ruthven, laughing. "Go up there yourself, and keep her company."

"If you will come with me, Alex," replied his brother.

The young man coloured and looked embarrassed. "I cannot do that now, John," he answered. "I was a long time absent from my post in the winter."

"The truth is, Alex," said Gowrie, frankly, "from all I hear, it seems to me that it would be better if you were more frequently absent--nay, if you were to give up this office altogether."

"What! and have they poisoned your mind, too, Gowrie?" cried the other, impetuously. "I will not go; for by so doing I should only confirm the falsehoods they have spread. I will not abandon my own cause, or show a shame of my own conduct, whatever my friends and relations may do."

"You speak too warmly, Alex," said the young earl. "Your relations have no inclination to abandon your cause; and I trust and believe you would never give them occasion to feel ashamed of your conduct; but I only advise you for your own good. Suspicion is a dangerous thing in the mind of a king, and, whether justly or unjustly founded, is to be avoided by all reasonable means. Besides, were your royal master and lady entirely out of the question, no man has a right to furnish cause for dissension in any family."

"Oh, if I were out of the way, it would be some other to-morrow," answered the young man. "The king's suspicion must have some object upon which to fix."

"I would have it any other object than yourself, Alex," replied his brother. "However, I have given you my advice, and you may take it or not, as you please."

"I shall certainly not withdraw from the court," replied Alexander Ruthven, in an impatient tone. "I should consider that I was doing wrong to the character of another whom I am bound to love and respect. Therefore, to give me that advice, Gowrie, is but talking to the winds, for in this case I am sure I am right."

"I much doubt it," replied the earl, and there dropped the subject, for he saw that it would be of no avail to pursue it farther.

Beatrice had remained silent during this brief conversation between the two brothers, with her eyes bent down on the ground and her cheek somewhat pale, but the moment it was concluded, she looked up, recurring at once to what had been passing before.

"I would offer to go with you, Gowrie," she said, "and cheer your dear Julia in her solitude; but I think I may be more useful to you both where I am; for, both on your account and on Alex's, my task must be to watch narrowly everything that occurs, and give you the first intimation of danger. Whether Alex will receive a warning I do not know; but you, Gowrie, I am sure, will listen to the very first hint that I give you. I may not be able to speak plainly. I may be obliged to write but a few words; but watch and understand, my dear brother, and if I say, fly, then lose not a moment."

"Why should you suppose I will not attend to your warning, Beatrice?" asked her brother

Alexander, with the irritability of one who knows that others think him in the wrong, and who is not quite sure himself that he is in the right.

"How can I suppose you will take a warning," asked his sister, "when you will take no advice?"

"Because a warning refers to a matter of fact, advice to a matter of opinion," answered the young man.

"Well, well," answered Beatrice, "do not let us dispute, Alex. I think, with Gowrie, it would be much better for you to go; but you may be sure, Alex, that if ever I tell you you are in actual peril, which I can foresee will be the case some day, I do not speak without perfect certainty. And now good bye, Gowrie. We must not be too long away, otherwise the king will think that we are plotting together."

"You see he suspects every one as well as me," said her young brother, determined to make out a case in his own favour; "and I am sure Gowrie is as little a favourite as I am myself. Besides, I do believe from his conduct yesterday, that James is now convinced his previous suspicions were unjust, and that he desires to make atonement."

"Pooh, pooh!" answered Beatrice, tossing her head with a somewhat scornful smile. "The king never made atonement to any one. The king always thinks he is right, and has been ever right, and will be right to the end of his life. He never dreams for a moment that he can have been wrong, though he may take means to lull the objects of his dislike or his doubts till they are wholly in his power.--But now come, Alex, do not let us pursue this subject any farther, but return quietly to the palace."

Then bidding her elder brother adieu, the lady left him, and, accompanied by Alexander, walked back almost in silence to Holyrood; for she herself was full of doubts and anxieties, and Alexander Ruthven was in that state of irritation which is often produced, especially in a young mind, by a conflict between a wish to do right and strong temptations to do wrong.

I need not pause to detail the passing of the day with Gowrie. The law's delay is proverbial as one of the banes of human existence in the blessed land wherein we live.--It was so even in his time; and he found, on consulting with those who had to deal with such matters, that the drawing up of the renunciation, simple as it seemed, would require the labour and attention of several days, in order to couch it in the full and ample terms which he knew would be required by the king. He had to give long explanations, and to enter into details which he had not previously considered, so that the greater part of a spring day was consumed before he left the dim and dingy den where the man of law held his abode. On his return to his own house he passed more than an hour in walking up and down the large and handsome sitting-room, and meditating over the past and the future. If it be asked whether his thoughts were sad or bright, I must answer, very much mixed, as is ever the case with a man of strong sense and active imagination. But Gowrie, it must be remembered, was in the spring of life, in that bright season when the song of the wild bird, hope, is the most loud and sweet and seducing. The circumstances which surrounded him might alarm or sadden him for the time, but the cheering voice still spoke up in his heart, and the syren sang not in vain. At length he ordered lights to be brought, and casting himself into a chair, took up a book--his favourite Sallust--and began to read. The pages opened at the Catiline, and the first words struck him, as strangely applicable to the half-formed resolution which had been floating vaguely in his mind, of passing life in peaceful retirement.

"*Omnis homines, qui sese student præstare ceteris animalibus, summa ope niti decet vitam silentio ne transeant, veluti pecora, quæ natura prona, atque ventri obedientia, finxit.*"

"And yet," he said, "methinks many a man can raise himself above the brute without mingling in the busy turmoil of the world's affairs--nay, do more real service to his country and his race in the silence of deep but peaceful thought than in the noisy contests of courts and cities."

Then he went on to read, till he came to the splendid description of Catiline.--"*Lucius Catilina, nobili genere natus, magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo provoque,*" &c.

"What a picture of wickedness," he thought, as he read on; "ay, and what a picture of the state of Rome under the republic, when it was possible to say of any one man's life, 'Huic, ab adolescentia bella intestina, cædes, rapinæ, discordia civilis, grata fuere; ibique juventutem suam exercuit.' Is this the fruit of free and democratic institutions?" he thought. "Is a state so nearly approaching to anarchy, the result of popular government? A despotism were better! But yet it cannot be so. There must be a mean between the licence which destroys and the authority which oppresses society, when the people have sufficient power to guard and support their liberties, and the magistrates of the land are armed with the means of checking lawless violence without trenching upon lawful freedom. I am not a free man if there be others in the land who have the power to injure me unpunished: my freedom is as much controlled by them as it could be by any king. It is laws which make real freedom, laws justly framed and firmly executed, laws above kings and subjects both.--But let me see what he says more."

He had not time, however, to turn the pages of the book before the door quietly opened behind him, and a step was heard upon the floor. He did not turn his head, however; and the person who came in proceeded round the table to the opposite side of the fireplace, when Gowrie, suddenly

looking up, beheld his servant, Austin Jute.

"Why, how now, Austin?" he exclaimed. "What has brought you to Edinburgh? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing to my lady, sir," replied the Englishman, comprehending very well that his sudden appearance might alarm the earl for Julia's safety, "but a good deal to myself; and I thought it much better to come and tell you, my lord, rather than go back to my duty, for nobody can tell how much what happens to one man may do for another. I'm not in Edinburgh by my own good will, you may easily believe, for you told me to stay, and I would have stayed; but necessity has no law, and what can't be cured must be endured. If other legs run away with me, my legs aren't in fault, and might makes right, as people say.--Well, my lord, I'm going on. I came against my will, as I shall set forth presently. The way was this: it is just four days ago that we saw three or four men riding in that long dark valley to the north west, and old Mac Duff, your baron bailie, was thinking to go forth and see what they were about; but knowing very well that if he were taken and the place attacked, I could not command the men, or, at all events, that they would not obey, which comes pretty near to the same thing, I rode out alone to reconnoitre. I did not think I could be so easily taken in, but this is a devil of a country, my lord, for such matters. I looked sharp enough round, as I thought, all the way I went; but it was impossible to go in and out amongst all the rocks and big stones, and I still caught sight of the men I had seen from the tower. When I came within about half a mile of them, they turned round and began to ride away, as if they were afraid of being caught, and thinking they had only been upon some marauding expedition with which I had nothing to do, I did not ride after them more than a couple of hundred yards; but when I turned to go home again, I saw five men on foot blocking up the road behind me. I made a dash at them, thinking to get through, but they were too much for me, my lord, and they soon had my horse by the bridle, commanding me to surrender in the king's name. I asked for their warrant, but they only laughed at me; and the other men on horseback coming up, they tied my feet under the saddle, and my hands behind my back. The horsemen rode with me, but the men on foot disappeared."

"Did they go towards the castle?" demanded Gowrie, with some anxiety. "What men did you leave behind?"

"Oh, the castle is safe enough, my lord," answered Austin Jute. "There were fifteen men in all in it; and when I went away I said, 'Safe bind, safe find, Mr. MacDuff. Pull up the drawbridge as soon as I'm out; and if I'm not back in half an hour, send out for some of your friends round about.' He'd soon have enough to help him; and there was plenty of provision in the place, besides the beacon on the top of the turret, which would bring more in a few hours; but they wanted nothing at the castle, though no doubt they'd have taken my lady if they could have caught her. That I found out by what I overheard as they brought me here."

"And what happened to you here?" demanded the earl.

"Why, first they carried me up to a place called the castle, my lord," answered Austin Jute, "where I was crammed into a dark, cold hole, and had nothing given me to eat but nasty stuff made of oatmeal and water; but, at the end of some hours, they took me down to what they called the abbey, where I was not so well off as before. Bad's the best, they say, but better bad than worse; and so it was in my case, for now I was left in the dark without anything to eat or drink at all for a great many hours, till the sunshine came in at a hole up above, and I began to whistle to pass the time. Soon after I was taken out, and was carried to a room where there were five or six people, and a large curtain across one end of the room. There was a table, too, with several things upon it, some little and some big, made of iron, and of very odd unpleasant shapes. One was like a barbecuing spit, only not so big; and I heard them call it the boot. A stout man was standing by the table, twice as big as I am, with his jerkin off and his sleeves turned up. I did not like his look at all. When I was brought in, those who were at the table began to cross-question me in all manner of ways as to what I did in Scotland, and how I came to be at Trochrie; and I beat about the bush a long time, especially when they asked me about my lady----"

"Then they knew already she was there?" said the earl.

"I'm not quite sure, my lord, now," said Austin Jute, frankly. "They seemed to know at the time; but I believe they took me in. I would not tell you a lie, my lord, for the world; but I've a strong notion they made me betray myself, by pretending to know more than they did. I'm very sorry for it; but what's done can't be undone. A bolt that's shot must go its own way. However, when I found that, either by what I said or by what they themselves knew, they were quite sure of the matter, I refused to answer any more questions as to how she was brought there, and all the rest. Then they threatened to put the boot on me, as they called it. I did not like that at all. I should have fancied my leg a pig being roasted alive; but instead of that they put a thing upon my thumb, and told me to answer truly, or it should be screwed up."

Gowrie rose from his seat, and walked up and down the room with his cheek flushed and his brow contracted; but he said nothing; and, after gazing at his lord for a moment, Austin Jute continued. "They changed their course now, however, and began asking if I had been with you in Italy; so I said I had. Then they inquired where you had hired me; on which I said, in Padua, five years ago. After that, this question arose, whether I had known the lady Julia there, and her grandfather, and how long. It was an unpleasant sort of catechism with that thing dangling at my

thumb; but having heard the king talk at Falkland about the lady's money, and how much he expected to make by having her in ward, I saw what they were seeking, and I said to myself, they'll come to the money in a few minutes. A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, and so I answered, boldly, that I had known her and the old gentleman ten or twelve years, long before your lordship came to Padua."

"But that was false," exclaimed the earl.

"I can't help that, my lord," replied Austin Jute; "it answered its purpose. As I had got into a scrape by letting out the truth, there was only one way of mending it--by letting out some falsehood. Put them into two scales, and the one will balance the other. If people ask me questions they have no business to ask, they may get answers that I have no business to give. However, they asked me how the old gentleman and the young lady lived in Padua, and knowing I could do no mischief now, I said, 'Heaven knows. They were poor enough, in all conscience; but where they got what little they had, I can't tell.' Then a club-footed man, that sat at the end of the table, said quietly, 'Then they did not keep up much state;' at which I laughed, and made him no answer, as if the very thought of such a thing was too ridiculous; upon which that accursed fellow, with the sleeves turned up, gave a turn to the thing upon my thumb, and sent a pain running all the way down to the soles of my feet. I never felt anything like that. I had well nigh roared with it; but I set my teeth hard and held my breath; and the man at the end of the table checked the tormentor for what he had done, and bade him keep his hands off till he was bid. So the thing was unscrewed; and then they asked me how many servants the old signor kept, and I humbly inquired whether they meant men or maids. The answer was, 'Both,' to which I replied, 'One, and she was an old woman. So it answered both purposes.' The man with the club-foot called me a saucy knave, and tried to look very angry; but he laughed notwithstanding, and inquired if I were sure there had been no more kept; and I answered, 'Not one as long as I had known the family.' The other questions were all of the same sort, and they tried to puzzle me very hard; but they could not manage it, though they talked about a man servant whom they pretended the signor had kept. To that I had my answer pat, however--that I was ready to swear upon the Evangelists that there had never been any but one and the same servant there for ten years. 'Whether it was a man or a woman,' I said, 'it was impossible for me to say. Their honours knew best; but one thing I would take my oath of, that it wore petticoats and was called Tita.' Thereupon there was a great burst of laughter; and the room had a strange echo in it, for the same sounds came back from behind the curtain."

"The party seems to have been a merry one," said the earl, "considering the circumstances."

"Nevertheless, they took me back, and plunged me into the same dark hole, and left me there till this morning, when I was taken out, in an oddish kind of way, not by a jailor or a guard, but by two gentlemen. There was a little boy, about as high as my knee, standing by a garden-gate to which they brought me, and he had my horse in his hand. So they told me to get up and ride away, as if Satan were behind me, back to Trochrie, and not to say a word to a living soul, but more especially to you, my lord, of anything that had happened; and they threatened me sore, moreover. I did ride away, for I was glad to be out of their hands; but I remained at the south ferry house till dusk, and then came back to seek your lordship and tell you all."

"You have done well, Austin," replied Gowrie, "and are an honest faithful fellow. I was nearer to you and them, when they mounted you this morning, than either knew; and I heard something said about starving your horse."

"Oh, that was but a snap, my lord, where I had no teeth to bite hard," replied Austin. "I know that a bitter word is often worse than a sharp sword. So, having nothing else to say, I told them they had starved my horse to make him like themselves. I took care to be in the saddle first, however; but, instead of trying to stop me, one of them gave the poor beast a cut with his whip, and sent us both about our business."

How the king had obtained information that Julia was concealed at Trochrie was now in part revealed; but only in part, for it was evident, from Austin's capture and examination, that some hint had been gained before--how, Gowrie could not divine. The honest servant was sent back before dawn on the following day, on his way to the highland castle, and he did not depart without a liberal reward, which he accepted without ceremony, for there were no affectations about good Austin Jute. He served faithfully, devotedly, where he attached himself; he would at any time have perilled life or limb, or sacrificed every comfort and convenience for a lord he loved; and, to say nought but truth, I do not think that, in so doing, he ever in his inmost heart thought of a recompence, but he took it willingly enough when it was given, and, sad to say, spent it with as little consideration as he won it.

Several more days elapsed ere the paper Gowrie required was drawn up by the men of law, and he twice presented himself at the palace. All there seemed still fair and smooth; the king's good humour lasted undisturbed; the queen was ever kind and gracious; Sir Hugh Herries did not appear at court, and John Ramsay, though distant to Alexander Ruthven, was warmer in his manner to the earl.

"Beatrice's doubts are unfounded, I do believe," thought Gowrie, as he rode away after the second visit; and when he returned to his own dwelling, he found the act of renunciation waiting for him. Somewhat less than an hour of daylight still remained, and that time was spent in

reading and considering the document.

The sun had just set, leaving a bright glow in the April sky, and Gowrie had risen to gaze at it from a window which looked out towards the west, when suddenly he heard a hasty foot in the ante-room, and the next instant Sir John Hume entered in haste.

"Here, Gowrie," he said, advancing with a small paper folded and sealed in his hand. "Here is something for you. What it contains I know not; but Beatrice slipped it into my hand in haste and agitation, saying, in a whisper, 'To Gowrie, with all speed.'"

Gowrie took it, tore it open, and found the words, "Away, with all speed, to Perth!--to-night!"

"My lord, here is Sir George Ramsay without, desiring to see you," said a servant, looking in.

"Admit him," replied the earl, crushing the paper in the palm of his hand.

The next moment Ramsay entered, with as much apparent haste as Hume; but on seeing the latter he paused, assumed a calmer air, and advancing to the earl, shook hands with him, saying, "It is a fair and warm afternoon, my lord, what say you to a twilight ride?"

"Not to-night, Dalhousie," replied Gowrie, gazing at him attentively; "have you any particular object in your proposal?"

"Only to have a few minutes' conversation with you, my dear lord," replied the other, returning his glance with one of equal significance; "but a moment here in private will do as well;" and he moved towards a distant window.

Gowrie followed him, bending down his head; and Ramsay approaching close, whispered in his ear, "You are in danger, my lord. It were well you departed at once. Lose no time--I dare not say more."

Gowrie pressed his hand kindly and gratefully, saying, "Thanks, Dalhousie, thanks! I had heard the tidings before; but the obligation to you is no less."

He spoke openly and aloud; and his friend, laying his finger on his lip, as if to counsel discretion, retired almost as hastily as he had come.

Ere half an hour had passed, the earl was on horseback, and riding towards Queensferry.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was a bright, hot summer day, the sky without a cloud, the air without a breeze. The sports of the morning were over, the hounds had returned to their kennel, the slaughtered stag was brought in, the horses were in the stable, the hunters seeking repose. The old palace of Falkland, where James V. drew the last breath of a life which had become burdensome, rose stately amidst its gardens and woods; and the old trees, but few of which now remain in the neighbourhood, then spread their wide branches over the velvet turf; in some places approaching so near to the building, as, when the wind waved them, to brush with their long fingers the palace walls. James himself had gone in about an hour before, rejoiced with the success, but fatigued with the exertions, of the chase; and all the ladies of the court were screening their beauty in the shady halls, from the glare of the full sun.

It has often struck me, in looking at the finer paintings of Claude de Lorraine--and they are not all really fine--and in contemplating the calm, quiet, sunny scenes they represent, that the painter must have chosen, by preference, that hour when, under the summer skies of Italy, all nature seems to be taking a mid-day slumber. Such was the aspect of the scene about the palace of Falkland on the day of which I speak. Looking towards the wood, and with one's back towards the palace, so as to shut out its memorial of active life, one might have fancied that one was in the midst of some primeval solitude, or else that the whole world, oppressed with the heat, was sound asleep. No moving object was to be seen; not a forester or keeper was within sight; the deer were hidden in the coverts of the wood; the very birds seemed to avoid the glare; and the court servants themselves--those busy toilers--were all enjoying the repose afforded by the weariness of their lords.

At length, however, after the scene had remained thus quiet for about half an hour, a very young but very handsome man sauntered forth from one of the smaller doors of the building, crossed the warm green in front, turned to one of the old trees, stood for a moment under the shade, and then walked languidly to another, near an opposite angle of the palace. He seemed seeking a place for repose, but difficult to please, for he again left that tree and strolled to its

green neighbour, where, stretching himself on the grass, he laid a book, which he carried with him, open on the ground, and supporting his head with his arm, gave himself up to thought. Oh, the thoughts of youth--the gay, the whirling, dream-like thoughts of youth! How pleasant is the visionary trance which boys and girls call meditation! True, youth has its pains as well as pleasures, both eager, intense, and thrilling; but it wants the fears and doubts of experience, that bitterest fruit of long life. The cloud may hang over it for an hour, but the breath of hope soon wafts it away, and it is not till the storm comes down in its full fury that youth will believe there are tempests in the sky.

There he lay and thought, with the branches waving gently over him, and the chequered light and shade playing on his face and on the open pages of the unread book beside him. The air was very sultry, even beneath the shadow of the trees, and he untied the cord which confined his silken vest at the neck, displaying a skin almost as fair as a woman's, although exercise, it would seem, was not wanting to give a browner hue; for even then he looked fatigued as well as heated, and there was dust upon his hair and upon his dress, as if he had ridden far and long that day. Weariness, and the hot summer air, with the playing of the shadows over his face, seemed to render him sleepy. His eyes looked heavy for a moment or two, the eyelids closed, opened again, closed once more, and there he lay, sound, sound asleep, not unlike what we may fancy was the shepherd boy of Latmus, when under the influence of the fair queen of night.

Some quarter of an hour had passed, and he still lay sleeping there, when round that angle of the building near which the tree grew, came walking, with a slow pace, a man of middle age, with an ungraceful gait, and of an ungainly appearance. He was habited in a suit of green, with a large ruff round his neck, and a tall crowned gray hat and feather; but he wore neither cloak nor sword, and instead of the latter, bore a small knife or dagger, stuck into his girdle on the left side. He, like the youth, seemed to have come out of the palace for fresher air than could be found within; and he, too, appeared in a meditative mood, for he walked with his eyes bent down, and his hand, in no very courtly fashion, scratching his breast. Nevertheless, from time to time, he gave a glance around; and the second time he did so, his eye fell upon the sleeping youth beneath the tree. With a quiet step he approached his side, but was instantly attracted by the open book, and took it up.

"Ay," murmured he, in a low tone, "love songs! That's just it; fit food for such a wild, empty-pated callant's brain."

Thus saying, he laid down the book again, and gazed upon the young man's face.

Suddenly he saw something which seemed to displease him mightily. His cheek flushed, his brow contracted, and he set his teeth hard. Then, bending down his head, he peered into the open bosom of the lad, and even partly drew back the collar of his shirt. It was done quietly and gently, but still it in some degree roused the sleeper, for he lifted his hand and brushed his throat, as if a fly had settled on him. The other started back instantly, but the young man did not wake; and the one who watched him continued to gaze at him sternly, with many a bitter feeling, it would appear, in his heart. His lip quivered; and for a moment he held his hand upon the hilt of his dagger, with a somewhat ominous look, and a cheek which had become pale. Then, however, he seemed to have made up his mind as to what he should do; and, stepping quietly back over the soft green turf, he approached one of the doors of the palace, which was close at hand, and tried to open it. It was locked, however, and turning on his heel again, with a low muttered blasphemy, he went round the angle of the building by the way which he had followed when he came.

Neither the sleeper, nor he who had lately stood beside him, was aware that there was another eye upon them both; but the instant the latter had departed, the door which he had tried in vain opened suddenly, and the light beautiful form of Beatrice Ruthven darted forth, crossed the green sward with the quick spring of a roe deer, and stooping over the sleeping youth, without care or ceremony, she tore from his neck a thick blue silk ribbon worked with gold.

The young man raised himself suddenly on his arm, looking surprised and bewildered; but Beatrice laid her finger on her lips, merely saying, in a low but emphatic tone, "Into the palace like lightning, mad boy!" and away she sprang towards the building again, passed the door, ran through the first passage, and up a narrow staircase to the entrance of a room on the first floor. There she paused and listened for a single instant, then threw the door open without ceremony and ran in.

Anne of Denmark was seated at a table, writing; but the sudden opening of the door made her lift her fair face with a look of some surprise and displeasure; and she said, in a reproving tone, "Beatrice! What now?"

Without reply, the fair girl darted forward in breathless haste, and laid the ribbon on the table before the queen.

"Quick, madam! put it in the drawer," she said, in a low, hurried tone. "Your majesty will see why in an instant;" and without waiting for any answer, she hurried from the room by the same way she had come, and closed the door.

There were several drawers in the writing table at which the queen was seated; and opening one with a hand which trembled slightly, while her cheek glowed a good deal, she placed the

ribbon in it, closed it again, and tried to resume her writing; but not more than one minute had passed ere the step of the king was heard upon a staircase at the opposite side of the apartments from that by which Beatrice had entered, and a moment after James himself appeared, with a heavy scowl upon his brow.

Anne of Denmark looked up, not without some timidity, though she was by nature very intrepid. There was no expression, however, upon her countenance which could betray the agitation within; and seeing the look of anger and malice on James's face, she boldly took the initiative, saying, "What is the matter, sir? You seem disordered."

"No, no, my bonny bairn," said James, "there's nothing the matter; but I was just thinking what clever chiefs those Italians are; and I want to see that ribbon which I bought for you of the merchant man."

"Certainly, sir," replied the queen, rising, with an unconcerned look, for she wished to test how far James's suspicions went; "you shall see it in a moment."

"No," cried the king, hastily, thinking that the queen was going to quit the chamber. "You had it in this room, madam, not so long ago that you need go to seek it. It's here you keep all your gauds and ornaments."

"Well, sir," answered Anne of Denmark, "I have no doubt that it is here still; but I cannot even open the drawers of this table, to look for it, without rising. I know not what is the matter with your majesty, but your conduct is very strange."

"I just want to see the ribbon, madam, that is all; and I think it must be in this chamber-if anywhere," was James's reply.

"Doubtless," answered Anne of Denmark, so far agitated as to open the wrong drawer by mistake.

"It's no there," said the king, looking into the drawer. "There's naething there but gloves, and bracelets, and such like clamjamfry."

"I see it is not, sir," replied the queen, turning over the things with her hand; "but it may be somewhere else. Do you think any one has stolen it?" And she opened the drawer in which it really was.

James did not reply to her question; but not a little astonishment was painted on his rude coarse countenance, when Anne of Denmark drew forth the ribbon and laid it in his hand. He continued to gaze at it for a considerable time, and then put it closer to his eyes, to examine it more carefully all over, as if he doubted that it was really that which he had bestowed upon the queen. There it was, however, precisely the same in every respect; and at length he gave it her back again, and turning sharply on his heel, quitted the room, muttering, loud enough for her to hear, "De'il tak me, if like be not an ill mark."

A minute or two after, he was seen walking past the tree under which Alexander Ruthven had been sleeping; but by that time the young gentleman was gone.^[4] One of the ordinary servants of the court passed his majesty, bowing low, a moment after; and the king called him up, saying, as he approached, "Go your ways, and rout me out Doctor Herries and the man retiring," James continued to walk up and down till he was joined by the person whom he had sent for. They then turned to the farther part of the gardens, much to the disappointment of Beatrice Ruthven, who saw all that passed from the window of a room immediately below that of the queen, and who had hoped to gather, at least from their demeanour, some indications of what was passing in regard to her brother. I will not say that she would not have listened eagerly to their conversation if the opportunity had presented itself; and perhaps the circumstances in which she was placed might be some justification of an act otherwise mean and pitiful; for, as the reader will see in the subsequent chapter, she had accidentally obtained information of designs the most treacherous against one dear brother, of whose high principles and noble conduct she could not entertain a doubt.

The king and his companion, however, walked away to the other side of the garden, as I have said, and stayed there for nearly half an hour, while Beatrice remained in anxious and painful thought. Her head rested on her hand, as she sat near the open window; and she had taken no note of how the time passed, when at length the sounds of people speaking as they walked by below, caught her ear. She would not move in the slightest degree; she even held her breath, lest she should lose one sound, and the next instant she distinguished the king's peculiar tone. The words as yet she could not hear, and still less those of Herries in his reply, though she recognised his voice at once.

The next instant, however, the sounds rose louder, and James was heard to say, "No, no, that will never do. We should lose our grip of the old bird, while wringing the neck of the young one; and there would be such a dust about it, that we should never see our way clear after."

"There, I think, your majesty is right," said Herries; "but if you will be advised by me there is a way to----"

Beatrice lost the conclusion of the sentence, for they moved on towards the other end of the terrace. She knew, however, that none of the royal apartments lay in that direction, and that the only door by which the king could enter led through the great hall, where he must necessarily encounter a number of the servants and followers of the court, a thing which James rarely desired. She approached somewhat nearer the window then, calculating that the two who had passed would return by the same way; nor was she disappointed, for, in a very few minutes, she heard the voices again, and the words of the king soon became audible. They were of no great importance, indeed, and conveyed no information but that which she already possessed--namely, that both her elder brothers were the principal objects, for the time, of James's hatred and suspicion.

"The de'il helps they Ruthvens, I think," said the monarch. "The one brother conveys himself away just at the minute when we have got all ready for him; and the other sends a token I would swear to, fleeing through the walls of Falkland like a conjuror."

This was all that Beatrice heard, but after they had passed the window, Doctor Herries replied, "The devil always helps his own, sire."

"And that's well said," answered the king, "for we have information to be relied upon, that this Earl of Gowrie, when in the city of Padua, had long and familiar dealings with a reputed sorcerer and magician, some of whose infernal arts he has doubtless acquired or contracted. Such matters are difficult of proof, for deeds of darkness hide themselves from the light. But time discovers many things, and Sathanus deals with his pets as we do with the birds and beasts which we keep for our food. He pats them on the back till his time comes, and then he cuts their weasands."

Doctor Herries smiled, for he was not so credulous in matters of demonology as his master; but by this time they had reached one of the smaller doors of the palace, which stood open, and they went in.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I must now go back for a period of more than a month. Gowrie on quitting Edinburgh rode on at a quick pace, hoping to save the tide at Queensferry; but he did not succeed. The water had sunk low, and the boat was on the shore. There was no resource but either to ride farther up in the direction of Stirling, or to wait till the next morning. Gowrie chose the latter course, though at the chance of being pursued and overtaken. He did not like the feeling of flight; and though it might be necessary, and he had already adopted the expedient as the only means of security, his repugnance was sufficient to turn the scale, when, on the banks of the Firth of Forth, he had to consider what was the next step to be taken. All passed quietly at the little inn, however. No signs or sounds of pursuit disturbed the night; and by grey of the dawn on the following morning, the earl and his followers were upon the shores of Fife. A short ride brought them into Perthshire; and then feeling in safety, the young earl paused at the first village, to consider what course he had better follow. If he went on to Perth, he saw that he might be detained there for some time. It was long since he had seen her whom he loved; and he felt that yearning of the heart to hold her in his arms again, which those who have loved truly can well comprehend. He was also somewhat anxious for her safety after all that had occurred to Austin Jute; but then, on the other hand, the few brief words which his sister had written, had indicated Perth as the place where he ought to take refuge; and it was not improbable that she might either know of some ambush on the way to Trochrie, or intend to send him further information before he went. The importance of receiving the speediest intelligence of what was passing at the court, decided him at length to act contrary to his own wishes, and he resolved to sleep that night at least in Perth.

Hardly had he risen on the following morning, when, at one and the same time, it was announced to him that one of the magistrates of the town desired to see him, and that a messenger from Dirleton had just dismounted in the courtyard. The latter was instantly admitted, and presented the earl with a packet addressed in his mother's hand. On opening it, however, he found a sealed letter from his sister, and also a few lines from the countess, informing him that the enclosed had come that morning from Beatrice, with the request that it might be forwarded instantly, and by a trusty messenger, to Perth. The letter from his sister contained the following words:--

"My dear and noble Lord and Brother,

"I had but time and opportunity to write you a very few words yesterday evening, which Hume must have delivered safely, as I find this morning that you have followed counsel, and are gone. I now send you farther information, not direct to Perth, but by the hands of our dear lady mother,

lest what I write should be stopped by the way. All is quiet here at this present, but some people are much disappointed, I believe, in their hearts. The cause of my warning was as follows.--My maid, Margaret Brown, who is very faithful to me, but of a very prying and inquisitive disposition, and not without shrewdness, informed me that danger awaited you, my dear brother. She had seen that something was going on, it seems, in the abbey, which excited in her some suspicion; and her cousin, Robert Brown, a menial servant of the palace, after having been called to the presence of the king, said to her, unadvisedly, as she was coming to my room to aid me in changing my dress for the court in the evening, 'Your lady will have a sore heart before long.' Thereupon the girl, after having dressed me, employed all her art and ingine to draw forth from the man what it was he meant, and succeeded so far as to learn that you were to be arrested the next morning; but in such a sort, without due warrant or form of law, and with insults and injuries belike, as might bring you to resistance, when, a fray being created, you might perchance be killed without there seeming blame to any one. This was the girl's story. She having got some one of the court to call me out of the presence, and having always found her faithful and true of tongue, I wrote hastily the words I sent, and gave them to our friend Hume, to be delivered to your hand.

"Thus far is the girl's story confirmed since your departure, that I have it from a certain source, several people well armed went down to your house this morning, and others followed them not far behind, even so much that the street was crowded. On arriving they asked for you of the porter, but learning that you had gone for Perth on the night before, and being confirmed of the fact by one who saw you ride away, they separated and retired, not having told the reason of their coming. This makes me well satisfied that I warned you as I did, and assures me that you have not been driven away needlessly by your loving sister,

"BEATRICE RUTHVEN."

"I must have forgotten Scotland," murmured Gowrie to himself. "Heaven! what a dream I have been living in!"

Perhaps what he said was true. We are all apt to forget the evils and discomforts of a place we have left behind. Memory is fond of pleasant objects, and plants thick ivy shrubs to rise up and decorate the ruins of the past. He had forgotten the turbulence and dangers which had surrounded his early days. He had almost brought himself to fancy that, as compared with Italy, Scotland was a place of peace, and security, and freedom, where the assassin's knife, the oppressor's wrong, the tyrant's sway were comparatively unknown. But the bitter reality was now before him; and he saw that to be an enemy of the court was to be but a hunted beast, whom every dog of favour might pull down and tear at liberty.

After a few minutes' thought, however, he cast off the impression, and sent for the bailie, who was waiting to speak with him. This magistrate was the reverse in everything of his junior, Bailie Roy--tall, thin, and raw-boned in person, somewhat bluff, and very laconic of speech; a man to be moved neither by fear or favour, but strong in his attachments and steady in his sense of right. He made an ungainly bow in answer to the earl's salutation, and at once dropped into the seat which he was invited to take.

"I have come, my lord," he said, "about the prisoner, David Drummond."

And there he stopped, as if all his say was said.

"Well, Mr. Bailie, what of him?" rejoined the earl. "I hear he has not been tried yet. If you will name the day most convenient to the magistrates, I will come down for the purpose, and hold a court."

"They were thinking of the twenty-second of the month," answered Bailie Graham; "aiblins that might not suit your lordship?"

"Quite well," answered Gowrie. "I will be down, undoubtedly."

Still Mr. Graham continued to sit and twirl his beaver, as if labouring with some other question or announcement; and at length he said, "Your lordship would not see the prisoner?"

"Certainly not," answered Gowrie. "He has been my own servant; and even that might be supposed to have some effect upon my judgment; but I can have no private communication with him while awaiting trial. If he have anything to request, either to make imprisonment more tolerable or to provide for his defence, let him demand it publicly."

"He said he would write to the king, my lord, when he was told of your answer," replied the bailie; "and he did it."

"Can he write?" asked the earl, in some surprise.

"No, not just with his own hand," said Mr. Graham; "but he got a scrivener to do it for him; and Bailie Roy, one way or another, got goodman Jobson to tell him what it was he said."

"I do not wish to hear, Mr. Bailie," said the earl. "It was probably intended for the king's ear alone."

"Ay, that it was," said the bailie, drily; "and no doubt his majesty will think no more of it than it deserves. It's not like to do the Earl of Gowrie much harm, I should think."

"I cannot tell," replied Gowrie, coolly; "but the unfortunate man must have his own way. If the king thinks there is anything important in his memorial, he will probably have the prisoner examined before the council."

"Na, na, my lord, he'll no do that," answered Bailie Graham. "He's gotten a' that the man can gie; and so he may lie where he is for the king."

A few words more explained to Gowrie that James had already sent some one from Edinburgh to confer with the prisoner in his cell; but that since then, "sin syne," as the bailie expressed it, no farther notice had been taken of the unfortunate David Drummond.

I must not say that Gowrie had no curiosity to know what the prisoner had said in his letter to the king; but he would not suffer it to master him, although he had little doubt that the first intimation of Julia's concealment at Trochrie had been thus communicated to James, and he did not feel at all sure that many parts of his conduct might not have been misrepresented by the sullen spirit of revenge which he had often remarked in the prisoner.

"It is very possible, Mr. Bailie," he said, "that this man may have attempted to injure me in his majesty's opinion by false or perverted statements; but that shall not prevent me from doing all that justice requires, without the slightest consideration of consequences. We will proceed, then, to the trial on the day you have named, and I shall not think it necessary even to let his majesty know the time appointed, for although it would not become either you or me to stop a letter addressed to our sovereign, yet the transaction is one with which we have nothing to do; and we must fulfil our duties as if it had not taken place."

"I knew your lordship was right," said Bailie Graham, in broader Scotch than I shall attempt to transcribe. "Bailie Roy, poor body, thought it would have been better for you to have seen the man, and spoke civilly to him till he was hanged; but I said that was not the way a provost of Perth should act; and so good morning to your lordship. Let them say what they will of you, this is the way to win through all."

Alas! that it should not always be as the worthy merchant said, and that this history should afford a pregnant example of the reverse.

Within an hour after the good man had departed from the earl's great house at Perth, Gowrie himself took his way towards Trochrie, riding with the spirit of love to hurry him forward. Gay and bright were the dreams that he dreamed by the way; and a feeling of rejoicing seemed to fill his heart as he thought that he had cast off the trammels of a court, and resumed that private station in which he now felt sure that happiness was only to be obtained. It would seem that fate or chance takes a delight in throwing obstacles in the way of impatience, perhaps as a check to its vehemence, and a warning to go more quietly. Though he set out early from Perth, and might have ridden the distance to Strathbraan in a few hours, a thousand petty accidents beset the earl by the way. A ford, which used to be practicable at almost all seasons, was now found impassable, for there had been rain in the hills. The earl's own horse cast a shoe, and it had to be replaced before he could proceed; and lastly, turned by the necessity of crossing the river higher up, into a more difficult and dangerous path, one of the horses slipped over a rocky bank, was severely injured, and the rider taken up insensible. The care of the poor man occupied some time; and so much was lost in this and other manners, that the sun had set nearly half an hour when the earl came to the spot whence the first view of Trochrie Castle was to be obtained. He looked eagerly forward through the thickening shadows of the night: the castle itself was lost in the darkness; but a light streamed forth from two spots, side by side, and Gowrie gladly recognised the position of the room in which Julia sat. Oh, how cheering, how gladdening are the lights as we approach after a long absence; what a tale does that faint distant spot of brightness tell to the heart, of peace, and love, and calm domestic joy, and all the hopes that gather round the hearth of home!

Onward he went then, with renewed impatience, and in ten minutes more he held Julia gladly to his heart. It was a moment that well repaid all the cares and anxieties and griefs he had suffered.

And there they sat side by side, and gazed at each other in silence, with her dear hand locked in his, and the heart looking out through the window of the eye; and each had much to say to the other, but still it was long unsaid, for emotions would have way before words.

"You look pale and sad, Gowrie," said Julia, at length. "I fear you have met with disappointment."

"No, indeed, dear girl," he answered, "I am not sad, nor have I reason to feel disappointment. My sensations have been very mixed, as all the feelings produced by the great world are; but now joy certainly predominates, for I am with you, and bear you some happy tidings. Then, as to disappointment, dearest Julia, I may experience some at finding that my fancy had drawn

pictures of men and things in this, my native land, in colours far too bright; but that was my own fault or my own folly; and in the most essential point of my hopes, I have succeeded as far as I could expect."

"Thank Heaven for that!" replied Julia, with no light words; "whatever be that point, I am sure that it is a noble and a good one."

"Nay," said Gowrie, "do not praise too much, my Julia. It is a very selfish one; but, to keep you in no suspense, let me tell you that the king has given his consent, in writing, to our union in the month of September next. All difficulties are thus removed, and I must say that in this he has acted, to all appearance, generously; for he had learned that you are here, and might not unreasonably, perhaps, have expressed some anger at my having concealed the fact."

"I heard from good Austin that he had gained intelligence of my abode," replied Julia, "and I felt some alarm, especially during your faithful follower's long and unexplained absence; but I tried to comfort myself by thinking of all the precautions you had taken when last you were here; for I can hardly fancy that anything which Gowrie undertakes can go wrong."

"Would it were so, truly, my beloved," replied Gowrie, somewhat gloomily.

"See this very instance!" exclaimed Julia. "Have you not succeeded where we had so little hope?"

"Not succeeded as well as I could wish," answered her lover. "The king has made it a condition, Julia, that you shall formally renounce all claim whatsoever upon the estates and property of your father--even Whiteburn, though settled by deed upon your mother."

He paused a moment, watching her thoughtful face, and then added, "Nevertheless, I have promised the renunciation in your name; first, because I knew it was the only means of winning the king's consent; and secondly, because I found that it was more than doubtful whether you could establish your claim by law."

"I have but one regret in this case, Gowrie," replied the beautiful girl--"that I come to you poor and dowerless. Oh, if I had all the wealth which they say my poor father amassed, how gladly would I pour it out before you!"

"If that be all, have no regret, my love," replied the young earl--"right glad am I that you do not possess it. I have wealth enough for both, my Julia--too much, indeed, it seems; for in this land wealth and influence do not excite envy alone, but doubt and suspicion likewise. It is dangerous, I am sure, to be too powerful a subject under a weak king. However, I have enough, and to spare. If then, dear one, you will sign the act of renunciation, I will despatch it to the king to-morrow, and then no objection can be ever raised or opposition offered."

"Then I must not go to the court to sign it?" asked Julia, eagerly.

"Not unless you wish it," replied Gowrie.

"Thank Heaven for that, too!" she exclaimed. "Wish it! Oh no, Gowrie. I suppose the time will come when I must go there; but had I my will, that time would never be. I always dreaded the thought of courts, and what your dear sister told me of that in which she dwells, made me more timid and fearful than ever. Oh, promise me, Gowrie, that we shall spend the greater part of life afar from those nests of envy, malice, and greediness."

"That promise I will make with all my heart," replied her lover; "but tell me, Julia, are you not weary of this desert solitude? Beatrice, who almost always counsels well, has half persuaded me to keep you immured here till you are altogether my own; for she sees danger in your residing anywhere not provided so well for defence as this. She thinks the king might seize upon you, and use the expectation of your hand as a means of leading me to a course which my heart and conscience disapprove, or rather, employ the fear of losing you, to drive me to acts which I am bound to oppose and to denounce."

"I have never felt weary one day," answered Julia: "fears I may have had--anxiety to see you again, I may have felt; but weariness, never; nor shall I, Gowrie. A few short months will soon pass: you will let me see you at times; I have beautiful nature before my eyes, books, music, painting, thought, to fill up the time; and what need I more? Yes, follow dear Beatrice's counsel. Let me rest here, dear Gowrie, till all places become alike to me, for thou wilt be with me in all."

Gowrie pressed her gently to his heart, and then withdrew his arms again; for he felt that, lonely, protected only by his honour, he must not let even the warmth of the purest love call up a doubt or a fear in her young heart. His thoughts and words naturally followed the course in which his feelings led; and he replied, "I will be with you often, my Julia, though now I must leave you soon, I fear; but when I return I will try to bring one of my sisters with me to cheer you."

But Julia had tasted less of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she answered, innocently, "I want no cheering when you are with me, Gowrie. Glad shall I be to see them; and if they be like Beatrice, my heart will open to them like a humble flower to the bright sun; but Gowrie's presence is life enough for me. But I have many things to tell you, too; and yet, I know

not why, but I think you have not told me all."

"Oh, there are many minor things to mention," answered the young earl, doubtful whether it were wisest to inform her of the dangers which had menaced, or to conceal them, now that he was safe, at least for the time. "What need," he asked himself, "to disturb her mind, and keep her in constant agitation, whenever I am absent, by fears for me, whose life has been already menaced? Better let her remain in ignorance of the perils that beset my path, when she can do nought to avert them. Could she act, could she counsel, could she direct, I would conceal nothing from her; but she is here helpless and alone, unable to do aught but sit and weep over the dangers or the griefs of others. Shall I make the hours, lonely and dull as they must be here, sad and apprehensive also? No, no; I will not be insincere; and whatsoever she asks, will answer her truly; but I will say no more upon such subjects than needs must be said."

Perhaps Gowrie went a little further than this, for he purposely led the conversation away from the subject of his own fate; and all that Julia learned was, that the king had shown no great love in his demeanour either for the earl or for his brother. Even this made her somewhat thoughtful; and to change the subject, Austin Jute was sent for. He came as fresh, as gay, as ugly as ever; but on this occasion he had little to tell, for his journey back to Trochrie had passed without impediment from any other source but his ignorance of the way. The difficulties he met with from that cause, he described with considerable humour, telling the answers which had been given to his inquiries at the different places which he had passed, and imitating the various dialects of the counties through which he had gone, which were in those days very strongly marked. He did very well till he came to the Gaelic, and even then, though he was utterly unacquainted with the words of the language, he contrived to give some of the sounds so exactly, that Gowrie could not refrain from laughter.

Julia rejoiced to see him so gay; and if she had entertained any suspicion that he was withholding the painful portion of the truth from her, it was dissipated by the cheerfulness he displayed.

An hour or two thus went by; but Gowrie would not keep her long from repose, for he longed to go forth with her on the following morning, and roam through the valleys, and over the hills, now covered with the yellow broom and the young shoots of the heath. The weather had become bright and warm. The fair season was coming on with rapid strides, when the mountains are softened and decorated by the hand of nature, and their solemn gloom cheered by the smiles of the sky; and Gowrie thought of many a plan to make the hours pass pleasantly. "While here," he said to himself, "the feeling of security will spread a calm and tranquil atmosphere around us, which we could not obtain in a less wild and solitary spot. To-morrow, I will take my dear prisoner forth, and show her some of the beauties of the land to which she is yet a stranger."

At an early hour, therefore, he bade Julia adieu for the night, and retired to the room which he had ordered to be prepared for himself in the gate tower. There he held a somewhat long conversation with Donald Macduff, his baron bailie in Strathbraan; and having ascertained from him that all strangers had withdrawn from the neighbourhood, and that a keen watch had been kept up ever since Austin Jute's capture, lest any of the king's people should be lurking about in the valleys around, he lay down to rest, and slept more soundly than he had done for many a night before.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In a room of no very great dimensions in the fair town of Perth, were collected a number of persons upon a solemn and serious occasion. A number of the officers and magistrates of the town were present, seated on a little sort of platform raised above the rest of the room. On either side were drawn up the various officers of a municipal court of justice, as they existed at that time, although I am unable to give their designations; and towards the door were seen two or three halbardiers, with their imposing but clumsy-looking weapons over their shoulders, and dresses of the reign of James V. In a large arm-chair, in the midst of the magistrates of the town, was seated the Earl of Gowrie, as provost of Perth and heritable sheriff of the county; and at a little distance from him, on the same raised place of honour, appeared Sir George Ramsay, habited in the ordinary costume of the court. Across the front of the dais was stretched a long narrow table, at which were seated two or three men in dark garments, with pen and ink and paper before them, and at the opposite end of the room, with a fretted and gilt barrier of iron about three feet high in front, appeared the prisoner, David Drummond, with a stout jailor on either side. His strong and muscular frame appeared to have suffered little, if at all, by the confinement he had endured; but his dull and sinister-looking face was now as pale as ashes, for the earl had just pronounced upon him that doom of death which he himself had twice inflicted upon others. Sadly but calmly, after the most convincing proofs of his guilt, Gowrie had pronounced the fatal words, with his eye fixed firmly on the man's countenance.

Drummond gasped as if for breath to speak; but the two jailors laid their hands upon his arm, and were about to remove him, when the earl interposed, exclaiming, "Stay, stay; he desires to speak. Let him say whatever he thinks fit."

"I appeal to the king!" cried the wretched man--"I appeal to the king!"

"There is no appeal from this court," replied Gowrie; "but----"

"Ah! you fear what I could tell, Earl of Gowrie," cried the criminal. "It would not suit you that I should have communication with the king."

"Unhappy man," replied the earl, with perfect calmness, "you are only now aggravating your guilt. There is no act of my whole life that I fear to have proclaimed at the market cross tomorrow. My conscience acquits me of offence; would that yours could do so. But to prove to you that I fear nought that you can do or say, and that I wish not to deprive you of one chance of life, I will fix the day of your execution, for the crime you have committed, so far off as to afford you opportunity of using every means to obtain that pardon which you do not deserve. You have been fairly tried and justly condemned. There is no appeal but to the king's mere mercy. He has the power of grace ever in his own hands, and far be it from me to interpose between you and it. For your execution, therefore, if you cannot obtain grace, I name the twenty-eighth day of the next month, at noon, and may the Almighty have mercy on your soul! In the meantime, every means will be given to you of addressing any petitions or memorials to his majesty which you may think fit to send; and should I not be present in the town of Perth, I beg that the magistrate will take care that they be forwarded by a special messenger, and without any delay. Now remove him."

The court then rose, and Gowrie and Sir George Ramsay spoke a few words together, in the midst of which a servant of the earl's entered the hall, bearing a sealed packet in his hand.

"From the king's majesty, my lord," he said; and Gowrie instantly cut the silk and opened the letter, under the impression that it might have reference to the cause which had just been tried. Such, however, was not the case; and folding it up again, he put it in his pocket, saying, "Come, Ramsay, and rest yourself with me for a day or two. I am about to make strange changes in my house, and have also to place my pictures, just arrived from Italy, in which I would have your good advice."

"But a few hours, my good lord, can I stay," replied Ramsay; "and I am afraid my advice would serve you but little. However, such as it is, command."

Taking leave of the bailies of the town, and the other officers of the court, with whom the earl was extremely popular, Gowrie and his friend withdrew, and walked together through the streets. Several persons followed them out; but as soon as they were free from the crowd, Ramsay looked at the earl's face, saying, "I hope your news from the court, my lord, is more favourable than that which I was unfortunate enough to bring you when last we met."

"Oh, the letter was a mere invitation to join the court and hunt at Falkland, in the early part of June," replied the earl, "and an acknowledgment of having received a certain law paper, which had been examined by the king's advocate, and found full and in due form. His majesty has been very gracious," he continued, with a smile and a meaning glance, "for the letter is written in his own hand."

"Do you intend to accept the invitation?" asked Sir George Ramsay.

"I am doubtful," said the earl. "An invitation from a monarch is well nigh a command; and I am never disposed to disobey my king where I can obey with safety to my person and to my honour."

"Your honour is safe, my dear lord, wherever you are," replied Ramsay. "Where a man holds life lightly, when compared with integrity, his honour is ever in his own safe keeping, and no other hand can touch it. But your personal safety is another question, and I would have you look to it."

"Do you know aught, Dalhousie, of fresh designs meditated against me?" asked the earl, straightforwardly; nor was the answer less explicit.

"No, I do not," answered Ramsay. "Of fresh designs I know none; but I may doubt whether the old ones are abandoned; and I have often thought it a dangerous sort of sport, my good lord, to hunt with a half-reconciled enemy. The chase has its accidents, which occur most frequently where many people are assembled. Methinks I would advise you to hunt but little, and with those people alone upon whose care and prudence you can rely."

He spoke in a very meaning tone; and Gowrie answered, "I think your advice is good; and, moreover, I could hardly contrive to accept his majesty's invitation consistently with the arrangements already formed; for my dear mother has consented to come forth from the retirement which she has long kept, and meet me at Trochrie in a few days."

"Then I suppose we shall soon have to congratulate you on an event which, I trust, may contribute to your happiness," said Ramsay. "The court has been busy with the story for some time past."

"Not very soon," answered Gowrie; "at least, to a lover it seems long. Some three months must yet elapse--and it *is* long; for what man is there, Dalhousie, let him read the stars skilfully as he will, let him be learned, wise, experienced, who shall say all that may happen in three months? How often does the shaking hand of Fortune spill the wine out of the overflowing cup of joy even as she is handing it to our lips!"

"But too true, my dear lord," replied Sir George; "but I trust in your case it will not be so, for your fate is, I think, much in your own hands. If you but avoid dangers where they are known to exist, I think they will not come to seek you."

Gowrie mused. "What should be the cause of this enmity?" he said at length, in a meditating tone. "What have I done to merit it? Is it that some one is playing false both to the king and me, and poisoning his ear with lying tales of false disloyalty? Or is it that between his blood and mine there is a repugnance which cannot be pacified--that the sad and terrible deed done by my grandfather in his mother's presence, when his unborn eyes were yet waiting for the light, has placed enmity between our races even to the present hour? They say that there are strange mortal antipathies in the blood of some men towards others, which can never be conquered by any effort of the person hated; and surely such must be the case even now, for a more loyal subject, or one who more truly wishes well to his crown, his state, his person, does not live. What are my offences?"

"I could tell you some, my lord," replied Sir George Ramsay. "First and foremost, you are too powerful in the land for a king's love. Your estates are vast. Your wealth, during a long minority, has mightily increased; you are allied to all the most powerful and noble in the land; and you are known to be one who would oppose, without fear, or change, or wavering, the establishment of arbitrary power in Scotland, either in the church or state. These are motives strong enough, my lord, and they are the real ones. What the pretences may be, I know not; but if you keep yourself aloof from all factions and all parties, if you abstain, as far as is consistent with your honour and your station, from all opposition to the king, methinks that the feelings that have risen up must die away of themselves, like weeds that have no roots.--But here we are at your great house, my lord, and a grand mansion is it, certainly."

"Come, see the pictures I have lately purchased," said Gowrie. "I shall have scantily room to place them unless I build me a new gallery. It is with such things as these, Dalhousie--with music, pictures, books, and thought, that I have employed my mind, and not in hatching treason or brooding over schemes of disloyalty.--But we will talk no more of such things. This is the way.--John Christie," he continued, speaking to the porter, "bid them serve dinner in the little hall for myself and Sir George, and see that his servants be well entertained. We are in the gallery when the meal is ready."

Thus saying, he led the way across the court towards the right hand, and entering a door in a little projecting tower which stood in one angle, he conducted his friend up a small staircase which was called the Black Turnpike, being but scantily lighted by three small loopholes. At the top of this staircase Gowrie opened a door which led into a very large and handsome room, containing no furniture except some tall straight-backed gilt chairs, covered with rich embroidered velvet. Passing by another door on the right, the earl then took his way across this spacious chamber to an entrance on the opposite side, while Ramsay remarked, "This is the gallery-chamber, if I remember rightly."

"Yes," replied the earl; "and that door behind us leads to my study, which I have furnished well with books. I am afraid, however, that I shall have to change my domicile, for the window looks down into the street, and the noise often distracts my thoughts."

"You will soon have other books to read in your lady's eyes, my lord," replied Sir George Ramsay, with a smile; and passing on, they entered by a small door that splendid gallery which formed the admiration of all men who saw it in those times. The walls were hung with pictures by the older masters of the Flemish, German, and Italian schools. Some were of a very ancient date, almost contemporary with the revival of the arts--more curious, perhaps, than beautiful, but yet not without their beauty too. There were two or three Van Eycks, and one especially, a fine picture of John of Bruges. But that which most attracted the attention of Sir George Ramsay, even from the Titians and the Correggios on the wall, were some large flat wooden cases, placed upright around, and with the tops removed, showing the pictures which the earl himself had collected in Italy. Amongst the rest was one of very large size, on which the clear light from the north shone strongly. It was rich and powerful in tone, and vigorous in conception, representing Niobe weeping over her children amidst a scene of great picturesque beauty, while the vengeful God of Day was seen retiring in the distance with the work of death completed. Before it Sir George Ramsay stopped for a moment or two, and gazed with interest and admiration. When he turned round he found the young earl standing beside him with his arms crossed upon his broad chest, and his eyes fixed upon the female figure with a look of stern thought.

"What a beautiful picture!" exclaimed the knight; "yet it is by a hand I do not know, and seems fresh from the easel. Who was the artist?"

"A young man of the name of Guido Reni," replied Gowrie. "It was painted for me this last year in an incredibly short space of time, for the artist wanted money; and I gave him his own price. But that picture, Dalhousie, has a particular interest for me. Do you not think the Niobe very like

my mother?--younger a good deal, but still very like."

"It is, indeed," said Ramsay, "particularly in the brow and eyes. Strange that it should be so, for this Italian most probably never saw her."

"Never in his life," replied Gowrie; "and I can only account for it thus.--I passed several days with this young man in his painting room at Bologna, and chanced, I remember, to mention my mother, and her devoted affection for her children. Whether there is any likeness between myself and her I do not know; but I left him to finish the picture and send it over when it was complete, and when I opened it a few days ago, was struck with the extraordinary resemblance.--Come, here is a Caracci well worth your seeing."

"And that lad lying dead with his arm thrown back under his head, and the left hand clutching the grass, is like your brother Alexander," said Ramsay, lingering before the picture still. But Gowrie had gone on, and his friend soon followed. There was still much to be seen in the gallery; but the habit of that day was to dine at a very early hour; and shortly after, the two gentlemen were summoned to their meal; and Sir George Ramsay mounted his horse almost as soon as dinner was concluded.

Gowrie then retired from the court in which he had seen his friend depart, to the study which he had spoken of in passing through the gallery chamber. There, casting himself into a chair, he thought for a moment or two, but in the end took up a book out of a number lying near, and began to read. He had not perused a dozen sentences, however, when the door opened, and, without announcement, Mr. William Cowper, a gentle and amiable man, one of the ministers of Perth, entered, saying, "I hope I do not interrupt your studies, my lord."

"Oh no," answered Gowrie, throwing down the volume. "It is but a foolish book, called, 'De Conspirationibus adversus Principes,' a collection of famous treasons, all foolishly contrived, and ending in defeat by the conspirators having too many men in their councils."

"Dangerous studies, my lord," replied the clergyman.

"Not for me, my good friend," answered Gowrie, gravely. "But what brings you, my dear sir?"

The conversation then took another turn; but Mr. Cowper, after he had left the earl, mentioned more than once, though doubtless with no bad intentions, the studies in which he had found the young lord engaged.^[5]

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Now, reader, for a short recapitulation of events which occupied several weeks. I must be brief, for the stern limits stare me in the face, and the tale must needs, perforce, draw to a conclusion. First, then, with the Earl of Gowrie. In a few days he returned to Trochrie, meeting his mother by the way, and escorting her with kindly care and tenderness. The best apartments in the castle had been prepared for her. The summer was of unusual brightness. The day had been one long lapse of sunny light; and although, when the countess passed the dark portal of the castle, which she had last entered with a gallant husband, since torn from her by a bloody death, a shade of gloom, cast from the cloudy past, fell upon her, yet it passed speedily away, when, with her hand clasped in that of her son, and the beautiful arms of his promised bride around her neck, she stood in the old hall, and looked forward through the perspective glass of hope towards the future.

A month passed away in joys and pleasant sports; Gowrie's household was now completed. The number of his attendants and his tenantry, the friendship of the neighbouring clans, the support of his relation, the Countess of Athol--all rendered the residence at Trochrie perfectly secure against any machinations of his enemies; and fear was banished from the dwelling. The younger brothers of the house of Ruthven appeared at the castle from time to time. His sister Barbara, quiet and nun-like in character, spent the greater part of her time there. An occasional guest partook of their hospitality. The mornings were passed in chasing the deer, or in rides amongst the hills; and the evenings in calmer and more intellectual pleasures. The old countess would sit and listen, as it were entranced, while her son's promised bride sang the exquisite songs of other lands, or while Gowrie himself, with the peculiar charm which is given by high conversational powers, told brief outpointed anecdotes of countries he had visited, or great men whom he had known; and, while she gazed upon the extraordinary loveliness of the one, or the high-toned, manly beauty of the other, she would say to herself, "These two were certainly formed by Heaven to be united," and would add, with a half-doubtful sigh, "and to be happy."

At the end of about a month, suddenly and unexpectedly, they were joined at Trochrie by the

earl's younger brother, Alexander. He seemed to shrink from all explanation of the causes of his having quitted the court; and when his mother made some inquiries as to whether the king and he were still friends, replied, "Yes. His majesty parted with me most graciously."

Gowrie asked no questions; but he divined much. He was kind and gentle to his brother, however; and the youth seemed to feel his forbearance deeply, and showed greater reverence and affection than he had ever done before. His faults were those of youth, passion, and indiscretion; but his heart was generous and kind, and experience and example might have made him a great and a good man.

The period of his stay at Trochrie was the happiest, by far the happiest, of Gowrie's life; and it went on increasing in brightness, for the days were rapidly approaching which were to make Julia his.

As the month of July waned towards a close, it became needful, however, that some preparation should be made for his approaching nuptials; and to ascertain whether, as he hoped and trusted was the case, the feelings of enmity which the king had shown him had been mitigated by time, he wrote to Beatrice, who was still with the queen at Falkland, and to Sir George Ramsay, who was likely to obtain correct information through his brother. Both the answers were favourable, for James was an accomplished hypocrite whenever it suited his purpose to be so; and Beatrice replied, "I trust that all danger is past, and former things forgotten. The king seldom mentions you, my dear brother, which is a good sign; and when he does so, it is with a joke, which is a sign still better. He said the other day, that you were so busy courting your fair lady, that you could not give a thought to king or cousin; and added, that if he could find out the day you were to be married, he would go as a guisard, and dance at your wedding."

Sir George Ramsay's letter was much to the same effect.

"I trust," he said, "that time is curing old wounds. If anything is meditated against you, my dear lord, I will undertake to say, that it is unknown to my brother as well as to myself, for John is not of a deceitful disposition, but rather rash and bold. He would not, and he could not, conceal from me what he knows; and as he mentioned your name the other day, if any design had menaced you, it would have been told."

With such assurances, the young earl's plans were soon formed, and it was agreed that the dowager countess, with her two younger sons and Julia, should proceed by one road to Dirleton, avoiding the court at Falkland, while Gowrie, with Alexander Ruthven, should go for a few days to Perth, to make preparations for the reception of his bride, and then join his mother and the rest of the family in East Lothian, on the ensuing 5th of August. The marriage was appointed to take place on the 1st of September, the earliest day which their promise to the old Count Manucci permitted.

With such plans and purposes, Julia and her lover parted on the 30th of July, 1600, in the fond anticipation of meeting again before the week was at an end. Gowrie rode on to Perth; and the news of his arrival spread through the county, where many of the gentry were now assembled after having passed the winter and spring in courts and cities. Multitudes flocked to see and congratulate the young earl on his return, and on his approaching marriage; and, to say truth, the crowd of visitors was somewhat inconvenient, considering the many preparations he had to make, and the shortness of his proposed stay. On the morning after his arrival, indeed, the inconvenience was rendered greater than it otherwise might have been, by a circumstance which seemed at the time merely ludicrous, but which was not without its significance. Gowrie, on reaching the gates of his own dwelling, had found them open, and the porter absent. He was somewhat angry at the neglect, but on speaking to his factor, Henderson, the latter excused the porter, saying that he had asked leave to absent himself for a day, which had been granted, as the earl's arrival so soon was not expected. The fault of the gates being open the factor took upon himself, and proceeded to lock them with his own keys, before he departed for the night to his small house in the town of Perth. He forgot, however, to leave his keys behind him; and when, early on the following morning, two or three of the neighbouring noblemen presented themselves at the gates, they could not obtain, and Gowrie could not give admission, except by a small postern door in the garden wall. Christie, the porter, did not return till night, and upon being questioned as to where he had been, replied, "To Falkland, my lord. I went to see my sister, who is servant there."

"Saw you the king?" asked his lord; but to this question the man returned one of those equivocal answers which are often all that can be obtained from a Scotchman of the lower class, who has no mind to be cross-questioned. It implied that he had just caught a sight of his majesty, but certainly did not imply that he had spoken with him.

Was this the plain truth? I trow not; for James was much accustomed to trust to his own skill alone in all dangerous negotiations.

The earl, however, had no suspicion of the truth, and dismissed the man to his duty, with a slight reproof for having carried the keys away with him. This occurred on Thursday, the 31st July, and I must now ask the reader to pass over two days, and follow me to Falkland, on Saturday, the 2nd August.

Do you see that little door, opening from a back staircase, and somewhat high up in the building? It looks like the entrance to the bedroom of some inferior follower of the court. It is on the third story, just over the king's closet, and the staircase goes no farther. Hark! there are voices speaking within! Laughter, too, and merriment. Is it a party of revellers hiding themselves there, to enjoy a debauch unobserved? No, it is a king and a king's confederate, talking over deeds of blood and cruelty.

"He'll come, he'll come," said James, "just as ae deer comes to the belling of another. But I'll no write, man--it's better to hold one's hand from written papers; they come up long after; I'll send him a message. Now, then, Sir Hugh, let us think who we can best trust. Tommy Erskine is o'er soft-hearted, or he might be a good man, for he'll keep the king's counsel, I think. You may just whisper a word of the matter to him and to Geordie Hume--not Sir John, mind--but tell them not all; only just an inkling."

"Ramsay, I suppose, must know the whole?" said Herries; "he's a man of action, prompt and ready, and hates the whole name of Ruthven."

"Fye, now, ye silly gowk!" cried James, laughing; "it is just because he is what you call him, that he shall not know a word before the time. He'll be prompt enough, and ready for action at a minute's warning; and his hatred of the Ruthvens will make him fancy any ill of them the moment they are accused. But I'll tell you, doctor, you must be there to put him forward the moment I cry out. Have him where he can see and hear all as soon as it happens."

"I will take care, sire," replied Herries, with a meaning look. "I have held a hound in leash before now, and put him on the scent at the right minute."

James laughed again, saying, "Well run our buck down this time, I think, doctor. But we must have some more. I'm not that fond of trusting such secrets to lords and gentlemen; for they may think their own turn will come. But there are two or three sturdy fellows in the hall and the buttery who'll do good service, and hold their tongues when it's done. Just you jog down the stairs and call me up Robert Galbraith--stay, I'll put down five or six o'them, that ye may send up quietly by turns. There's Galbraith, and then we can have the porter, James Bog, and his brother John, who has the key of the ale-cellar, and Brown, too. He's a stout fellow, and canny. He does not heed to ask questions, but does what he's told, only he's o'erfond of the lasses. We'll have all these."

Sir Hugh Herries listened with astonishment to the names which the king mentioned, and at last ventured to say, "Will it not seem strange, your majesty, to take with you, on your expedition, men of such stations as your porter here at Falkland and the keeper of the ale-cellar?"

"Hout, tout!" cried the king, "who's to call it strange if I choose to do it? May not a king guide his own menial servitors as he likes? and who's to fash his thoomb with what it pleases us to command? I tell ye, doctor, these are the best men we could have, and I must take heed I do not get a gore from the hart I'm hunting."

"That of course must be cared for, sire, above all things," answered Herries, who feared that James might suspect his loyalty, as being somewhat lukewarm, if he estimated the king's danger less than he did himself; "it were well to have some one well-armed close to you, and none could be better than Ramsay."

"I and Christie will see to that," said James, nodding his head significantly. "Ramsay will no do. He might be scrupulous if he kenned it was all laid out beforehand, though he'll do the deed in hot blood right well and willingly, if he thinks his king's in danger. You see, Sir Hugh, it is not easy to get unlearned, thickheaded, common-witted men to understand that judges and officers of the law are but empowered to put offenders to death by authority committed to them by their sovereign, who, in imparting to others, loses no part of his power and authority himself; but having tried and condemned a criminal in his own mind, according to the right which he derives from God, has every title to say to any of his subjects, 'this man, or that man, is a traitor, or a murderer, or a thief,' as the case may be; 'put him to death;' for doing which the king's mere word is his sufficient warrant. I say it is not easy to get such men as Ramsay to understand this, though he would quarrel with any Ruthven of them all, and cut his throat for our service, if we would but give him leave to proceed according to his false fancies of honour and such like. No, no, man, he must know nought of our purposes till the time comes, as I have said. Such counsels are too grave for him, but still I will take care so to prepare and preoccupy his mind with the knowledge of meditated treasons that he shall be ready to strike home in our defence when need is. The men I have told you of, are those we can best trust; and, perhaps, before the day for the hunting, we may pick out one or two more of the court folk, to accord greater or less knowledge to, as we shall deem expedient."

"But is your majesty sure that the earl is now at Perth?" asked Herries; "it would not do for you to go and find a warm nest and a flown bird."

James chuckled. "See what an unbelieving carle thou art, Hughie," he said; "the last time, I trusted the matter to you and your cronies; and sure enough you found what you say, a warm nest and a flown bird; but I have taken the matter into my own hand now, and made sure of all. The lad returned to his great house, at St. Johnstone, on Wednesday last at evening, and there he

is carousing like any prince. All the people are flocking to him from the country round, as if he were king of Perth, and forgetting that we ourselves are here in Falkland. The good folk of the town, too, are all mad about him, and looking for the bridal, as if a king's son were going to wed."

"Is there no risk of the citizens rising?" asked Herries, in a low tone.

James's face instantly fell. "That's right well bethought," he said; "they, burghers of Perth, were aye a turbulent set. We must have men enow in the town to keep them down. What's to be done, think you, doctor?--stay, I've got the pirln. We'll send Davie Murray to his cousin Tullibardine, and bid the baron meet us with all his folk in arms, as if just by accident."

"I fear me, your majesty, that will not pass current," said Herries; "people don't travel by accident with two or three hundred armed men."

"Ay, ay! but you forget there's that affair of Oliphant. The notorious villain has been grinding down the Angus folk like corn between the stones, and he's now in Perth or thereabout. That will be enough for Tullibardine. As for the people about the court, we must have another story ready; but I'se warrant we find one."

"I hope it will match all the rest," said Herries, with a grim smile; "for where one has so many pirlns on hand they are apt to get tangled. I've seen many an old wife get clean dumfounded with the power o'them; and I'm thinking that, at spinning a web, neither your majesty nor I can match an auld wife."

"Gae wa', ye disloyal carle!" cried the king, laughing; "to even your born sovereign to an auld wife! Go your ways, man, I'll make a tale that shall puzzle them. You send up the folk I have told you; but Davie Murray, our controller, first; and then the others, one by one. Let them be like buckets in a draw-well, as one goes down, the other comes up--no more clavers, but do as I bid."

Herries retired from the royal presence; but he stopped and thought for a minute or two upon the stairs. He stopped and wondered, too; for though he was ruthless enough, he could not regard the business before him as the king did; and he asked himself, how James could plot the death of two young, hopeful men, in the pleasant spring of life, full of gay expectation and the happy blood of youth, as if he were but laying out the chase of some beast of the field? The secret was, that he could not, with his acute and logical mind, deceive himself with James's sophistries as to the justifiableness of the act; and the king did.

He descended at length, however, and twelve times that night the small door at the top of the stairs opened and shut, as one of those who were to take a part in the perpetration of the contemplated deed went in and came out.

At length the king descended himself, his dark and fatal council over, and lying down to rest, slept as soundly as a sick-nurse.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The prayer and the sermon had been long and furious, for Mr. Patrick Galloway was one of the most vehement men in and out of a pulpit that even the Scottish church ever produced. "The man of many pensions," as he was sometimes called, had once been, or appeared to be, a stern and ardent advocate of church freedom; but he had mightily changed his views since he became chaplain to a king whose love of liberty was but small; and all the tremendous energies of the most persevering and eager of men were now turned to advocate the views of his royal patron. He now "wrestled and pleaded," as he called it, with peculiar fervor in his prayer for the safety of his majesty, and his deliverance from all enemies, and he took for the text of his sermon merely the opening words of one of the epistles, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." On this theme he descanted for a full hour, speaking to his courtly auditory as if he were the mouthpiece of the king, and venturing to exhort all men to passive obedience, in terms and with arguments which James himself, with all his blasphemous uses of scripture, would not have ventured to employ.

Many, nevertheless, listened to his fervid exhortations with that reverence and kindling enthusiasm which rude and impassioned eloquence often produces in the minds of the warm tempered and uncultivated, and amongst those was Sir John Ramsay. Every word that the preacher uttered went straight to his heart, and roused up therein a sort of gloomy longing to be of service to his sovereign, which was but too soon to be gratified.

After the king's dinner he called for Ramsay, who had hardly finished his own, and walked out with him, otherwise unattended. The day was hot, but cloudy, the pace of the king and his favourite slow, and James's manner peculiarly calm and composed. I will not attempt to give any

idea of the language in which he expressed himself, for though, as I have elsewhere said, somewhat more than half a Scot myself, his majesty's knowledge of the vernacular was much greater than my own, and to say sooth, many of his expressions were not very decent and not very reverent. I may be permitted, therefore, to translate the dialogue into English and legible terms.

The king's first question went to ascertain what Ramsay thought of Mr. Galloway's sermon. Ramsay expressed his cordial concurrence with every word which had been uttered, and showed by his reply how eagerly he had listened.

"Well, well," said the king, "it was a good sermon, and well conceived, but it was like a wasting of much powerful exhortation, for those who most needed it were not present to hear it."

"I should have thought all men might have profited by it, sire," replied Ramsay, "as a stirrer up of zeal and of loyalty."

"Ay, but they were all zealous and loyal about me," answered James; "and none of those Ruthvens were present except that wild thing Beatrice, who has more folly than guile in her."

"I had hoped, sire, that her brothers were coming to a better sense of duty," answered Ramsay. "Your majesty has shown them great favour lately."

"Policy, Jock--policy!" replied the king. "Both being out of reach together, or only one within arm's length at a time, there was little use of attempting to strike where the blow was sure to miss. But I'll show you what to think of their loyalty and sense of duty. Look you here, John Ramsay, what the man David Drummond writes me--he who was put to death the other day by sentence of the justice court in Perth--see you here," and after groping for nearly a minute in his large breeches pocket, James produced a packet of papers, from which he selected one, and gave it to his companion.

Ramsay read it with looks of astonishment and displeasure, and then returned it to the king, saying, "I wonder, sire, you did not save the villain's life to be a witness against the traitor, his master."

"It would have been perverting justice," said the king, "for he died by a just sentence, although I'm thinking that the earl was not sorry to stop his tongue with a wuddy. His information served me so far, however, that I wrote to a good friend and servant of mine at the English court, and got down this copy of the King of France's letter, which this young earl brought over with him. Look ye now, and devise what he means, for to my mind it seems that he plainly points out to one who has been an enemy to Scotland that this earl who brings the letter is the ready man for helping her in her plans. See here, lad, what he says; 'I have been visited by the noble lord, the Earl of Gowrie, who will lay these at your feet; and as he is exceedingly desirous of serving your majesty,' &c.--Ay, more desirous of serving her than of serving his natural king," continued James; "but maybe he'll be taken in his own trap yet. He would not come to our hunting here, though we invited him by a letter under our own hand; and now we understand he has thoughts of inviting us to his place at Perth----"

"I trust your majesty will not go," cried Ramsay.

"If we do, it shall be well accompanied," replied the king; "with many faithful and loyal people like yourself, Jock, who will see that no harm befalls us; and mind you be ready if ever you hear the king's voice crying, to run and help him."

"That I will, sire. Doubt me not," answered Ramsay, "and woe be to the man whom I find attempting to do you wrong."

"I know it, I know it, Jock," answered the king; "and when I've such folk as you about me, I do not fear any evil. But good faith, man, we must get in for the afternoon preaching. I will bide here a little, but you can go your ways."

Ramsay at once took the hint, and retired; but James continued walking to and fro, and, whether by any previous arrangement or not, I cannot say, some five or six gentlemen of his household and court went out separately one after another, held each a few minutes' conversation with the king, and then returned to the palace. To no two of them did the monarch say exactly the same thing, though the subject was still the same; and he seemed well satisfied with the answers of all. Nevertheless, when at last he was joined by Sir Hugh Herries, he said, in a low tone, "I don't like that cold body Inchaffray. He does not speak heartily, doctor. I have told him little, and we'll tell him no more. Has Davie Murray come back yet?"

"No, sire," answered Herries. "He has not had time, though he rode as if the de'il were behind him--which perhaps might well be."

The last words were uttered with a low laugh; and the king turned sharply upon him, asking, "What do you mean, you fause loon?"

"They say the king's anger is the devil," answered Herries, with a bow and a cynical smile. "That's what I mean, sir."

James himself laughed now, replying, "Then ye're not feared for the de'il yoursel. But we must get the preaching over, Herries. It had a fine effect this morning; though I wonder that goose Galloway did not touch upon the sorcery and magic. I had indoctrinated him well with it; and he might have made a grand point of it, especially if he had hinted that there were some people who studied in foreign lands, and came home atheists, full of charms and diabolical arts, but that their end was always evil."

"Perhaps he kept it for another time, sir," answered Herries; "and indeed I think it might be somewhat too strong just now, to point out the ill end that some people may come to, for it might make men believe hereafter that the whole had been prepared beforehand."

"Awa wi' sic clavers," cried James; "who cares what they say hereafter? We'll make it good, man; and it's always well to prepare the way for the history of such an affair. I'll tell you what, Hughie, I have full proof that this Gowrie lad has had dealings with necromancers and conjurers of devils, and that's a food which, when men have been nibbling at, they don't give up easily. So Galloway might have said it, and told the truth, too.^[6] But now, Herries, man, you must look well to the people who are to go with us. Have as many as possible, in case of there being a fray. It does not much matter whether they can be depended on for beginning the thing or not, so that you be quite sure they will take part with their king when it is begun."

James paused for a minute or two in thought, and then said, "As for Inchaffray, we must get him away. Your cold, long-thinking folk that always take time to consider before they give an answer, are not for such work as this; and when I put it to him quietly whether he did not think that kings, having the right divine to judge all their subjects, might cause execution to be done by their own power upon those that the arm of the law was too short to reach, he said, it was a knotty point, which required deeleberation, for kings might sometimes make a mistake, though he would not go the length of saying that if they were proved right in the end, they would not be justified. I will send him to Stirling the morn, and he'll have time to deeleberate by the way."

"A small fine upon his estate might do him good," said Herries, "if he shows himself at all refractory."

"It's a fine plan, those fines," said James, to whom the hint was by no means disagreeable. "It punishes these fat, wealthy lords, by taking a part of their ill-gotten gear from them. It leaves them less power of doing mischief, and it strengthens the king to keep them down. Harry the Seventh of England, our good ancestor, knew the value of fines right well, and he was a wise prince. It's funny to read in history how he employed his two sponges, Empson and Dudley, to suck up all the gold that was scattered about the realm; and then, when he wanted some himself, he gave them a squeeze, and the thing was done. It's almost a pity that this young Earl of Gowrie has not taken it into his head, with all these dangerous designs of his, to do some open act which would have enabled us, doucely and quietly, to levy a good fat fine upon him; but he's kept so quiet, that he's left us no way but that we're taking; and that would not have touched his brother Alex, who is the worst of the two, and deserves death as well as any one that I know. But fegs, man, there's the old doctor looking out of the window. I'll warrant you he's waiting for us to come to the preaching. Rin, Cousland, rin!--but mind ye don't have the lassie Beatrice jecking at ye, about your bowit foot."

"She did so this morning," said Herries, as he followed the king; "but I asked her to let me look into her loof, and then told her that I could see, by the art of chiromancy, some great misfortune would happen to her within the month."

"Ye should not have done that, ye gowk," said the king.

"Then let her leave my bowit foot alone," said Herries. "I'll warrant my lady turned very mealy about the haffits, for it scared her, although she could not tell what I meant."

James was going to reply; but two or three gentlemen of the court now approached, probably to tell his majesty that the evening preaching was about to begin; and James re-entered the palace without saying more.

CHAPTER XL.

On Monday, the 4th of August, 1600, the Earl of Gowrie, his brother Alexander, good Mr. Rhind, a gentleman of the name of Oliphant, and Mr. William Row, a celebrated presbyterian minister, and a man of a bold, intrepid, and straightforward character, were seated together in the little dining-hall immediately after the evening meal, which was usually taken in those days at nearly the same hour as that at which we sit down to dinner in our own times. The summer's day, and the twilight which succeeds it, I need hardly tell the reader, is much longer in the northern

latitude of Perth than in the southern parts of the island; and though supper was already over, it was still broad daylight. There was some very rare old wine upon the table, one of the good things of life to which even the strictest ministers of the Presbyterian kirk had no conscientious objection, and of which I have remarked, they can generally imbibe a quantity without its having the slightest effect upon their intellect, which would very much puzzle the brains of any man habituated to its daily use. Gowrie, however, was accustomed to drink but little. Of a strong frame, in robust health, hardly having known a day's illness in his life, he felt no need of wine; but still his hospitality would, in all probability, have induced him to stay and press the grape upon his guests, had he not had many subjects calling for immediate attention.

"I must now leave you, Mr. Row," he said, "and must take Alex from you, too, for we have a number of orders to give and matters to arrange; but my good friend, Mr. Rhind, will be my locum tenens, and see that you do justice to my cellar. If I find it otherwise at my return, I shall either think that Rhind has played the host badly, or that you find the wine of an ill flavour."

"You are going to Dirleton I think, to-morrow, my lord," said Mr. Row.

"Not before I have heard your sermon, my dear sir," replied Gowrie, with a courteous smile. "We shall not set off till after dinner; then I shall run through Fife, embark upon the Firth of Forth, and be at Dirleton before night."

"And when you come back," said the minister, with a shrewd look, "we shall see a bonny lady in the great house, I'm told."

"I trust so, my dear sir," replied Gowrie, "and one well qualified, both by character and education, to esteem and love such men as Mr. William Row. It is for her reception that I am now so busy in preparations."

"Let us not keep you, my good lord--let us not keep you. We will just take a moderate cup, and then retire."

"Oh, no, I trust to see you before you go," replied the earl, quitting the table. "Now, Alex, let us away and make our arrangements."

Thus saying, the earl left the little dining hall, crossed the larger hall and a part of the courtyard, and took his way towards the great staircase which led to the picture-gallery, putting his arm affectionately through that of his brother, and saying something to him in a low tone.

"What!" exclaimed Alexander Ruthven, starting, and looking in his face; "I did not hear you clearly."

"I only said, Alex," replied Gowrie, "that it is fit you should see what is done and ordered; for if I should die before my marriage, or without children, you will have to complete, as Earl of Gowrie, what I have begun."

"Now, Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the young man, warmly. "What should put such a thing in your head, John?"

"Nothing but the uncertainty of human life," replied his brother, with a grave smile. "I might be drowned crossing the Forth to-morrow. My horse might fall, as poor Craigenfelt's did, the other day. A thousand things might happen, to take me from this busy scene. It is true, indeed!" he added, "I have thought of such things much lately; and I suppose it is natural, when the greatest joy of life is before one, to dread those accidents which so often interpose between expectation and fruition. Would that the day were here, and my Julia's hand clasped in mine for ever; but here comes Cranston. I shall leave him behind, to see that all is executed properly. He is a man of taste and judgment, and we can rely on him quite well."

The person who approached was one of the domestics of the Earl of Gowrie, whom he had engaged since his return from Italy; but it must not thence be inferred that he was a man either of inferior birth or education, for many a well born and well instructed person, in those days, accepted the higher offices in the houses of noblemen of the rank and wealth of the Earl of Gowrie. Thomas Cranston, we find, was the brother of Sir John Cranston of Cranston, and from the way in which he is designated in his trial, it would seem that he had taken his degree of Master of Arts.

On his approach, Gowrie addressed him familiarly, and led the way through the picture gallery to the rooms on the side opposite to the gallery-chamber and study. The first he entered was a light and well proportioned room, looking out over the gardens, and catching a pleasant view of the beautiful Tay.

"Remember what I have told you, Cranston, about this room," said Gowrie, casting off the gloomy air which had more or less hung about him all day. "This is to be my lady's bower, where she can be free from intrusion, and spend her quiet moments at her ease."

"I think, my lord, you said the silk hangings of green and white were to be put up here?"

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed Gowrie. "You are no lover, Cranston, I can see. Here, we'll have the

colour of the rose; and I pray Heaven, that her life with me may be so coloured, too. The summer flower, Cranston, whose blushing bosom will not rival her dear cheek, must decorate her chamber. No, no; those hangings which we had made here in Perth are for this room, and for the sleeping-room adjoining. My dressing-room is the little room beyond, and these two rooms for my mother. In the other wing, is your abode, Alex, hard by William and Patrick."

"I hope they will be more quiet than their wont," answered the young gentleman, "for, to speak the truth, I am of a more quiet temper than I used to be."

"You will be here but for a short time at once, and you must bear with them, Alex," said his brother; "but you are far enough off from them, too; so that even when you do come from the noisy court, you may find repose enough."

"I shall never go to the court again," said the young gentleman, in a thoughtful tone, walking on with the earl, while Cranston followed, a step or two behind. "During the last fortnight, Gowrie, I have thought more than I ever thought in my life before. I see that I have been wrong, but not, I trust, criminal; and I know that the prayer which petitions against being led into temptation is a very good one for me."

"I will not say I am sorry to hear you so speak," said the young earl; "and though a knowledge of the danger is, with a strong and high mind, almost a certainty of victory, yet I will not try to shake your resolution, for I believe it is a good one--at all events for the present."

"I am sure it is, John," replied his brother; "and so, to return to what I was saying, you see I shall be in Perth till you and the whole household are tired of me, perhaps."

"If you remain till I am tired of you, my dear Alex," answered the earl, kindly grasping his shoulder, "we shall spend our lives together. But I trust that ere long I shall see you married, too; and what I can do to advance your fortune, shall be done."

"I doubt not, Gowrie," replied the younger man, "that what I see of the happiness of yourself and your fair Julia, will make me eager to try the same lot--only where shall I find another such as she is?"

"Oh, easily," answered Gowrie, "though it be a lover speaks, Alex. What I mean is, you will easily find one as well suited to you as she is to me--though I could never in life find another such. But let us finish our task, for our friends below will think us long;" and, in a far more cheerful mood than before, the earl led the way onward, giving various directions to Mr. Cranston, till all that he could recollect at the time was arranged. He then turned to descend the staircase which led to the north-eastern part of the house, at which he had now arrived; but, before he went, he paused to ask--"How is poor Craigengelt, Mr. Cranston? I have had so many people with me to-day, I have not been able to get to see him."

"He is better, my lord," replied the other. "I saw him this morning before dinner, and I shall see him again presently."

"Tell him I will come and visit him before I go to-morrow," said the earl; "and he must come over after me to Dirleton when he is well enough."

Thus saying, the earl went back to the dining-hall; but the party was diminished, for Mr. William Row was gone.

"I must go, too, my lord," said Oliphant, as the earl remarked upon the absence of the minister, "for the truth is, my cousin, the Master, is lying concealed in Perth, and we are to ride away at midnight, as the king's people are seeking him for that affair in Angus."

"A bad affair it was!" replied the earl, gravely. "I should be sorry to say anything harsh of your house, but the king is quite right not to suffer such things."

"Ay, the Master is a born devil when his blood's up," replied Oliphant. "I wont justify him, my lord; but he is yet my cousin, you know, and so I must help him, and now I'll bid your lordship good night, and may God protect you!"

"I trust he will!" replied the earl. "Good night;" and sitting down, he filled a tall Venice glass with wine, and drank it off at a draught, as if he were tired and thirsty.

A few minutes after, Mr. Rhind left him, saying he would go and help to put the books to-rights in the study; and the earl and his brother were once more left alone together. Gowrie, notwithstanding the momentary sadness which had come over him just as Oliphant departed, seemed more cheerful than he had been for many a day. The light and playful wit which had distinguished him in Italy, sparkled forth anew; and he spoke gaily and happily of his own prospects, suffering the bright rays of hope to rest upon the future like sunshine on a hill.

"It will be very sweet, Alex," he said, joyously, "to spend our lives together here, afar from those courtly scenes of which you have now found the hollowness. After all, a court is a dull place, from which even those who rule it must retire to some small domestic corner for anything like happiness. Its wit is all restrained, its merriment measured by line and rule; and its gayest

sports, hampered by fictitious proprieties, always put me in mind of a man I once saw at Milan, who danced in iron fetters for the amusement of the spectators. We shall be much happier here. Sometimes we can sail upon the Tay, and perhaps win the speckled salmon out of the blue water. At other times we will away to hunt the deer, or mingle with the good citizens in their sports; and then for idler hours, we shall have books, and music, and pleasant chat, and let the world wag at its will, knowing little of its doings. In a varied round of duties, pleasures, and affections, time may well glide by us quietly, till we find age creeping on us unawares, and telling us, there is another place before us where rest is perfected in joy.--But it is growing dark, Alex. We will have lights for an hour, and then to bed. To-morrow--oh, to-morrow! Then shall I hold my dear one to my heart again."

"My lord," said the earl's page, Walter Crookshanks, entering, "here is Mr. Fleming with a message from the king for Mr. Alexander."

Gowrie looked towards his brother, whose face turned somewhat pale, and then replied, "Give him admission, by all means."

The moment after a well-dressed and graceful young man was ushered into the room, with whom the earl and his brother both shook hands.

"Welcome to Perth, Fleming," said the earl, "pray you sit down. You bear a message from his majesty, I think."

"Not to your lordship," replied Fleming, taking a seat, "but to Mr. Ruthven. He greets you well, sir, and bade me say that he requests your presence at Falkland, to-morrow, at as early an hour as may be, to see the running of a famous stag which his men have marked down this evening. You must not be late, for his majesty will be away sooner than usual."

"How many legs has the stag, Fleming?" asked Alexander Ruthven, with an effort to laugh. "Four, I trust?"

Fleming gazed at him for an instant, apparently in some surprise. "Ah!" he said at length, "I did not understand you. Four, by all means. I heard the order for horses and hounds, myself. We are all in mirth and high glee at Falkland. The king seems to have forgotten all cares and crosses, and like an over-ripe gooseberry, seems ready to burst with sweetness. No, no, there is no danger. If you are there about eight o'clock, you will find the whole court in the saddle. Some of the ladies even, I have heard, are likely to be out to see the run. What shall I say to his majesty?"

Alexander Ruthven looked to his brother, and then replied, "Say that I am his most devoted servant, and always ready to obey his will.--You must not go dry lipped, Fleming, however," he continued, seeing the young gentleman rise, as if to depart. "A cup of this old wine will refresh you--your horse, too, has not had time to feed."

"He will carry me back fasting," answered Fleming; "but I must drink to your good health, and to that of my lord, your brother. The king never bethought himself of sending for you till three hours ago--foul fall his memory! when, after talking with your sister the duchess, he suddenly called out to me, 'Fleming, get on your beast's back, and ride to Perth as if the de'il had ye. Tell the bairn Alex to come and run the muckle hart wi' us the morn, and bid him no lose time by the way. Some one here can lend him a horse, I trow, for his ane beast will be weary!'"

As he spoke he filled himself a cup of wine; and the earl asked who was with the king when this was said.

"The duchess and Lady Mar," said Fleming. "They came into the small room, at the top of the great staircase, my lord, where I had ensconced myself to talk awhile with Margaret Hume, if the truth must be told. But now I will wish you both good night, and away on my long ride again."

The earl bade him adieu; and Alexander Ruthven saw him to his horse's back. Then, returning to his brother, he said eagerly, "What shall I do, Gowrie? This invitation is strange."

"Strange as the man who sent it," said Gowrie; "but yet methinks he can intend you no ill; and, if you refuse to go, it will at once put enmity between you and the king. If there is any evil designed, it is clear Fleming has heard nought of it."

"I must go, I fear," said Alexander Ruthven. "I know not why I feel such a dread; for it is just like the king, the whole proceeding--friends with you to-day, at enmity to-morrow, then friends with you again, if you show that you heed his wrath but little. It is possible--nay, it is probable, that he intends no ill; but yet, I know not why, I feel as if I were going to execution. How often have I flown to that court with joy!--and now how different!"

"If such be your feelings, Alex, I would not have you go," replied his brother. "I may perchance be superstitious in this, but I have often thought that, as we see in beasts sympathies with the elements which give them warning of coming changes, teaching them to fly to the open fields when earthquakes are approaching, or look up to the sky and low with joy when the refreshing shower is soon about to descend, so in man's nature there may be sympathies with the finer elements that involve his spiritual nature, giving intimation of coming joy or peril. My own short experience and reading, narrow though it be, have tended to confirm this notion; for I have

seldom seen or known a bold spirit seized with an unaccountable repugnance to an act, and do it, without the consequences being disastrous to himself. Now, were you, Alex, of a timid nature, given to unreasonable fears, I should make light of such dreads; but as it is, and as you perhaps are but too bold in character, they have more weight with me."

Alexander Ruthven thought for a moment or two deeply, and then replied, with a sudden start, "No, I will go! I have been scanning my own heart, Gowrie; and I think I can trace the cause of this dread to a consciousness which has come upon me lately, that I have been more faulty, in my thoughts at least, towards the king, than I believed myself to be when I left Falkland. So faulty will I never be again; and as the first fruit of a better spirit I will obey his command and go."

Thus was it settled, then; and all that remained to be determined was, who was to accompany Mr. Ruthven on his expedition.

"Take our cousin Andrew," said the young earl; "he is honest and faithful, and well looked upon by the king. With your own servant and one of mine that will be enough.--Henderson, too, is going to Ruthven to see after the farms; he may as well accompany you part of the way, and bring me back word if you find any cause of apprehension as you go. Andrew is at Glenorchie's house hard by. Send him a message, and he will go, I am sure." The two brothers retired soon after to rest; but by four on the following morning Alexander was on horseback, and in a few minutes, accompanied by his cousin Andrew Ruthven, and followed by Henderson with two other servants, he was on his way to Falkland. The apprehensions which he had experienced the night before seemed now to have returned upon him in full force. He spoke little to any one; and his first words to his cousin, after they had quitted Perth, were, "I do not love this journey, Andrew. I know not why the king has sent for me. It is very strange."

Still, however, he rode on vehemently, as if anxious to know his fate, let it be for weal or woe, and in the end he outrode all his companions, coming in sight of Falkland by seven o'clock.^[7]

"The king will not be out for an hour," he said to himself, "and I can learn from Beatrice whether there be any signs of danger."

Riding straight east, between the little town of Falkland and the wood, the young gentleman took his way towards the stables, then called "The Equerry," intending there to put up his horse and enter the palace privately; but just as he was approaching the building, to his surprise and disappointment, he saw the king already mounted, and an immense train of courtiers and huntsmen, going forth nearly two hours earlier than usual. There were some old hawthorns growing near, and dismounting at once, he threw his rein over a branch, and advanced to the side of James's horse. There kneeling on the soft grass he bent his head, saying, "I have come at once to obey your majesty's commands."

His heart beat for the next words; but James, with a smiling face, leaned over the saddle, and threw his arm familiarly round the young man's neck, saying, "That's a good bairn. Well I wot, I wish there were many to obey as readily and speedily, Alex. Noo, man, get ye on your beast and come wi' us, we'll show you fine sport the day."

The young gentleman obeyed at once; the cavalcade took its way to the wood; the tracks of the buck were soon found, and the hounds put upon the scent. Twice, I think, in other works I have described a royal hunt; and here I will refrain, not alone on that account, but because "the hunting of that day" was not of stag or roe.

As the noble beast, which was the pretended object of the morning's chase, forced from his leafy covert, bounded away over the more open ground, and hounds and hunters dashed after him, the royal cavalcade was separated into small parties, and Alexander Ruthven asked eagerly of one of the gentlemen near, where his acquaintance Fleming was that morning.

"He was sent off to Leith at six o'clock, poor lad," said Lord Lindores; "tired as a dog with hard riding last night, he had sore ill will to go; but the king was peremptory."

"Alex Ruthven! Alex, bairn, ride close!" cried James, from a little distance; "what are ye clavering about? Mind the sport--Come hither, man, come hither!"

The young gentleman immediately obeyed, and rode up to the king's side; and throughout the rest of the hunting, whenever he absented himself for a moment he was recalled almost instantly, if he was seen to be conversing with any one belonging to the court. So long as he remained silent and apart, James took no notice, and appeared to be busily engaged in the chase; but no sooner did Alexander open his lips to any other than the king himself, the monarch's voice calling him up sounded in his ears.

The hunt was long, considering the circumstances, for the deer was forced by half-past eight, and was not pulled down till ten. All gathered round the noble beast as he lay upon the ground, and every one made way for the king to perform, as he so frequently did, the last disgusting offices of the chase; but, to the surprise of all, and the consternation of Alexander Ruthven, James remained upon his horse, saying, "Noo, my lords and gentles, we've another ride before us. We're awa to St. Johnstone, to visit our loyal friend, the Earl of Gowrie; but we shall be back before night, so you needna seek your night-caps."

"I fear, your majesty," said Alexander Ruthven, "that you will hardly find my brother at his house. He purposed to go to Dirleton early to-day."

"De'il tak it!" cried the king; "but 'tis no matter. We will ride the faster and catch him, I do not doubt. Here, Alex, bairn, ride by us; and tell us all about your brother's journey. Ye've seen the leddy, I'll dar' to say."

The poor young man, alarmed and confounded, replied, in faltering accents, that he had; and, in answer to James's questions, he described his brother's promised bride as accurately as he could find words to do, in the state of trepidation of his mind at the moment.

The monarch kept him by his side as much as possible; but in the course of their long ride they were naturally separated more than once; and the very first time their conversation was broken off, Alexander Ruthven took the opportunity of asking Sir George Hume, a distant cousin of the affianced husband of his sister, what could be the motive of the king's journey?

"It is understood he is going to Perth," replied the other, "to seize the Master of Oliphant, who has been committing cruel oppression in Angus."

This information was some relief to the young gentleman's mind, for he knew that the culprit mentioned had been in Perth the day before; and riding up to the king's side again, he said, "Perhaps your majesty will allow me to go forward and give notice of your coming. I may so catch my brother before he departs, and enable him to prepare for your reception."

"No, no," replied the king; "my coming must be kept quite quiet till I am there. As to the reception, we shall do well enough. You stay and ride with us."

The young gentleman fell back again, with a gloomy and apprehensive countenance; and James, turning to the Duke of Lennox, who was riding on his other hand, said, in a low tone, "Do you see how scared he looks? What know you of the lad's nature, my lord duke--is he given to such high apprehensions?"

"I only know, your majesty," answered Lennox, "that he is a very honest and discreet young gentleman, as far as my observation goes."

James mused for a moment or two, and then said, in a low tone, gazing with a cunning look in the duke's face, "You cannot guess, man, the errand I am riding for--I am going to get a pose in Perth."

"Indeed, sire," said Lennox, drily; "I am glad to hear it. I hope it may be a large one."

"I dinna ken," replied the king, in the same low tone; "but the bairn Alex came to me just when we were going out for the hunting, and told me that he had got a stranger man locked up at Gowrie Place, whom he had found in Perth with a pitcher full of gold pieces. He besought me to come away directly and take it, and to make haste and come privately, for his brother, the earl, knows nothing of it; and he's feared that the man might cry out."^[8]

"I do not like the story at all, sire," answered Lennox, with an exceedingly grave face; "and were I in your majesty's place, I would not go. The thing is quite childlike and improbable. How should Alexander seize such a person and confine him in Gowrie House without his brother knowing it? The house is the earl's; the servants there are his; he is provost of Perth, and high-sheriff of the county. Were it not better, sire, to dispatch two or three of us on to tell the earl, on your part, what his brother has related, and to command him to bring or send the man and his pot of gold before your majesty?"

"No, no," answered James; "I will e'en just go myself; but look well where I go with the bairn Alex, when I am there."

The Duke of Lennox was silent; but in the course of the ride James told the same story, and in the same low tone, to several of the other courtiers. It was heard by every one with looks of suspicion, though it may be very doubtful whether they imputed the falsehood to the king or to Alexander Ruthven.

Even to Sir Hugh Herries his majesty repeated the tale, with a low chuckle at the same time.

Herries shrugged his shoulders, with what perhaps might be termed a look of contempt; but he merely replied, "I wish the tale were more probable."

When the head of the royal cavalcade were within two miles of Perth, but not before, James called Alexander Ruthven to his side, and said, "You may now send one of your folk forward to tell your brother we are coming this way, but stay you here yourself."

"I will send my cousin Andrew, please your majesty," replied Alexander Ruthven.

"Well, call him up, call him up," said the king; and the young man's hope of sending a private message to his brother was disappointed. Gloomy and sad, he rode a step or two behind the king, till they were within less than a mile of the town; but then again James, turning his head, gave

him a keen and scrutinizing look, and said, "Now, Alex, bairn, ye may ride on to your brother."

The young man struck his spurs deep into his tired horse's flanks, and dashed past the king with a low bow.

CHAPTER XLI.

The Earl of Gowrie slept well; nor did he wake till past six o'clock. Even then he felt unwilling to get up, for the last hour had been filled with pleasant dreams; and they set fancy wandering on the same track, even after reason had roused herself to grapple with the tasks of the day. In his sleep he had imagined that he was wandering with Julia through a pleasant garden; he could not tell where. It was not certainly in Perth; it was not at Dirleton; it was not any he had ever seen in Italy or France. The fruits and flowers were of a different kind from those of Europe--larger, brighter in colour, more magnificent. The odour which filled the air was at once sweet and refreshing; and the fountains that rose up here and there, the rivers which glided through green banks at his feet, were so pure, and clear, and bright, that the little stones at the bottom seemed like jewels, as the eye penetrated the waters. There was a murmur, too, of many sweet sounds in the air--birds singing, and happy voices, and the gush of fountains, and the low song of the stream--all blended into an entrancing harmony. There seemed nobody but himself and Julia in that garden; and they sat together upon the velvet turf of a green bank, with the shadow of a feathery tree waving over them, with nothing but joyful sights and pleasant sounds around; and he held her hand in his, and gazed into her dark and lustrous eyes, and they both murmured, "This is like Heaven!"

For some minutes after he woke, he lay and thought of his dream. It is very pleasant, on a bright summer's morning, with the birds singing around, and the soft breath of dawn moving the air and agitating the green branches, and the downy influence of sleep but half withdrawn, to lie and meditate of happy days. Oh, how the images crowd upon us then--how joy with joy weaves a wreath more beautiful than gems or flowers--how we wish that life were indeed a day-dream like that! But Gowrie was not suffered long to indulge. He heard some one moving in the ante-room, and the next moment there was a tap at the door. He rose and opened it, and, somewhat to his surprise, saw his servant, Austin Jute; for he had thought it was his page come to call him.

"What is it, Austin?" he asked; "you seem disturbed."

"Oh no, my lord, not disturbed," replied the good man; "but a short tale's soon told. I don't like your man Christie, my lord--the porter, I mean."

"What has he done that you disapprove of, Austin?" asked the earl, gravely.

"Nothing, my good lord," replied the Englishman. "That is to say, nothing that I can say is wrong; and he is uncommonly civil to me; but you can't always tell the bird by its feathers. A pig's got a long snout, and so has a woodcock, but they're two different creatures. However, to make short of my tale, Master Christie had two visitors in his lodge this morning before five o'clock; and I'm very much mistaken if I have not seen the face of one of them when you sent me to the king at Falkland."

"He has a cousin amongst the royal servants," said the earl; but Austin Jute shook his head with a doubtful look. "I never forget a face," he said; "and very seldom a figure, when I have seen it. Now, if I'm not much mistaken, indeed, the face I saw this morning, when I saw it before, was going into the palace at Falkland with a very different coat underneath it from that which was there to-day. There was no badge then upon the arm either. They say fine feathers make fine birds, it is true; and if so, it has sadly moulted; for it was a finer bird than now."

The earl mused for a moment or two, and then said, "That is somewhat strange, indeed. It shall be inquired into."

"Ay, things are strange, my lord, till we hear stranger," said Austin Jute. "I have not told you about the other man yet. I'm not likely, I think, my lord, to forget a man I once ran through the body."

"I should suppose not, certainly," replied the earl. "Did you ever confer that honour upon the second personage you saw to-day?"

"He was not first or second, my lord," replied Austin, "for I saw them both at once. Birds of a feather fly together; and these two came up cheek by jowl. However, if I ran a man through the body eight or nine months ago in Paris--and people told me I did--he was here this morning."

"As you say--stranger still!" replied the earl; "but this shall be inquired into directly. How came

you to observe them?"

"Why, I was up this morning to see Mr. Alexander off," replied Austin, "and then I went out to walk through the town. As I was coming back, I saw two men before me going along at a quick pace, till they stopped at the gates here. They did not ring the great bell, but knocked upon the railings with the end of a riding whip, and Christie came quietly up and opened the gate. I stood at the corner and watched them, so I had time enough to see what they were like. I did not like to wake your lordship earlier, but as the people are all beginning to stir, I thought it better to do so now."

"You were quite right, Austin," replied the earl. "Now go and send the page to me. But say not a word of what you have seen to any one."

"Mum as a mouse, my lord," answered Austin Jute, and withdrew.

As soon as he was dressed, Gowrie descended into the court-yard, and crossing it to the great gates, which were open, stood under the archway close to the porter's room, looking up and down the street, and giving Christie, who was bustling about within, a fair opportunity of saying anything he might think fit. The man remained silent, however, and the earl at length called him to him.

"Who had you here about five o'clock?" he demanded, as the man came out, bowing low.

"Oo, it was just my cousin, Robbie Brown," replied the porter. "He was on his way to Dundee, and looked in for a minute."

Gowrie fixed his eyes upon him in silence for a moment; and he could see the tell-tale colour mount up into the man's cheek. "Who else had you here?" he demanded, somewhat sternly.

"Weel, noo, to think o' that!" cried the porter, holding up his hands. "If I had not clean forgotten to tell your lordship, that a very worthy gentleman, Ramsay of Newburn, came speering as he gaed by, if I thought your lordship could see him this evening. But I tellt him that it was clean impossible, for I kenned you were to ride to Dirleton."

Gowrie was not deceived. There was falsehood in the man's face. Though what could be the motive and what the object of all these proceedings he could not divine, yet he saw that there was something evidently wrong. Turning upon his heel, he re-entered the house, and, after thinking for a few minutes, he sent for Mr. Cranston, saying, as soon as he appeared, "I know not, Cranston, whether Henderson will have returned before I set out, and as you remain here, I must charge you with a message to him. Tell him to discharge the porter, Robert Christie, at once, paying him whatever may be due to him, and giving till to-morrow to remove from the house, but not to let him be found here afterwards on any pretence."

"I will not fail, my lord," replied Cranston.

"And now send Henry Younger to me, if you can find him, Mr. Cranston," said the earl, who continued to walk up and down the room till the servant he had sent for appeared.

"Younger," he said, as soon as the man entered, "you have been a good deal with Sir George Ramsay's family. Do you know his cousin Newburn?"

"Oh, ay, right well, my lord," replied the servant; "a ne'er do weel mischievous deevil, if ever there was one."

"Then take your horse, and ride to Dundee as fast as you can go," said Gowrie. "See if you can find him out there, and bring me word if he be in the good town, and who he has got with him."

"Am I to say anything to him from your lordship?" demanded the servant.

"No," replied the earl at once. "All I wish to know is if he be there, and who is with him. I have got nothing to say to him; but on those two points I require satisfaction."

The man bowed and retired; and Gowrie proceeded with the ordinary avocations of the day. Nevertheless, his mind was far from calm and at ease. Many of those little ominous circumstances which, like clouds of dust rising before a storm, prognosticate coming evil, though the connexion cannot be traced, had gathered into the last two or three days. The porter's sudden journey to Falkland during his absence, his brother's unexpected summons to the king's presence, the visit at an early and unusual hour of two persons from the court—all raised up doubts in his mind as to the king's intentions; and he asked himself what could James design, and how could he best meet it? Both questions were difficult to be answered, and he revolved them in vain in his mind till the hour arrived for his going, according to promise, to the week-day preaching. In the parish church he found assembled, besides the good citizens of the town, a number of gentlemen of his own name and family, who were parishioners of Mr. William Row, the minister of Forgardenny, who had undertaken to preach that day, the two regular ministers of Perth being absent attending the provincial synod at Stirling. Amongst those whom he knew best were the two sons of his cousin, Alexander Ruthven of Freeland, and, in parting with them at the church door, he invited them to dine with him that day at twelve, as well as Drummond of

Pitcairns and the Baron of Findown, who were also present.

The moment after, the senior bailie of the town approached, and informed him that there would be some business before the town council that morning, if his lordship could attend; but Gowrie answered, with a smile, "I fear, bailie, I cannot come, for Mr. Hay is to be with me on county business, and though I love the good town well, I must not give it all my time."

The worthy magistrate received his excuse in good part, and on returning to his house, Gowrie found the gentleman he expected already waiting for him. All who saw him during the morning remarked that he was very grave; but he went through the whole of the matters which were brought before him as sheriff of the county, and they were both many and important, with great accuracy and attention. While Mr. Hay was with him, and about ten o'clock, his factor Henderson returned, and the earl eagerly asked, "What news from Falkland? Who found you with the king?"

Henderson gave but a vague answer; and thinking he had something particular to communicate, Gowrie took him into a neighbouring room, and questioned him there.

What Henderson replied is not known; but on his return to the chamber where he had left Mr. Hay, the earl found Mr. John Moncrief, who came to obtain his signature to some papers.

"I met your lordship's factor," said that gentleman, after the first salutation, "a mile or two south of Perth."

"Was he riding fast or slow?" asked the earl; for the most open and generous natures will become suspicious by experience of man's faithlessness.

"At a foot pace," answered Moncrief.

"Then I know not how he has got back so soon," answered Gowrie. "I sent him with my brother Alex to Falkland, with orders to bring me back word how the king received him, for there was some little displeasure when they parted. Henderson was ordered to go to Ruthven too, and he says he has been to both places. Now, I ride as boldly as any man in the realm, and I could not have done as he has done in the same time."

"He told me he had been three miles above the town," replied Moncrief. "But these are the papers, my good lord, if you will be pleased to read and subscribe them, for the lady cannot have her rights without your signature."

"Then we will not detain your lordship farther," said Mr. Hay, rising. "The rest of the county business can very well be settled at your return."

Gowrie suffered him to depart, for, to say the truth, he was not very fond of him; but Moncrief he asked to remain and dine, adding, "I shall set off for Dirleton immediately after dinner. So you must not expect me to play the good host, Moncrief."

The papers took long to examine, however, for Gowrie would not affix his signature till he had read them through, so that it was half-past twelve before he sat down to table. Just when the second course was being placed upon the board, the earl's cousin, Andrew Ruthven, entered the hall, dusty from his journey; and approaching the earl, he said, in a low tone, "The king and all the court are coming this way, my lord, and I rode on to tell you. The report is, that he is coming to seize the Master of Oliphant."

"But the king is not coming here?" said Gowrie, with a heavy cloud upon his brow. "The Master of Oliphant was at Dupplin this morning."

"I cannot tell, my lord," replied his cousin; "the king's words were very short; all he said being--'Now you may ride on, Andrew.'"

"Well, well, sit down and take some dinner," said the earl, thoughtfully. "Have you ridden fast?"

"I should have ridden faster," answered the other, "but there are such a rout of Murrays in the street, I could hardly make my way through them. I think the whole clan has turned in, with the Master of Tullibardine at their head."

"What do they here in Perth?" demanded the earl. "Did you speak with any of them?"

"Oh, yes," answered his cousin, seating himself at the board. "Some quite down in Water-street, declared that they came to honour the wedding of George Murray, who lives half way through the town; and some said plainly, that they did not know--they came because they were told."

"The Master of Tullibardine," said the earl, gloomily, "comes not to honour the wedding of an inn-keeper. There is something more in this; and we shall hear farther soon."

Andrew Ruthven had hardly time to fill his plate from one of the dishes on the table, and to begin his dinner, when young Alexander Ruthven entered the room in breathless haste, exclaiming--"Brother, the king and all the court are near at hand. I left them, a few minutes ago,

not a mile from the town gates."

He fixed his eye eagerly, anxiously, upon his brother's countenance, as if he could have said a world more, but had not time or courage to speak. A shadow, like that of a flying cloud, swept over the earl's face, deep but transitory--a momentary struggle in the heart, showing itself by that grave, stern look--and calmed as soon as felt.

"Would that his majesty had given me notice," he said, "then might I have received him more worthily. Nevertheless, we must prepare at once. Gentlemen, we must go and meet the king. Henderson, take heed that instant preparation be made that the king may dine. Let this room be prepared for his majesty's meal; the great hall for the lords of the court; my study near the gallery chamber for the king to take repose, if he need it after such a day of fatigue. Have everything ready as fast as possible, and spare neither speed nor money to prepare befittingly. Cranston, I beg you run down at once, call the bailies together, tell them the king is coming, and require them to meet me as speedily as possible at the South Inch. Gentlemen all, you had better rise and follow me to receive his majesty on his entrance into Perth."

"By --- we had better follow you to keep him out," said Hugh Moncrief, with a meaning look, and then added, at a reproving glance from Gowrie's eye, "for he will not go again, I judge, without exacting more than we can well spare."

Gowrie took no public notice of his words, but led the way to the door; and after a brief search for hats, and cloaks, and rapiers, the whole party passed across the court on foot, and through the gates into the street.

Christie, the porter, with a grave face, held the right hand valve of the great iron gates open; but as soon as the earl and his friends had passed through, a sinister smile came upon his lip, and murmuring to himself--"Now, then," he retired into his room. The instant after, Austin Jute ran through the gates and followed the earl, but did not overtake him till he was half way down the street. Then advancing, so as to be in his master's sight, he doffed his hat, saying, "Have you anything to command me, my lord?"

Gowrie put his hand to his head, like one almost bewildered, and then said, "Ay, Austin, ay.--Go on, gentlemen; I follow you. Take horse directly, Austin," he continued, as soon as the others had passed on; "speed to Dirleton. You must find your way as best you can. Tell my mother--tell the dear lady Julia what has happened here. Say that I cannot be with them to-night, but----"

He paused, and thought for an instant, and then added, "No! I will make no promises for to-morrow. God, and God only, knows what may be to-morrow. Do not alarm them, Austin, more than needful. But still," he added, solemnly, "do not buoy them up with hopes that may prove false. Tell them the king comes--tell them I know not why he comes; and let their own judgment speak the rest. But of all things, let my mother be upon her guard, and see to the safety of my young brothers. There's my purse, good fellow, to defray your expenses on the road. Would there were more in it, for your sake. And now away with all speed! Here, take my sword; lay it somewhere in the house. The king shall not say that I wore arms of any kind."

Austin Jute caught the earl's hand and kissed it, as if he felt that it was the last time he should ever see him. Then, without a word of reply, but with a glistening eye, he turned from him, sped back to the Great House, took the horse he usually rode from the stable, and without farther preparation rode away.

In the meantime, Gowrie rejoined his friends and walked on, the party every moment being increased by some accession from amongst the magistrates of the town, or the gentry of the place and neighbourhood. It had thus been swelled to the number of five or six-and-thirty persons when it reached the side of the large fine piece of meadow ground in the Tay, called the South Inch, and in a minute or two after, the royal cavalcade was seen approaching at a slow and stately pace. It was remarked, however, aloud, not by the Earl of Gowrie or any of his friends, but by one of the bailies of the town, that although they had met many of the Murrays in the streets as they went along, not one of them had joined the party going to receive and welcome the king.

"They do not show their loyalty, methinks," said Bailie Roy.

No reply was made aloud, but Hugh Moncrief, a warm-tempered, plain-spoken man, who had been watching Gowrie's countenance attentively, muttered between his teeth, "They may show it by and by with a vengeance, perchance. I know not what they do here; the town is full of them!"

Neither Gowrie nor his brother Alexander made any observation whatever, but waited in grave silence till James's horse was within some fifty yards; and then the young earl advanced with his head uncovered, saying, "Your majesty is welcome to your good and loyal town of St. Johnstone; and I only regret that I did not earlier know of your coming, that a better reception might have been prepared for your royal grace."

"Oh, we come in no state, my good lord," replied the king. "We love to take our friends by surprise; and we know that no man in all the realm will be more willing or better prepared to receive the king than the Earl of Gowrie. Deed, our poor beasties are very tired, so that our train has gone spilling itself on the road like an o'erfilled luggie; but they'll come in by sixes and sevens, no doubt. And now, my lord, by your good leave, we'll go on and repose ourselves."

Gowrie gave a glance over the king's train at this intimation of its numbers being likely to increase before night. It consisted of more than forty persons already; but, without any observation, he merely bowed his head and walked by the side of the monarch's horse, James continuing to speak with him in a gay and jocular tone all the way to the gates of Gowrie House.

As soon as the monarch had entered the court, where some eight or ten of the earl's servants were drawn up, Alexander Ruthven sprang to hold the horse's head, while Gowrie himself assisted the king to dismount. The magistrates of the town were then presented to the monarch in form, having pressed somewhat closely around; but James, treating the worthy bailies with somewhat scanty courtesy, cut their compliments short, and was led by the earl through the great hall into the lesser dining room, which had been hastily prepared for his reception.

"He's no like a king either in face or tongue," said Bailie Graham, in a low tone, as he walked away.

"Ay, but it's a graund thing, the royal presence," said Bailie Roy, aloud, as he retired.

So the town council were divided in opinion.

CHAPTER XLII.

From the moment of the king's arrival, Gowrie House, or Palace, was one continual scene of confusion for nearly two hours. Every instant some fresh party was arriving, either of the courtiers, who had tarried behind on the road to refresh their weary horses or to procure others, or of parties from the country, consisting generally of the family of Murray of Tullibardine, of which powerful race we are assured that there were three hundred men in arms in the town before two o'clock.^[9] Some of the latter, as well as all the former, flocked into the court, and in a quarter of an hour after James had entered the gates, the young earl found his dwelling no longer, in fact, at his own disposal. Though courteous and civil to all, every one saw that he was grave and displeased; nor were his doubts diminished when one of those small accidental circumstances, which so frequently betray deep-laid plans, proved to him and his brother that the monarch's visit proceeded from no sudden caprice or accidental event, but from design, arranged and concerted with others long before.

The assumed cause of the presence of so many of the Murrays in the town of Perth on that day, was the marriage of one of their family in the city; but the person married was known to be merely the innkeeper; and, at the best, the presence of so many noblemen on such an occasion seemed to Gowrie an honour somewhat extraordinary. When, however, a cousin of the Baron of Tullibardine appeared at Gowrie Palace, bringing with him a large and beautiful falcon from the country as a present for the king, the young earl could not doubt that the house of Murray had been made acquainted with the monarch's proposed visit before the person who was to entertain him. He had little opportunity, however, of communicating his suspicions, even to his brother, before the king's dinner was served, for James kept him constantly at his side, talking and jesting in a mood unusually joyous and noisy even for him. He seemed to have forgotten altogether the story of the pot of gold and the bound prisoner, which he had told to some of his courtiers by the way, and though nearly an hour elapsed ere the meal was ready, he quitted not the hall to which he had been first led.

"I grieve your majesty has to wait so long," said Gowrie, at length; "but your gracious visit took me completely by surprise, and as I was about to set out for Dirleton in the afternoon, with most of my people, my poor house is not provided even as well as usual."

"It matters not, my good earl," replied the king; "fasting a wee will do one no harm. Many a godly man fasts for mortification, and doubtless an enforced fast will do as well. But here come your sewers, or I am mistaken; and now we shall soon fall to. Alex, bairn, you shall be our carver while we jest with the earl--though, fegs! my lord, you would not do for a jester, for you seem as melancholy as a pippit hen."

"I am in no way fit for that high office, sire," answered Gowrie, with the colour mounting in his cheek; "and indeed it would require both wit and courage to fill it at your majesty's court."

"How so? how so?" cried James.

"Because I should think," replied the young earl, "that your majesty is more than a match for any jester that ever lived, both in the hardness and the sharpness of your hits."

"Ay, but you can jest too, I see, earl," said James; and he took the solitary seat which had been placed for him at the table.

In the meantime a table had been laid in the great hall for the numerous unexpected guests who had flocked into the Great House that day; and it seems it was customary, on such occasions, for the king's entertainer to see the second course served at the royal table, and then to invite the courtiers round to dine with him in another chamber. Gowrie however, doubtful, anxious, and ill-pleased, neglected the moment at which the invitation should have been given; and the Duke of Lennox, the Earl of Mar, and others, continued grouped around the king's table, while Gowrie himself stood at the lower end, and his brother Alexander, stationed behind the monarch's chair, gave him wine from time to time, or carved the dishes placed before him. Thus passed a considerable part, not only of the first but of the second course also, James talking incessantly to Alexander Ruthven and his brother, in a very gracious manner, but with somewhat coarse and indecent language.

At length, looking up with a sarcastic grin, the monarch said, "I'm thinking, Alex, bairn, that your brother, the earl, fancies these pair lads standing round hae tint their hunger by the road side, that he keeps them sae lang empty."

"I really beg your pardon, my lord duke," said Gowrie, turning to Lennox, "but I was so intent upon seeing his majesty duly served, that I have fallen into the fault for which he justly reproaches me. I trust we shall find a dinner of some kind in the great hall, though the honour I have received, being unexpected, I fear it will be but poorly requited by your entertainment."

Thus saying, he led the way to the other table, and seeing his guests placed, and the best dinner which so short a notice permitted his servants to provide, put before them, he returned to the inner hall, and took his place, as before, at the lower end of the board.

He and his brother, with their own servants, were now with the king alone. A closed door, a blow of a dagger, and James had died and Gowrie lived; but such a thought never crossed his pure, high mind, whatever might be then working in the heart of his royal enemy.

James continued to jest with ribald coarseness, till the second course was removed, and a rich dessert of the finest fruits which could be procured from the splendid gardens of Gowrie Place was placed before him. Then, however, he said, "I feel somewhat weary, Alex, bairn. Show me a room, man, where I can repose myself in quiet for a while, away frae a' this din."

"There is one prepared for your majesty," replied the young gentleman; "permit me to lead the way."

"I'll hae a sup o' wine first," said James; and taking a large goblet or hanap from the hands of Gowrie's brother, he added, addressing the earl, "My lord, you have seen the fashion of entertainments in other countries, and now I will teach you the fashion in this country, seeing you are a Scottish man. You have forgot to drink with me, and to sit with your guests, and to bid us welcome; but we will now drink our own welcome." He then quaffed off the beaker, and proceeded--"I pray you, my lord, go to the other company, drink to them, and bid them welcome in the king's name."

"I obey your majesty's orders," answered the earl, gravely; and without farther comment retired to the great hall, leaving the king alone with his brother.

Taking his seat at the head of the table, Gowrie called for wine, and when his page had filled a cup to the brim he rose, saying, "I am desired by his majesty to drink this *scolll* to my lord duke and the rest of the company;" and then turning to Lennox and Mar, who were seated next each other on his right hand, he apologized, in more familiar terms, for any neglect which had appeared in his reception of his guests.

"His majesty's coming," he said, "was so sudden and unexpected, that I had no time to learn my part, and prepare to perform it."

The wine went round. The conversation became general; and at this moment Gowrie remarked young John Ramsay caressing a large and beautiful falcon which he held upon his right hand, while an enormously tall large man, sitting beside him, seemed resolved, by the efforts of his immense appetite, to consume all the provisions which remained upon the earl's board.

"You have a beautiful bird there, Ramsay," said the earl, speaking down the table. "Is she as good upon the wing as she looks upon the hand?"

"I really don't know, my lord," replied Ramsay. "Murray of Arknay brought her in upon his fist as a present for the king. So I am holding her," he added, with a laugh, "while meikle John Murray devours to the extent of his ability."

"You'll have to keep her all the day, Ramsay," said the burly man of whom he spoke. "I've had enough of her, carrying her sixteen miles;" and then, turning towards Gowrie, he added, "She's as keen a bird, my lord, and as true as ever was hatched and fledged. I wish you could see her upon wing. I've only flown her thrice to prove her, intending to take her to Falkland; but when I heard yesterday the king was coming here, I scoured her and brought her with me."

"Pity that I should be the last to know of the king's coming," said Gowrie, in a meditative tone; and turning to Mar, he said, "But poor entertainment I've been able to give you, my lord. My good

brother-in-law, the duke, will excuse it for love; but I know not how to apologize to so many gentlemen who are nearly strangers to me."

Mar merely bowed his head, for he could not help seeing that their coming had been as unpleasant as unexpected to his host; and, though probably not in the king's secrets, he saw clearly that there was something amiss between the monarch and the house of Ruthven.

"My Lord of Lindores, I beseech you ply the wine," continued Gowrie. "It may not be so good as that which you gave me some five or six months ago, but it will do for want of better."

"Cannot be better," replied Lindores. "This is wine of eighty-three; the best vintage they have had in France for a whole century."

At that moment the king and Alexander Ruthven passed across the lower part of the hall, taking their way towards the great staircase leading to the picture-gallery, the cabinet close by which had been prepared by Gowrie's orders, as the reader has already seen, for the king to repose himself after dinner. James had his arm round Alexander Ruthven's neck, in the over-familiar and caressing manner which he not unfrequently put on towards those who were on the eve of disgrace; and he was, moreover, laughing heartily. There were some sixty persons in the hall at the moment, all talking aloud, and most of them with their faces turned from the door which led into the lesser hall, so that the monarch's passing was noticed by few. The Duke of Lennox, however, caught sight of James's figure, and rose, as if to follow him; but Gowrie said, "His majesty is going to repose for a while in my study up stairs, which has been made ready for him;" and Lennox at once resumed his seat.

Sir Thomas Erskine, however, who was placed considerably farther down the table, had frequently turned his eyes towards the room in which the king had been dining; and now he instantly got up and followed James out of the hall, overtaking him at the foot of the broad staircase, and entering into conversation with him and Alexander Ruthven. They ascended the stairs together, and at the top encountered Christie, the earl's porter, who instantly drew on one side with a low reverence, but at the same time put his hand to his chin in a somewhat significant manner.

Passing then through the gallery without taking any notice of the pictures, the king, without direction from his host's brother, proceeded at once towards the door of the gallery chamber, through which was the only way from that part of the house to Gowrie's study; and the door having been thrown open for him to go through, James turned to Sir Thomas Erskine, saying, "Bide you here for us, man."^[10]

Erskine bowed, and stopped at the door; and James, with Alexander Ruthven, passed through. In the large gallery chamber, standing in the recesses of the window, were two or three men, dressed as the ordinary household servants of the king--at least so says tradition. Alexander Ruthven either did not see them, or took no notice of a circumstance which had nothing extraordinary in it; but, advancing a step before the monarch, he opened the door of his brother's cabinet, and James at once passed in.

When the young man had his step upon the threshold to follow, however, he paused for an instant and hesitated, seeing a tall dark man, completely armed, already in possession of the room.

"Come in, Alex, bairn--come in," cried James, in a good-humoured tone.

The young gentleman, not without a feeling of dread, obeyed; and the door was closed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The court-yard of Gowrie palace--that large court-yard which I have before described, of ninety feet in length by sixty in width--was filled with men and horses from a little after one till a late hour in the afternoon. Gowrie's own attendants had more than they could well manage to do--the domestic servants in waiting upon the king and the courtiers, and his grooms and stable-boys in taking care of the horses. The granaries were thrown open. The servants of the strangers helped themselves to what they needed; and men who had never been seen in the place before, were running over the whole building. In vain Mr. Cranston remonstrated, and endeavoured to preserve a little order; and while he himself was obliged to be absent from the scene of confusion, besought Donald Macduff, the earl's baron bailie of Strathbraan, who had come down with his lord from Trochrie, to stop the people from entering the palace and swilling the wine and ale at their discretion. Christie, the porter, seemed to rejoice in the tumult, giving admission to all who wanted it, to every part of the house, except the two upper floors.

"There'll be nothing done," said Macduff, "unless one of them has his head broke. It's all Christie's fault. He knows that he's to go to-morrow, and cares not what he does. I'll split his weasand in a minute with my whinger, if you'll but say I may, Mr. Cranston."

"No, no--no violence, Macduff," said Mr. Cranston; "especially not to the king's people;" and he turned away into the house again.

Macduff stood sullenly on the steps of the hall, gazing with a bitter heart on the scene before him, till Mr. Alexander Ruthven, of Freeland, came up and spoke to him in a low tone, saying, "This is really too bad, Macduff; some order ought to be taken with these people."

"The king alone can do it, sir," replied the baron bailie; "and I doubt that he chooses to do so, otherwise he would have taken better care at first. I suppose he calls this spoiling the Egyptians."

"That scoundrel Christie has left all the doors open," said Mr. Ruthven.

"Ay, sir, I dare say he knows well what he's about; but I'll go and speak to him;" and walking up to the porter, followed closely by Mr. Ruthven, he said, "Hold your laughing, stupid tongue, and turn all those people out of the house, except the gentlemen. Then lock the doors, and keep them out."

"Deed, I shall do no such thing," answered Christie, turning from him with a dogged look. "I'm no to take my orders from you, I'se warrant, no better than a highland cateran."

Macduff laid his hand upon his dagger, and drew it half out of the sheath; but Mr. Ruthven caught his arm, exclaiming, "For God's sake, Macduff, keep peace! There's no telling where a broil would end if begun in such a scene as this. Come away, man--come away;" and he pulled the highlander by the arm to the other side of the court. "Watch his movements," he continued, when they were at some distance. "I doubt that man, Macduff, and it may be well to mark him."

"Ay, I'll mark him if I get hold of him," replied the other. "He's gone into his den now; and see, there are three or four others gone in after him."

"That's great Jimmy Bog, the king's porter at Falkland," said Mr. Ruthven.

"And that broad-shouldered fellow is Galbraith, one of the door-keepers at Holyrood," said Macduff. "What the de'il does the king do bringing such folk here? If they had been his grooms, or his huntsmen, one could understand it. I saw his cellarer about not long since--I'll tell you what, Mr. Ruthven, I don't like this at all. How it'll end I can't say, but ill I'm thinking. Here's my lord's house is not so much his own as that of every loon about the court."

Mr. Ruthven shrugged his shoulders, and walked away; and Macduff continued to stand upon the steps with his eyes fixed upon the lodge or room of the porter. From the back of that room a long and narrow passage, with windows looking into the court, ran along the western mass of building till it reached a staircase in the corner, by which access might be obtained to all the rooms on the first and second floors. Neither Christie himself, nor those who had followed him into his room, came out again while Macduff remained watching; but he saw the head and shoulders of more than one man pass along the range of windows I have mentioned, and then disappear. All this took place some quarter of an hour before the king left the table; and shortly after that, the baron bailie saw the porter coming from the very opposite side of the building, showing that he must have passed round more than one half of the house.

A minute or two after the voice of the earl was heard saying, "Macduff--Donald, get me the keys of the garden from the porter."

The officer obeyed, and carrying the keys into the hall, he found Gowrie himself standing with the Duke of Lennox, the Earl of Mar, Lord Lindores, and some other gentlemen, while Sir Hugh Herries stood alone at a little distance. Macduff would have given much to speak a few words to his lord; but he did not venture to do so in the presence of such a number of courtiers, and gave the keys of the garden in silence.

"Now, my lord duke, and gentlemen," said Gowrie, "I will lead the way;" and proceeding through a small door which opened directly into the garden, he held it open while the others passed, saying to Cranston, who stood near, "Let us know the moment his majesty comes down. Come, Ramsay of the Hawk, will you not walk with us?"

The young gentleman followed in silence; and the earl rejoining his brother-in-law, the Duke of Lennox, said, in a grave and quiet tone, "It is long since you have been here, Duke. I trust Gowrie House will have you more often for a guest."

"The oftener I am here the more beautiful I think these gardens," replied the duke. "The scene itself is fine; but I think if you were to raise a terrace there to the east, you would catch more of the windings of the Tay, and could extend your view all round the basin through which it flows."

"The town would still shut out much," answered Gowrie, "unless I were to build the terrace as high as the top of the monk's tower. Thence we catch the prospect all round, or very nearly so."

"You are making some alterations I see, my lord," said the Earl of Mar.

"Oh, they are very trifling," answered Gowrie; "merely some devices of which I got the thought in Italy, which I am trying to adapt to this place. It is somewhat difficult, indeed; for that which suits very well with Italian skies and Italian architecture, would be out of place in our northern land, and with that old house frowning over it."

Thus conversing in a quiet and peaceful tone they walked on quite to the other side of the garden, and stood for a moment or two under the tall old tower called the Monk's tower, which rose at the south-eastern corner. While there, the town clock struck three; and Sir Hugh Herries, with a sudden start, exclaimed, "There is three o'clock! We had better go back, my lord. I know the king intended to ride away at three."

Herries' face was somewhat pale when he spoke; but Gowrie did not remark it, and replied, "That clock is ten minutes fast by all the others in the town; but still we can walk back and prepare, for I hope to give his majesty a few miles convoy on his road."

Thus saying, they all turned, and returned towards the house, while Herries, seeming impatient of their slowness, got a step or two in advance. A moment after they saw Mr. Cranston coming hastily from the house towards them; and Gowrie hurried his pace at the sight, seeing that his retainer had something to tell.

"A report has got abroad in the house, my lord," said Cranston, "that the king has mounted his horse and ridden away privately with one or two of the servants."

"That is just like him," exclaimed the Duke of Lennox. "He served us so this morning at Falkland."

"Who told you so, Cranston?" demanded the earl, eagerly.

"It is in every one's mouth, my lord," replied Cranston; "but I believe it came first from Christie."

"Quick, quick! see for my horse, Cranston," cried the earl. "I wished to escort the king part of the way to Falkland."

"I bethought me of that, sir," replied the other; "but your horse I find is in the town."

"In the town!" exclaimed Gowrie. "What does my horse in the town? See for another quickly, Cranston. After such poor entertainment as I have given his majesty, I would not for much show him such an act of neglect as not to ride with him."

"Perhaps he's not gone after all," observed John Ramsay. "Which way did he go? I'll go and see."

"Ay, do, Ramsay," said the Duke of Lennox; "you can do anything with him."

"He went up the broad staircase to the picture gallery and to the rooms to the west," said Cranston.

Still holding the hawk, Ramsay ran on before, appearing not to attend to some words addressed to him in a low tone by Sir Hugh Herries; and mounting the staircase with a light step, he entered the picture gallery, the door of which was open. The sight of so many splendid paintings, of grace, beauty, and colouring, such as he had never seen before, according to his own account, struck the young man with amazement; and, forgetting his errand for a moment, he stood and gazed round with admiration. Then advancing to the western door, which led into the gallery chamber, he tried it with his hand, but found it locked. He then listened a moment for any sounds which might indicate the king's presence in the room beyond--but all was silent; and descending the stairs again to the court-yard, he said, in an indifferent tone, "The king is not there."

"Ramsay--Sir John Ramsay, come hither!" said Herries, calling him to a corner of the court just under the western tower. "I wish to speak with you;" and Ramsay, approaching him, seemed to inquire what he wanted.

In the meantime Gowrie, with the Duke of Lennox, the Earl of Mar, and one or two other gentlemen, passed through the house, and crossed the court to the great gates, near which the porter was standing.

"Come, my man," said Mar, addressing the porter, "what is this story of the king being away? Tell us the truth."

"The truth is, the king is still in the house," replied the porter. "He could not have gone by the back gate without my knowing it, for I have the keys of all the gates."

The man's colour varied very much while he spoke; and Gowrie at once concluded he was telling a falsehood.

"I believe you lie, knave," he said, fixing his eyes sternly upon the man. "His majesty is always the first to mount his horse. But stay, my lord duke, and I will go up and see."

He accordingly turned and left the party, taking his way to the great staircase; and Lennox, looking after him, said, in a low voice, to the Earl of Mar, "There is something strange here, my lord. Know you what it is?"

"Not I," answered Mar, in an indifferent tone, but adding, immediately afterwards, "The king is quite safe, wherever he is. The earl is unarmed, without sword or dagger."

"What may that mean?" said Lennox.

But at that moment some one else came up, and Mar made no answer. In little more than a minute after, Gowrie came down again in haste, saying, "The gallery door is locked. The king cannot be there. Let us to horse and after him. Where can he have gone?"

And passing through the gates into the street, followed by the other noblemen, he turned to Sir Thomas Erskine, who was standing with some of his relations and servants under the windows, and inquired if he knew which way the king had gone.

All was now bustle, and confusion ten times more confused than ever, in the court and round Gowrie Place. Lords and gentlemen were calling loudly for their horses. Grooms and servants were running hither and thither. Horses were prancing, neighing, and kicking; and Bailie Roy, who had lingered about the Great House ever since the king's arrival, was putting everybody to rights, and drawing down many a hearty imprecation upon his head for his pains. Ramsay and Herries remained quietly in the corner of the court; and the two earls, with the Duke of Lennox, Sir Thomas Erskine, Alexander Ruthven of Freeland, and several others, were conversing over the king's strange departure, and considering in what direction they should seek him.

Suddenly a noise was heard above, proceeding from the south-west tower. The long window was east furiously open, and the head and shoulders of the king protruded.

"Help, help!" cried the king. "Help! Murder! Treason! Help! Earl of Mar!"

Lennox, Mar, Lindores, and a number of others instantly rushed through the gates, across the court to the great staircase, and mounted it as fast as they could go; but they found the door of the gallery locked, and could not force it open.

"Up the black turnpike, Ramsay," said Herries, in a low voice. "Up, and save the king!--Here, man--here! Up this stairs to the very top, then through the door to the left."

Without an instant's pause, even to cast away the hawk, Ramsay, with his blood boiling at the idea of danger to the king, darted past Herries up the narrow staircase, three or four steps at a time, till he came to the very top; and there finding a door, without trying whether it was locked or not, he set his stout shoulder against it, and burst it open. He instantly had a scene before him, which I must pause for a moment to describe.

James was at the window still shouting forth for help, and at some little distance behind him, taking no part whatever in that which was going on, appeared a tall, powerful, black looking man in armour, but with his head bare. Kneeling at the king's feet, with his head held tight under James's arm, in the posture of supplication, and with his hands stretched up towards the king's mouth, as if to stop his vociferous cries, was the graceful but powerful form of Alexander Ruthven, who could, if he had pleased, by a small exertion of his strength, have cast the feeble monarch from the window headlong down into the street below. He made no effort to do so, or even to free himself, however; and his sword remained undrawn in the sheath.

Such was the sight presented to John Ramsay when he entered the room in fiery haste; and casting the falcon from his hand, he drew his dagger.

James instantly loosed his hold of the young man at his feet, and exclaimed, with an impatient gesture to Ramsay, "Strike him low--strike him low! He has got on a pyne doublet!"

He gave no order to apprehend an unresisting man. His command was to slay him; and Ramsay, starting forward at the king's words, struck the unhappy youth two blows in the neck and throat, while James, with admirable coolness, put his foot upon the jesses of the falcon, to prevent its flying through the open window.

Ruthven made not an effort to draw his sword, but fell partly back; and James, then seizing him by the neck, dragged him to the head of the narrow stairs, and cast him part of the way down, while Ramsay, rushing to the window, shouted to Sir Thomas Erskine, "Come up, Sir Thomas--come up these stairs to the very head!"

Wounded, but not slain, Alexander Ruthven, stunned and bleeding, regained his feet, and ran down towards the court. Before he reached it, however, he was encountered by Herries, Erskine, and another of the king's bloodhounds, and without inquiry or knowledge of what had taken place, Herries exclaimed, "This is the traitor!" and stabbed him to the heart. Another blow was struck almost at the same time by George Wilson; and the poor lad fell to rise no more, with his

sword still undrawn, exclaiming, with his last breath, "Alas! I am not guilty!"

* * * * *

A dead and mournful silence fell upon all. A terrible deed had been done. A young fresh life had been taken. A kindred spirit had been sent to its last account. Even Herries paused, and revolved thoughtfully the act which he had just performed. Even he for one brief moment, however transitory was the impression, however brief the sensation, asked himself, as others have asked themselves before and since, "What is this I have done?--Is there an Almighty God, to whom the spirits of the departed go to testify not only of all they have done, but all they have suffered--and must I meet that God face to face with the spirit of this youth to bear witness against me?--What sweet relationships, what dear domestic ties have I snapped asunder, what warm hopes, what good resolutions, what generous feelings, what noble purposes, put out for ever!"

But that was not all he felt. There is a natural repugnance in the mind of man to the shedding of man's blood, which nothing but the frequent habit of so doing can sweep away. There is a horror in the deed, which I feel sure the murderer shrinks from the instant the fatal deed is accomplished; and it was that, more than any reasoning on the subject, that Herries and his two comrades felt, as they stood in the semi-darkness, and gazed upon the corpse, so lately full of life, and health, and energy, and passion.

Sir Thomas Erskine had not struck him, it is true, and that seemed to him a consolation; but yet he felt that he had been art and part in the deed--that he had known what was meditated beforehand, and that, though his hand was not imbued in the youth's blood, he was as much a murderer as themselves.

With a strong mind, Herries made a strong effort to conquer the sensations which oppressed him; but it cost him several moments so to do; and moments, in such circumstances, are hours.

That which first roused him and the rest was the voice of the king, bringing back in an instant, by its very tone, all the worldly thoughts which had been scattered to the winds by the sight of the dead body and the perpetration of the deed.

"Hout, lad!" cried James, apparently addressing Ramsay, "dinna keep skirling in that way. He's dead enough by this time; but there are other traitors to be dealt with--traitors more dangerous and desperate than this misguided lad. Here, take the birdie, and keep quite still. We must not scare the quarry before the hounds are upon it. I must be King of Scotland now or never;" and, approaching the top of the stairs, he called out, bending somewhat forward, "Wha's doon there? Hae ye dispatched him?"

"He's gone, sire, never to return," replied the voice of Herries from the bottom.

"Then pu' him up here," cried James, "and come up yersels.--Wha the de'il's that knocking so hard at the door there?--Come up, come up! They may be Ruthven folk. We must have help at hand. Where the de'il's the fellow with the harness gaen?"

Sir Hugh Herries hurried up the stairs, leaving Sir Thomas Erskine and the servant of his brother James Erskine, to drag up the body of Alexander Ruthven; and a hurried consultation took place as to what was to be done next.

"Better, for Heaven's sake, sire, call up all the noblemen and gentlemen from the court," cried Ramsay, while the knocking at the gallery door still continued. "We are strong enough, when gathered together, to defend you against all the Ruthvens in Scotland."

"I ken that, ye fule guse," cried James, with a sinister leer; "four or five of ye are quite enough for that; but that's no the question, man. The greater traitor of the two is to be dealt with; and you must do it, Jock, unless you want a Gowrie for your king. He'll soon be here seeking his brother. He must not get away alive, or we've missed the whole day's work."

"I'll deal with the traitor," cried Ramsay, zealously. "Your majesty showed me such proofs of his guilt, 'tis a wonder you let him live so long."

"That's a good bairn--that's a good bairn," answered James. "Aye, defend your king.--Somebody look to the door there, that they dinna break in, but speak no word till you've done execution on the earl. 'Tis he set his brother on," he continued, addressing Ramsay. "The other had not spirit for it--Ay, here they bring him! There, throw him down there--The earl'll soon be here; and I'll just stay in the closet till it's all done.--Here, Geordie Wilson, take my cloak, and cast over the callant. Then, when his brother sees him, he'll get such a fright, thinking it's mine ainsel, yell can do with him what ye like."

Sir Hugh Herries looked almost aghast to hear the king so completely betray his own counsel; but the rest seemed to notice the matter but little--Ramsay, with all his fierce passions roused,

taking everything for granted, and the rest ready to obey the king at his lightest word. George Wilson, the servant, took the king's cloak, and spread it over the dead body of Alexander Ruthven, from which a dark stream of gore was pouring forth upon the rushes which strewn the room; and when this was done, James took a look at the corpse, saying, "A wee bit more o'er the head, man. He'll see the bonny brown hair." Then, retreating into the earl's cabinet, he closed the door, calling to those without to lock it and take the key.

Sir Thomas Erskine sprang to obey, saying, "Stand on your guard, Ramsay. They are thundering at that door as if they would knock it down. It's well I bolted it as well as locked it before I came down." Then springing across the room to the entrance of the great gallery, he said, "Who's there, knocking so hard?"

"It's I, the Earl of Mar," cried a voice from without. "Open directly! The Duke of Lennox is here, the Lord Lindores, and others."

"All is right, all is right," said Erskine. "The king is safe; one traitor slain. Keep quiet, or you will scare the other from the trap. It is Sir Thomas Erskine speaks--keep quiet, as you wish for favour."

All was still immediately, and the moment after steps were heard upon the narrow staircase.

CHAPTER XLIV.

What had become of Gowrie while this dark tragedy was enacted above? He was standing, as I have said, talking with Sir Thomas Erskine and a considerable party of noblemen and gentlemen, in the street, at a little distance from his own gate, when suddenly the window above was thrown open, and the king's head thrust forth. Bailie Roy had sidled up towards the group of courtiers; and he instantly looked up, while the Duke of Lennox, at the first sounds of James's outcry, exclaimed, "That is the king's voice, Mar, be he where he will."

"Treason! treason!" shouted Bailie Roy. "Treason against the king!--Ring the common bell!--Call the town to arms!--Treason! treason!"

At the same moment, and without an instant's pause, Lennox, Mar, Lindores, and others, rushed into the court, as I have before stated, and up the broad stairs, and Sir Thomas Erskine, his brother James, and George Wilson, the servant of the latter, sprang at Gowrie's throat, and seized him by the neck, crying, without proof or even probability, "Traitor, this is thy deed! Thou shalt die!"

Totally unarmed, and assailed by three strong armed men, the young earl, notwithstanding his great personal vigour, must have been overpowered in an instant, and probably would have been slain on the spot, for he made no resistance, merely exclaiming, with a look of consternation, "What is the matter?--I know nothing!"

But at that moment Alexander Ruthven of Freeland started forward to his aid, and having no sword, struck Sir Thomas Erskine to the ground with a buffet, while Mr. Cranston and Donald Macduff rushed forth from the court to the rescue of their lord. Almost at the same time, the voice of Ramsay was heard shouting to Sir Thomas Erskine from the window above; and springing up from the ground, Erskine ran into the court with George Wilson, the servant, and rushed up the narrow turnpike stairs after Herries, to finish the murderous work which had begun in the tower.

Freed from the fell hands which had grasped his throat, Gowrie gazed round bewildered, exclaiming, "My God! what can this mean?"

"Arm, arm, my lord!" cried Macduff; "they are for murdering you on pretence of treason."

But Gowrie rushed immediately towards the palace gates, exclaiming, "Where is the king? I go to aid him."

As he approached, however, the gates were suddenly closed in his face by his own porter, Christie, and a voice called through the bars, "Traitor, you enter not here!"

"Arm, in God's name, or they will take your life!" cried Cranston, seeing a number of the Murrays and the king's followers gathering round.

"That I will," answered Gowrie, now roused to anger. "Away to Glenorchie's! He will give us arms;" and running with all speed about a couple of hundred yards down the street, he entered the large old house of a friend of his family, and seized a sword and steel cap from amongst many

that hung in the outer hall.

"Here's a better blade, my noble lord!" cried Glenorchie's old porter; "take them both--one may fail!"

Thus armed with a sword in either hand, Gowrie rushed out again, exclaiming, "I will either enter my own house or die by the way."

"I am with you, my lord," cried Cranston, meeting him; and at the same moment his page, who was running down the street, exclaimed, "Let me fasten your salad, my lord; it will fall off."

Gowrie paused for an instant till the steel cap was clasped under his chin, and then hurried on to the entrance of the Great House.

But a change had taken place. The gates were wide open; the servants and retainers who had followed the king from Falkland, were all either in the house or at the further side of the court; and without pausing to ask any question, Gowrie rushed to the narrow stair at the foot of the southwest tower, and ran up, followed close by his faithful attendant, Cranston.

The door at the top, leading into the gallery chamber, was partly closed, and a shoulder placed against it; but Gowrie pushed it open, exclaiming, "Where is the king?--I come to defend him with my life," and at once entered the room with the two naked swords in his hands. Before him lay a dead body bleeding profusely, and partly covered with the king's cloak.

"You have killed the king, our master," cried Herries, "and will you now take our lives?"

Gowrie's strength seemed to fail him in a moment--His brain reeled--and pausing suddenly in his advance, he dropped the swords' points to the floor, exclaiming, "Ah, woe is me! Has the king been slain in my house?"

Without reply, Ramsay sprang fiercely upon him, and, unresisted, drove his dagger into the young earl's heart.

Gowrie did not fall at once, but for one instant leaned upon the sword in his right hand, without attempting to strike a blow. Cranston sprang forward to support him, and caught him in his arms; but the earl sank slowly to the ground, and with the indistinct murmur of one well-loved name, expired.

The murderers gazed upon their victim for a moment in silence; but it was no time now for hesitation or inactivity. They were four in number, it is true, and there remained but one living man opposed to them in the gallery chamber; but the sound of persons ascending the turret-staircase was heard, and Erskine rushed upon Cranston with his sword drawn.

Cranston, furious at the base treatment of a lord he loved and revered, instantly repelled the attack, and, no mean swordsman, wounded Erskine in hand and arm; but all the others fell upon him, and drove him back to the head of the staircase. Succour, however, was near; for three gentlemen, headed by Hugh Moncrief, who had dined with the earl that day, alarmed by the tumult, and the vague rumours that were circulated below, were now rushing up--unhappily, too late--to the assistance of the noble friend whom they had lost for ever. Unprepared for meeting immediate hostility, however, they were encountered at the very entrance of the room by those who were too ready to receive them, and after a sharp but short encounter were driven down, as well as Cranston, into the court-yard. Hugh Moncrief, Patrick Eviot, and Henry Ruthven of Freeland, forced their way into the street, and joined a small knot of the dead earl's friends collected under the window; but Cranston, less fortunate, was taken in the court-yard.

The situation of the king, however, was less safe than he had imagined it would be. There was much tumult in the streets of Perth, where the family of the dead had ever been extremely popular; and when James, informed that the deed he had long meditated was fully executed, came forth from the cabinet, it was with a pale face, for seditious cries were rising up from beneath the windows, and one of the most loyal towns in Scotland was well nigh in a state of insurrection.

"Give us our noble provost," cried one, "or the king's green coat shall pay for it."

"Come down, thou son of Signor David!" shouted another; "thou hast slain an honest man than thyself."

The next minute, however, the head of Robert Brown, one of the king's lacquies, appeared at the door of the gallery-chamber, to which he had crept quietly, and casting himself on his knees before James, he said, "God save your majesty! There are the Duke of Lennox and Earl of Mar, with eight or ten of your best friends, in the gallery there, but they can not get in to your help, for the door is locked."

"God's sake! let them in!" cried James; and strange to say! from amongst the party present, the key of the gallery door was produced, and Lennox and the other gentlemen admitted.

The door was instantly locked again, although the purposes for which it had been first secured

were now accomplished. Fortunately for the king was such precaution taken; for, almost immediately after, a number of Gowrie's friends and servants rushed to the gallery, loudly demanding their lord and kinsman. Vain efforts were made to burst open the door; swords were thrust through where a crevice gave the means, and one of the Murrays, leaning against the partition, was wounded in the leg. The voice of Alexander Ruthven of Freeland was then heard exclaiming, "My lord duke, for God's sake tell me the truth! How goes it with my Lord of Gowrie?"

"He is well," answered Lennox, in a sad tone. "But thou art a fool. Go thy way: thou wilt get little thanks for thy present labour."

Still the tumult in the street increased, the common bell of the town continued ringing, and James became seriously alarmed.

"Run down, my Lord of Mar--run down," he said, "and take good heed to the court and all the gates. Drive out all the traitor's people or slay them, and then set a good guard at each of the gates and in the gardens. Young Tullibardine is in the town with all his men. Could ye not find him, meikle John Murray?"

"I will try, your majesty," replied Murray of Arknay, who had been wounded in the leg; "but there is Blair of Balthayock, with full fifty men in the hall. He can keep the gates."

"Ay, tell him--tell him," cried James; "the lad Christie will show him all the points of defence. Christie's a good serviceable body, and shall be weel rewarded. Now, gentlemen," he continued, "let us proceed to the examination of the dead traitors' persons. We may find somewhat, perchance, that will tend to the purposes of justice. Uncover that one first, and see what you can find."

The cloak was then removed from the body of Alexander Ruthven, and without stopping to look at his handsome face, now calm in the tranquillity of death, the courtiers searched his pockets. Little was found, indeed, except a purse containing a small sum of money, and a letter, which was handed immediately to the king, for it was in his own handwriting.

"That must be put out o' the way," said James, looking at it. "Is there a fire in the kitchen?"

"Oh, yes, there must be," replied Ramsay; and after tearing the letter into very small pieces, the king gave it to his page, saying, "Put them in the fire, Jock, instanter. But bide a wee--there may be mair."

"There is nothing more, sire," said the Earl of Mar, and then added, "His sword has never been drawn--it is rusted in the sheath."

"That has nothing to do wi' it," cried the monarch, angrily. "Search the other man--see what ye can find on him."

"Here is something worth finding," exclaimed Sir Thomas Erskine, who had unclasped Gowrie's belt, and now held up the scheme of the young earl's nativity, as drawn out by Manucci, displaying the various signs and figures which it contained to the by-standers.

"It's magic!" cried the king, in great delight. "I tell't ye so. He was a dealer with sorcerers and devils, and would have taken our life by his damnable arts. I kenned it weel. I tell't ye, Jock Ramsay."

"And me too, sire," said Herries. "Your majesty's wisdom is never at fault."

"See, the body does not bleed!" cried the king; "this is a magical spell, upon my life. Turn him over, he will soon bleed now this is taken away."

And so, indeed, it proved; for as soon as the body was turned over, so as to bring the wound of which he had died in a different position, the dark blood poured forth in a torrent.

While they were gazing at this sight, and the king was again and again pronouncing that the paper he now held in his hand was a magical spell, the noises in the street suddenly increased very greatly, but the tone seemed to be different.

"De'il's in they folk!" cried the king; "will they pu' the house down? Look out of the window, my Lord of Mar."

"These are some friends that are crying now," said Mar, after looking from the window. "The bailies and their folk have forced their way in amongst the mob, and seem well affected." Then leaning forth from the window, he listened for a moment to something that was shouted up from below. "They desire to see with their own eyes that your majesty is safe," he continued, turning again to James, "and to receive your commands from your own lips."

"Is it safe, man? Is it sure?" demanded the king. "Are they no feigning?"

"No, no," replied Mar. "They have got that little Bailie Roy, I think they call him, at their head."

"Oo, ay, that wee pookit like body Roy," cried James. "I'm no feared o' him;" and, advancing to the window, he cried, at the utmost extent of his voice, "Bailie Roy, Bailie Roy, I am safe and well, praise be to God! And I strictly command you to cause all the people to disperse and retire quietly to their lodgings."

This said, he withdrew his head again; and the good bailie made every effort in his power to obey the royal injunction and disperse the people. But his municipal eloquence, and his proclamation at the market-cross, proved of little effect: an immense crowd continued to occupy the street before the Great House, and cries and imprecations upon those who had slain the innocent, continued to rise up from time to time.

It is not, indeed, improbable that, but for the imposing numbers which Blair of Balthayock kept drawn up in the court-yard, with their swords unsheathed, and which could be seen by the people through the iron gates, the mob would have burst in, and, as Nisbet says in his Heraldry, would have cut the court to pieces.

For more than an hour, James and his principal nobles and favourites continued in deliberation up stairs, the nature of which only transpired in vague rumours. It is supposed by some, that this hour was spent in patching together the somewhat disjointed tale which was afterwards given to the public on royal authority, and in endeavouring to make the story which James had previously told in coming from Falkland, harmonize in some degree with the dark and bloody transactions which had followed.

However that may be, there was still, at seven o'clock, so great a multitude assembled in the street as to render it dangerous for the king to attempt to pass that way. The porter, Christie, and a man named Dogie, were sent for to the king's presence, and acting upon a suggestion they threw out, it was resolved that a boat should be brought down to the garden stairs, by which James and his principal courtiers should be conveyed along the Tay to the South Inch, while the rest of the monarch's retinue should attempt the passage by the streets; and the young master of Tullibardine should be directed, with the strong body of horse he had brought into the town, to guard all approach to the Inch against those who had not a certain pass-word. This was executed skilfully and promptly; and towards eight o'clock, under a gloomy sky and heavy rain, James mounted his horse at the South Inch, and escorted by Tullibardine and the Murrays, rode away towards Falkland.

Thus perished the noble, the brave, and true! Thus triumphed the feeble, the base, and treacherous! Let any man read attentively the page of history, where too many events like this are recorded, and then doubt, if he can, the coming of a future state where such things shall be made equal.

CHAPTER XLV.

Austin Jute rode on towards Dirleton; but he did it with an exceedingly strong feeling of ill will. He had doubts and apprehensions in his mind, with regard to the fate of his well-loved master, which, under any ordinary circumstances, would have bound him to his side, to share his peril, to labour to avert it, or to fight in his defence till death. But Gowrie's order had been peremptory; the necessity of warning the earl's mother and Julia was great; and Austin Jute, as I have said, rode on, though with a heavy heart. I shall not trace his journey minutely, but merely notice that he took means to avoid an encounter with the royal cavalcade in its approach to Perth, and then made the best of his way to the old family seat of the Ruthvens and Halyburtons, which, owing to some delay in the passage, he did not reach till nearly eight o'clock. He was admitted instantly to the presence of the old countess, who at the moment was standing by the side of her son's promised bride, watching a portrait of Gowrie which Julia was painting from memory. Every line of his countenance was impressed so deeply upon her mind, that, with the perfect knowledge of the art which she possessed, she had little difficulty in transferring the image to the canvas. She had but to raise her look, and fill the vacant air by the power of imagination, and Gowrie, in all his young and high-toned beauty, stood visible to the mind's eye.

As Austin Jute entered, the countess turned partly towards him, saying, "I think I know your errand already, good man. The pleasure of my son's arrival is to be delayed for a day. Is it not so?"

"It is to be delayed, madam," replied Austin, in a tone so grave, that Julia instantly dropped the brush, and started up.

"What did he say?" she exclaimed, fixing her bright eyes eagerly upon the servant's countenance. "Austin, Austin, what has happened?"

"My dear child, do not agitate yourself so much," said Gowrie's mother, in a soothing tone. "You know the king sent yesterday to ask William to meet him to-day in Perth,^[11] and, of course, with the king for his guest, Gowrie could not leave his house, even to visit you, sweet one."

"There is something wrong," cried Julia, still keeping her eyes fixed upon Austin's countenance. "I see it there. Something has happened!"

"No, indeed, dear lady," replied Austin Jute; "nothing has happened that I know of. The king's coming took my lord by surprise, for he knew nothing of it till this day at his dinner."

"Nothing of it!" exclaimed the old countess, her brow contracting a good deal. "Why, it was announced to my boy William, by four o'clock yesterday evening.--But let us hope," she continued, "that this is one of the king's wild jests. He loves to take people by surprise, I have heard, and to make merry with the embarrassment he causes. Had the king arrived ere you departed?"

"No, madam; but he was within a mile of the town," replied Austin Jute. "My lord sent me to warn you, and---"

He paused and hesitated; and the old countess finished the sentence for him, saying, "And to tell us he would come to-morrow. Was it not so?"

Austin shook his head. "He was going to do so, my lady," he replied; "but he stopped himself as the words were on his lips, and said, 'No; I will make no promises for to-morrow. God, and God only, knows what may be to-morrow!'"

Julia sank into a chair, and covered her eyes; and the old countess put her hand to her brow, and fell into deep thought.

"Let me not alarm you more than needful, dear ladies," continued Austin Jute, after remaining silent for a moment or two; "though my lord seemed quite bewildered by the suddenness of the king's visit, and perhaps he might think the matter more serious than it really was---But let me tell you what he said. I can give it you word for word, for I have repeated it over and over again, to myself, as I came along. The order was, 'Tell them the king comes. Tell them I know not why he comes; and let their own judgment speak the rest. But of all things,' added my noble lord, 'let my mother be upon her guard, and see to the safety of my young brothers!'"

"Wise and thoughtful ever," exclaimed the old countess. "Oh, Gowrie, Gowrie!"

Julia remained in silence. She wept not, spoke not, hardly seemed to breathe; and Austin Jute at length demanded, in a low tone, addressing the countess, "Shall I go back, madam, and obtain tidings?"

"Oh, do, do!" cried Julia, starting up, and wringing her hands. "Bring me tidings, bring me tidings!"

"Stay!" cried the countess, with recovered calmness. "Not you, my good man. You are known to some of the people there; I will send a stranger. Go and refresh yourself in the hall; but, first, tell William Laing to come to me, and bid some of the grooms prepare a horse for him without delay."

"We are giving too much way to fear, my child," continued the countess, addressing Julia, as Austin Jute retired. "We are taking for granted that some evil is meditated against my son, and without cause. True, we know the king did at one time suspect him; but we know also that the suspicion was groundless, and as James has lately shown him greater favour, we may well conclude that he is satisfied he was wrong in his doubts."

Julia went and knelt down on the cushion by the countess's feet, and laid her broad fair brow upon her knee. "It was predicted to him," she murmured, in a low voice, "that at this time great peril should befall him; and we were warned in a strange manner that we should never be united. Reason with me not, dear lady. I feel I am superstitious now, though I never was before; and I feel, too, that it is in vain, when superstition has possession of the mind, to struggle against it. God grant that my fears may prove vain and idle, and if not, God grant that we may both have strength to bear up under his will; but my brain feels on fire, and my heart has hardly power to beat."

The countess cast her arms around her and kissed her neck, and at the same moment the servant she had sent for entered the room.

"Mount directly, William Laing," the countess said, "and ride for Perth with all speed. Bring us information, without pause or delay, how fares the earl; but if you get important tidings by the way--mark me, tidings that you can depend upon--return and let us know, be the hour what it may. Now away, and lose not a moment by the road. There is money for you, for you will need a boat."

As the man was retiring, young William Ruthven entered the room, and seeing the anxious countenances before him, he exclaimed, in a tone almost gay, "Why, what is the matter, dearest mother? What is the matter, sweet sister Julia? I came in all glad to tell you that my new falcon,

Bell, has struck the largest old heron in the county, and---But this must be something serious," he continued, as Julia turned away with the tears in her eyes, "Gowrie--What of my brother?"

"Nothing, nothing," answered the countess. "His southron servant has just arrived to say that he cannot come to-day, as the king pays him a sudden visit, which he heard not of till dinner time; and our dear Julia, whose heart is not accustomed to the rough things of the world, has taken fright--needlessly, I do hope and trust. Stay with her and comfort her, William. I have some orders to give;" and going out, she sent at once for the factor of the Dirleton estates.

The man came almost immediately; for there was that kind of indefinite uneasiness, that looking forth for evil through the whole house, which so frequently precedes calamity; and every servant was alert and active.

As soon as the door of the little room to which she had retired was closed, the countess said, "I know I can trust you, Guthrie. I have had news I do not like from Perth. The king goes to visit my son suddenly, and by surprise; and the earl sends me word to be upon my guard, and watch for the safety of his brothers. Keep four horses saddled in the stable, and two men ready to fly with the boys, should need be--at least till we hear more: and now, Guthrie, collect me all the money you can get. Go to all the tenants nearest at hand, and ask them for any sums they may have by them, within their amount of rent. Tell them the countess has need of it. They know I would never press them but in dire necessity; and they will not grudge it, I think."

"There is not one of them who will not give his last penny willingly, my lady," replied the factor, "if it be not old Jock Halyburton of the mill. I'll go my round, and be back in an hour."

"Go, then--go, Guthrie," answered the countess; and, leaning her head upon her hand, she remained for somewhat more than half an hour in deep, bitter, painful thought. She noticed not that there was the sound of several feet moving past the door, and the first thing that roused her from her reverie was a loud, shrill, piercing shriek from the adjoining chamber.

Starting up at once she rushed in; but for a moment, by the faint light which now prevailed, she could gain no clear view of the scene before her. All she saw was, that there were two men besides her own sons in the room. The next instant she perceived the form of poor Julia lying prostrate on the floor near the window, with the lad William bending tenderly over her, while the younger boy, Patrick, stood nearer to the door, pale as death, and wringing his hands in bitter grief.

"Oh, Henry, you have killed her!--Poor blighted flower!" cried William Ruthven, as his mother entered.

"I knew not she was in the room," replied Henry Ruthven of Freeland, who was one of the two men whom the countess had seen; and nearly at the same moment his brother Alexander, who was with him, took the old lady's hand, saying, "Alas! dear lady, this is a bitter day!"

"Your news?" said the countess, in a tone preternaturally calm and cold, at the same time seating herself in a chair near.

The young man hesitated for an instant, and then replied, "I and my brother Henry here are forced to fly with all speed for having drawn our swords, dear lady, in defence of your noble sons."

"Then are my sons no more!" said the countess, solemnly; "their friends would not fly if they still lived. Oh, accursed race of Stuart! tyrannical, weak and bloodthirsty, could not the father's death sate your appetite for vengeance, and must you wreak it upon the innocent children? May Heaven avert from you the reward due to those who shed the blood of the unoffending, and visit you only with the remorse which works repentance! Oh, my poor boys, what had you done to merit this? But I must not yield--No, I will not shed a tear. Thank God, I am old, and the separation will but be short. I will remember my noble son's last injunction, and care for his poor brothers. Lads, lads, get ready to ride at once, for this is no longer a land for you. James Stuart will never rest while there is one drop of your blood unshed, one acre of your lands unseized. Away and prepare! The horses are saddled in the stable; the gold will be here anon. Ride with them, Henry and Alex; you will be some protection. And you, poor thing," she continued, rising and moving across the room to where Julia lay, "your prophetic heart gave no false augury. Oh, it was the oracle of deep true love that spoke. Fatherless, motherless, bereft, you shall remain with me, whom this man would make childless. My home shall be your home, and you shall be to me as a daughter. Try not to raise her, William. Let her have a respite from agony. You know not the blessing you would take from her when you seek to call her back to life and memory. Weep not, my dear boy--weep not now. Keep your tears for another hour, as I shall do, and when you are safe afar, then we may weep for others who are safer than ourselves. Go, go, my boy--prepare; and you too, Patrick, for you must not let another sun shine upon you in your native land. Go with them for awhile, good cousins, while they make ready, and leave me and my maidens to tend this poor child."

It was nearly an hour before Julia awoke--I was going to say to consciousness--but that I cannot say. When she opened her eyes she gazed wildly round her, and pronounced the name of Gowrie in a low plaintive tone that wrung his mother's heart.

"Come, my child," said the countess, tenderly; "come with me to your chamber."

"Gowrie," said Julia again, in the same tone, gazing vacantly in his mother's face, "Gowrie!"

It was all that she ever said. No other word ever passed her lips but that. She was gentle, tractable, did all that was required of her, but speak. That she never did after, but to utter one name. All language seemed lost to her but that single sound; and that grew fainter and fainter every day, while the rose died away from her cheek, the light, wandering and wild as it was, faded from her eye, the hand grew thin and pale. Ten weeks all but a day passed, and Julia found rest and peace.

Happy, most happy for her, that reason never returned. She would have heard of him she loved being pronounced a traitor, though he never dreamed of treason--she would have heard of his dead body being mangled by the hand of the executioner--she would have heard of the faithful friends and servants who had drawn their swords to save him from assassination, being torn by the torture and dying a dishonouring death--his lands forfeited--his family proscribed--his very name forbidden to be used; and--oh solemn mockery of God's omniscience!--she would have heard of thanks offered up for his destruction and his murderer's safety.

There could but have been one comfort--to hear and know that all men thought him innocent; that the best and noblest of the clergy in his native land refused, even under pain of deprivation and banishment, to mock God as they were required, and that far and wide, throughout Europe, the history of his asserted treason was treated with contempt, and the tale of his death received with sorrow and with pity. But she died, and, without ever recovering a glimpse of reason to groan under the burden or to feel the relief, went down to that calm home where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

CHAPTER XLVI.

POSTSCRIPT.

It may seem strange to place at the end of a work like the present, those observations which are usually placed at the beginning, and to add in a postscript, that general view of a subject which is generally afforded in a preface. Except in those cases where a right understanding of the scope and object of the work, and a clear view of the principles upon which the author writes, are necessary to the comprehension of that which is to follow, I greatly object to prefaces. I do not wish to prepossess my reader in favour of my book, nor to imbue him with my own peculiar ideas in order to gain his assent to what is to come after. I, therefore, may as well say at the close, where the reader is more likely to peruse it, what many others would have said at the commencement, and having formed a very strong and decided opinion upon a matter of history, in regard to which, others, inconceivably to me, have adopted a different view, add a few remarks in justification of my own judgment.

On the work itself I have little to say, except inasmuch as it is an essay intended to prove what is really the feeling of the public in regard to cheap literature.

I was aware, from the first, that should the experiment not succeed, I might be met by the reply, that what the public desire is good as well as cheap literature, and I therefore chose a subject of deep interest, which I had pondered for some years, which was first brought to my attention by a gallant officer^[12] descended from the family which figures most conspicuously in the foregoing pages. To those who have really read the book and arrived fairly at these concluding pages, I think I may venture to appeal as to whether I have spared labour, research, and thought upon the work. I know that I have not, and I believe the evidence thereof will be found in the tale itself.

I would have done as I have said, had it been merely because the work was to be given to the public at a cheaper rate than usual; but there were other strong motives for considering well every sentence I wrote. An important point of history was involved: a point which has been rendered dark by the passions and prejudices of partizans, who refused to judge of it as they would judge of any other matter of evidence brought before them.

The question is, whether the young Earl of Gowrie and his brother laid a plot for entrapping James VI., King of Scotland, to their house at Perth, for the purpose of murdering him, the king escaping by a miracle, and causing them to be slain in return: or whether he laid a plot for surprising them in their house, under the appearance of a friendly visit, and, by a pre-arranged plan, murdered them in their own dwelling.

I have maintained, as the reader has seen, and ever shall maintain, that the latter was the

case.

When any man is accused of a crime, it must be shown that the crime was committed, that the accused had a sufficient motive, and that the act is brought home to him by conclusive evidence.

The crime of which the Earl of Gowrie and his brother were accused, was having seduced King James to their house at Perth, with the intention of putting him to death; for the intention in such cases is the crime.

The motive which has been assigned is the desire of succeeding to the throne of Scotland, as the next heir. This has been tenderly touched upon, because it was too shallow a pretence not to fail at once before examination; but it is still clearly indicated as the motive. Gowrie was only remotely related to James by Margaret Tudor, Queen of Scotland, the king's great-grandmother, an English princess, whose blood gave him no claim whatever to the Scottish throne, whatever it might do to that of England. Moreover, the king had one son then living, and another was born two months after. So that had the king been killed on the fatal fifth of August, he would have been as far from the throne of Scotland as ever.

The evidence of any crime having been committed by the Earl and his brother, now comes to be examined; and I do not scruple to say, that to the eyes of any man of common understanding, it not only proves that Gowrie and his brother were innocent, but that James was guilty. First, let it be remarked, that this evidence was all on one side, that no defence was made on the part of the dead accused, that no witnesses were examined on their behalf, that those on the other part were not cross-examined. The king himself was the principal witness; for his statement must be taken as a deposition. He declared that Alexander Ruthven, the earl's brother, came up to him when he was going out to hunt at Falkland, and besought him to come immediately to Perth, as he, Alexander, had seized and imprisoned in his brother's house, a stranger with a pitcher full of foreign gold, which he wished to secure for the king; and that he must come privately, without letting any one know, for he feared that the man might cry out and call the attention of the earl, who knew nothing of the fact. James says he determined to go, (though the tale was too absurd to obtain credence from any rational being;) but instead of going immediately, he continued to hunt from seven till ten o'clock; and instead of going privately, took the whole court, all his usual attendants, and moreover, two lacquies from the palace, together with the porter at Falkland, and the keeper of his ale cellar. Of the conversation between the king and Alexander Ruthven, we have no testimony but that of James himself. It is true, as he rode towards Perth he related the tale privately to the Duke of Lennox, when that nobleman at once expressed his opinion of the improbability of the story; but yet the king went on. His majesty did not send forward to announce his coming to the young earl till he was within two miles of Perth; but then he was met and received, not by Gowrie and his attendants in private and alone, but by the earl as Lord Provost, at the head of the magistrates of the town, hurriedly assembled. The king then proceeds to relate what occurred at the earl's palace, and comments on the young nobleman's demeanour, which, instead of being courteous, flattering, and calculated to lull and deceive, was exactly what might be expected from a man taken unprepared by the sudden and unannounced visit of a sovereign, when he was about to set out on a journey of some length. He was distant, silent, and though attentive to the king, anything but so to the immense train he had brought with him.

After dinner the king was led by Alexander Ruthven to a chamber near the picture gallery to repose for a little, and the king says that he was taken through many rooms, the doors of which were all locked behind him. The king's prudence must have been sadly at fault to go on under such circumstances. In the chamber to which he was led, according to the account of the king, and also that of Ramsay, was a tall, dark, strong man, armed. The monarch described him particularly, but implied that he was not one of his own attendants, but a stranger; yet he remained some time conversing with Mr. Alexander Ruthven without any apparent alarm, and suffered the young gentleman to go out and in, he avers, to meet his brother. It is shown by the other depositions that Gowrie was during the whole of this time, except for one short moment, either in the hall with the large body of courtiers, or walking with them in his gardens. At length Alexander Ruthven assaulted the king, James declares, and attempted first to stab him with a dagger, and then to bind his hands with two garters, saying, coolly, "Traitor, thou must die, and therefore lay thy hands together that I may bind thee." If we are to credit the testimony of Moyses, one of the king's most faithful servants, there were five hundred gentlemen in Perth on that day, of whom it would appear full three hundred were of the family of Murray, sent for to meet the king under the Master of Tullibardine. The rest were the king's friends and followers, already completely in possession of Gowrie's palace. Many of these were in the street just below the room, with the Duke of Lennox, the Earl of Mar, Lord Lindores, and Sir Thomas Erskine. Alexander Ruthven must have been a bold man, and not a prudent one, if he really sought the king's death, to make so cool a proposal rather than run him through the body with his sword, especially if the armed man in the room was put there by himself to aid in the assassination. The armed man, however, according to the king's account, remained quaking and trembling; and Alexander Ruthven did not draw his sword during the whole day. James then declares he rushed to the window, and shouted treason, and when John Ramsay entered the room in haste--having been informed by some one how to reach it, which none of the others could divine--he found the younger Ruthven on his knees, trying to stop the king's vociferation. James did not give orders to apprehend him for trial, but to stab him, and even pointed out where he was to be stabbed. The king, then, was locked in the cabinet, while his friends laid wait for Gowrie to stab him likewise, when he came in search of his brother.

The other depositions--with one exception, which I shall notice presently--go to prove merely the facts which I have mentioned in the preceding chapters, that Gowrie was taken by surprise, and discontented with the king's unannounced visit, that he was unarmed during the whole day, that when the report was spread that the king was gone, he called for his horse, in order to ride after him with the rest of the court, unarmed as he was, that he never left his guests for more than a moment; and, as a very strict investigation has been made of his occupations during the whole of the early part of the day, it is shown that he attended the morning service at the parish church, transacted important business with several parties, invited some common acquaintances to dinner, dined with them calmly, made no preparation whatever against the king's coming, and even sent two of his servants to a distance, though he had but eight or nine in the house, one of whom was ill in bed. In the testimony of not one of the credible witnesses is there a word that implicates Gowrie, and there is much to show that it was well nigh impossible he could have any share in the attempt of his brother, if any attempt was really made. At the same time, however, a great deal transpires which shows that Gowrie was not the injurer, but the injured. No preparation is alleged for the commission of the crime, no force was collected, no arms laid up, he himself was totally unarmed, his brother had only an ordinary sword (for the dagger was said to have been snatched from the armed man.) Andrew Ruthven, who accompanied his cousin to Falkland, was totally unarmed, so was George Dewar, one of the Earl's servants. He had drawn round him no great body of friends. These are all negative testimonies to his innocence. Then again we find that when he called for his horse to follow the king with the rest of the court, he learned that his horse had been removed from his own house. Was this to prevent his escape? When the very act is said to have been doing which was intended to deprive his sovereign of life, he went unarmed and stood under the very window of the room where it was to take place, with a large party of the king's most attached friends--in the midst of the royal servants! Ramsay's deposition shows that he, Ramsay, knew at once how to find his way to the monarch; and Sir Thomas Erskine's proves that James did not go with Mr. Ruthven alone to the earl's cabinet, but that he, Erskine, accompanied them, and was stationed by the king himself at the door of the chamber. It is proved also by the various depositions, that when Erskine, Ramsay, James and George Wilson were together in the chamber after Gowrie's death, and before the bodies were searched, the key of the door into the gallery was amongst them, and was used to admit the nobles from the other side, and to exclude the earl's friends. It is not even pretended that any keys were found upon Alexander Ruthven after his death.

Moreover, it is proved that the king, who is represented as having been struggling for life with a traitor, was so cool, that while his friends despatched his enemy, he put his foot upon the jesses of the falcon, to prevent it from flying away.

Setting aside the monarch's own evidence, therefore, the testimony of all other persons was rather in favour of Gowrie, and against the king, than otherwise; and the proofs of the monarch having assembled a large body of men in Perth were easily to be obtained, showing a preconcerted plan for going to that city before Alexander Ruthven could, by any possibility, have told the story of the pot of gold. Moreover, that story was in itself so absurd, and many parts of the king's statement so unlike truth; and the fact of the earl and his brother having been slain unresisting, when they could, without difficulty or danger, have been taken and tried according to law, was so suspicious, that it must have seemed necessary to all James's advisers to support his testimony by some corroborative evidence or circumstance. No one could give any evidence of what took place in the gallery chamber or its cabinet, but the armed man who was present; but it would have been something to prove that the armed man was one of Gowrie's servants. He, therefore, was to be sought for, or at least a substitute; but unfortunately the king, in his first proclamation, had given a very accurate account of the man's personal appearance. He was described by the monarch as a black, grim man, and as his head was uncovered, and James had some conversation with him, he could not be mistaken in his complexion. David Calderwood, quoted by Mr. Scott in his life and death of the Earl of Gowrie, declares that the king first asserted the man was Robert Oliphant, one of Gowrie's servants. Oliphant proved, however, that he was not in Perth that day. Two others were then successively pointed at as the criminal, but they freed themselves from the imputation. The next person accused was Henry Younger, likewise one of the earl's servants; but setting out to establish his innocence, he was met, pursued through the fields, and put to death by a party of the king's horse. The matter now seemed settled; the dead body was exposed at the market cross at Falkland, and Galloway, the king's chaplain, had the assurance to address the monarch publicly at the cross, saying, "Sir, the man who should have helped to do the deed could not be taken alive, but now his dead body lies before you."

It was soon proved, however, that Henry Younger was at Dundee during the whole of the 5th of August, and another had to be sought for.

In this exigency, Andrew Henderson, the earl's factor, volunteered, or was persuaded, upon promise of pardon, to acknowledge himself the man whom the king and Ramsay had seen. How this was brought about has never been known; but he was suffered to make his deposition, and therein told a story even more incredible than that of the king. He said that his lord had commanded him to arm himself, to assist in apprehending a notorious robber, and for that purpose *to suffer himself to be locked into a closet at the top of the house*, where he remained for about half an hour--in fact, till the king and Alexander Ruthven came.

The other depositions clearly prove that this statement was false, as well as absurd; for from

the time of the king's arrival to the moment at which James proceeded to the rooms above, and especially during the last three-quarters of an hour, every moment of which is accounted for, Gowrie never quitted the monarch's presence, except to go with the nobles to the adjoining hall, or afterwards to drink to them by the king's command. The contradictions between Henderson's evidence and the statement of the king are pointed out both by Lord Hailes and Robertson, and well summed up by Mr. Scott. The sermons of Bishop Cowper prove that many persons in Perth denied that Henderson was in Gowrie's palace at all after the king's arrival; and though that worthy pastor states he had spoken with persons who saw Henderson there, he seems not to have given information to the monarch, for whom he was so zealous, of the names of these parties; for not one of them was called forward to prove the truth of a tale which nobody believed. Even James himself threw discredit upon the account, by not naming Henderson as the armed man, though he published a statement after the depositions were taken, and indeed with no face could the king have done so; for he had previously stated that the man was a black, grim man, and Henderson was a little ruddy man with a light brown beard. Henderson was, moreover, contradicted by other witnesses upon various points, and by the king himself upon many. Yet Henderson, we may suppose, did James good service in some way; for we find that he was honoured and rewarded with lands and offices, as well as Christie, the Earl of Gowrie's porter, whose services are unknown, though strongly suspected; and another domestic, named Dogie, of whose deeds we know nothing.

The guilt of the Earl of Gowrie was disbelieved in Scotland all but universally, and the accusation of magic and sorcery brought against him was treated with the contempt it merited, except by a few persons more curious than intelligent. Five ministers of Edinburgh refused to offer thanks for the king's deliverance, in which they did not believe; and, three of them suffered severely for their contumacy and incredulity. The estates of the Earl of Gowrie were forfeited, and divided amongst favourites, and three of the earl's faithful servants were executed at Perth, declaring their innocence and his with their dying breath. An annual thanksgiving was appointed in England and Scotland, but the English laughed at the farce, and the Scotch were indignant at the impiety. An annual feast also was held, which Weldon mentions as follows: "Sir John Ramsay, for his good service in that preservation, was the principal guest; and so did the king grant him any boon he would ask that day. But he had such limitation made to his asking, as made his suit as unprofitable as the action which he asked it for was unserviceable to the king."

I have endeavoured, in the account of the last few days of the earl's life, to keep as near to the truth as possible, only indicating circumstances not absolutely proved as natural conclusions from established facts. I have not ventured to represent the scene which took place in the earl's gallery chamber and cabinet between his brother and the king, for my account would probably be nearly as wide of the truth as that of the monarch or the factor, though it might be less absurd. But I have not felt myself bound to adhere to historical truth in those parts of a romance which are conventionally established as fiction. The character of Julia Douglas is purely imaginary; and were there at present any descendants from the Regent Morton, I would apologize for the liberties I have taken with their ancestor. The lady whom it was proposed the earl should marry, was in reality the Lady Margaret Douglas, daughter of the Earl of Angus; but particular circumstances, which it would be tedious to dwell upon, prevented me from mixing her name up with this history; and there were rumours current, both before and after the earl's death, of another more powerful but secret attachment, which might probably have frustrated the views of friends under the influence of a stronger power.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): This man, David Drummond, was tried and condemned shortly after, in the first justice court held by the young earl, and was executed for his offence, June 28, 1600, as appears by the chronicles of the fair city of Perth.

[Footnote 2](#): This curious anecdote is given in the manuscript memoirs of the Church of Scotland, by Mr. David Calderwood, a contemporary who was at this time about five-and-twenty years of age, and a keen observer of all that was passing.

[Footnote 3](#): It is now the generally received opinion that the Earl of Angus did obtain possession of the treasures of the regent Morton, and that he spent the whole of them in acts of liberality to his fellow exiles.

[Footnote 4](#): This anecdote of court scandal is to be found in Pinkerton's essay on what he calls the Gowrie conspiracy, in which it was inserted on the authority of Lord Hailes. The freedom of manners attributed to Anne of Denmark, both before and after the accession of her husband to the throne of England, and her fondness for several ladies of more than doubtful virtue, are mentioned by almost every writer of the day. All agree, however, that the character of Beatrice Ruthven, afterwards Lady Hume, one of Anne's earliest

favourites, was perfectly irrefragable.

[Footnote 5](#): This anecdote of Mr. William Cowper is given by Archbishop Spottiswood, a strong partizan of the king; and it is clear that he mentioned it with the view of supporting, by some independent testimony, the extraordinary statement of James himself--a statement which would not have deceived a child, so absurd, incongruous, and ridiculous it is, had not the friends and flatterers of the monarch exerted themselves, with all the zeal of sycophant ambition, to bolster up a puerile defence of his conduct, by corroborative circumstances often as false, and sometimes as puerile.

[Footnote 6](#): This same Mr. Patrick Galloway, after the earl's death, did very imprudently go the length of saying, in a sermon preached at the market cross of Edinburgh, referring to the murdered nobleman, "He was an atheist, an incarnate devil, in the coat of an angel, a studier of magic, a conjurer with devils, some of whom he had under his command."

[Footnote 7](#): If Henderson ever was at Falkland on that day, as he afterwards swore, he must have arrived at about half-past seven, and to have seen anything of what took place could not have quitted the ground till after eight. Yet he had returned to Perth by ten. He was met by Mr. John Moncrief, about that time, riding into Perth, and stopped to speak with him, so that he performed, in two hours, a journey which had taken Alexander Ruthven three, over the bad and tortuous roads then existing. But the whole of the man's evidence is invalidated by his subsequent perjury in regard to the other transactions of that day.

[Footnote 8](#): The above is actually the story which James not only told to his courtiers, but afterwards wrote to several neighbouring princes, and embodied in his narrative of the events of that day, leaving his hearers and his readers the very unpleasant alternative of looking upon him either as an idiot or a knave. Lennox, in his deposition, very barely conceals what he thought of the story and of the king, for believing, or pretending to believe it.

[Footnote 9](#): Moyses, in his Memoirs, declares that there were no less than five hundred gentlemen in Perth that day who bore testimony to the truth of the king's statement, and therefore were certainly not inimical to James. Yet we are told to believe that in presence of this imposing force of loyal subjects (assembled, who knows how?) Gowrie and his brother, with eight servants, attempted the king's life.

[Footnote 10](#): This fact is indiscreetly suffered to appear in Erskine's deposition, where he says, "When all was over, I said to his majesty, I thought your majesty would have concredited more to me than to have commanded me to await your majesty at the door, if you had thought it not mete to take me with you." That Sir Thomas Erskine knew more of this foul transaction than he deposed to, is indicated by a letter from Nicholson, the Queen of England's agent in Scotland, 22nd September, 1602, in which he mentions that the king was much disturbed because his queen had revealed to Beatrice Ruthven some secrets told her by Sir Thomas Erskine.

[Footnote 11](#): This fact is positively asserted in Calderwood's manuscript Memoirs, quoted by Mr. Scott.

[Footnote 12](#): Lieut. Col. Cowell.

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