

THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS; OR THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE

BY MISS JANE PORTER. CHAPTER XXVIII.

WALLACE REFUSES THE SCOTTISH CROWN AT THE HANDS OF EDWARD - MAKES A TOUR OF THE SOUTHERN COUNTIES.

Day succeeded day in the execution of these royal designs. They fulfilled the benevolent designs. They fulfilled the royal halls of Lochmabie did not long detain him who knew no rest but when he was going about doing good. While he was raising, by the hands of his soldiers, the lately ruined hamlets into well-built villages, he felt like the father of a large family in the midst of a happy home. He had hardly gone the circuit of these now cheerful valleys, when an embassy from England overtook him at the tower of Lammington. The ambassadors were Edmund, earl of Arundel (who had married the only sister of De Warenne) and Anthony Beck, Bishop of Durham. At the moment their splendid cavalcade, escorted by a party from Sir Eustace Maxwell, entered the gate of Lammington. Wallace was in the hourly expectation of Edwin; hearing the trampling of horses, he hastened into the courtyard; and the officer of Maxwell informed him of the names and errand of the illustrious strangers. The bishop drew near. "We come, Sir William Wallace," cried the prelate, "we come from the King of England with a message for your private ear."

"And I hope, gallant chieftain," joined Lord Arundel, "what we have to impart will give peace to both nations, and establish in honor the most generous as well as the bravest of men."

Wallace bowed, and conducted the Southern lords into the hall. Lord Arundel looking round, said, "Are we alone, Sir William?"

"Perfectly," he replied; "and I am ready to receive any proposals of peace which the rights of Scotland will allow me to accept."

The earl drew from his bosom a gold casket, and laying it on a table, addressed the Regent: "Sir William Wallace, I come to you, not with the desecrations of an implacable liege lord, whom a rash vassal has offended, but in the grace of the most generous monarchs, who are anxious to convert a brave insurgent into a loyal friend. My lord the king having heard, by letters from my brother-in-law the Earl de Warenne, of the honorable manner in which you treated the English when the fate of battle threw into your power, instead of sending over from Flanders a mighty army to overwhelm this rebellious kingdom, has deputed me, even as an ambassador, to reason with the rashness he is ready to pardon. And with this diadem," continued he, drawing a circlet of jewels from the casket, "which he tore from the brow of a Saracen prince on the ramparts of Acre, he sends the assurances of his regard for the heroic virtues of his enemy. And to these jewels, he commands me to say, he will add a more efficient crown, if Sir William Wallace will awake from this trance of false enthusiasm, and acknowledge, as he is in duty bound to do, the supremacy of England over this country. Speak but the word, noblest of Scots," added he, "and the Bishop of Durham has orders from the generous Edward immediately to anoint you king of Scotland; that done, my royal master will support you in your throne against every man who may dare to dispute your authority."

At these words Wallace rose. "My lord," said he, "since I took up arms for injured Scotland, I have been used to look into the hearts of men; I therefore estimate with every due respect the compliment which this message of your king pays to my virtues. Had he thought that I deserved the confidence of Scotland, he would not have insulted me with offering a price for my allegiance. To be even a crowned vassal of King Edward is far beneath my ambition. Take back the Saracen's diadem; it shall never dishonor the brow of him who has sworn, by the Cross, to maintain the independence of Scotland, or to lay down his life in the struggle."

"Weigh well, brave sir," resumed the earl, "the consequence of this answer. Edward will surely in England; he will march hither himself, not at the head of such armies as you have discomfited, but with countless legions; and when he falls upon any country in indignation, the places of its cities are known no more."

"Better for a brave people so to perish," replied Wallace, "than to exist in dishonor."

that we are commanded to preserve the one at the expense of the other; and we are ready to obey. Neither the threats nor the blandishments of Edward has power to shake the resolves of them who draw the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

"Rebellious man!" exclaimed Beck. "Since you dare quote Scripture to sanction crime, hear my embassy. To meet the possibility of this flagitious obstinacy, I came armed with the thunder of the Church, and the indignation of a justly incensed monarch. Accept his most gracious offers, delivered to you by the Earl of Arundel. Here is the cross stretching it forth; 'but beware! keep it with a truer faith than did the traitor Baliol, or accept the malediction of Heaven—the exterminating vengeance of your liege lord!'"

"My Lord Durham," replied Wallace, "had your sovereign sent me such proposals as became a just king and were possible for an honest Scot to admit, he should have found me ready to have treated him with the respect due to his rank and honor. But when he demands the sacrifice of my integrity; when he asks me to sign the deed that would again spread this renovated land with devastation; were I to consider the glozing language of his embassy as grace and nobleness, I should belie my own truth, which tramples alike on his meanness and his pretended claims. And I ask you, priest of heaven, is he a God greater than Jehovah, that I should fear him?"

"And dost thou presume, audacious rebel!" exclaimed Beck, "that the light of Israel deigns to shine on a barbarian nation, in arms against a hero of the cross? Reprobate that thou art, answer to thine own condemnation! Does not the Church declare the claims of Edward to be just; and who dares gainsay her decrees?"

"The voice of Him you pretend to serve! He is no respecter of persons; He raises the poor from the dust; and by his arm the tyrant and his host are plunged in the whelming waves! Bishop, I know in whom I trust. Is the minister greater than his Lord, that I should believe the word of a synod against the decreed will of God? Neither anathemas, nor armed thousands, shall make me acknowledge the supremacy of Edward. He may conquer the body; but the soul of a patriot he can never subdue."

"Then," cried Beck, stretching his crozier over the head of Wallace, "as the rod of Moses shed plagues, miseries, and death over the land of Egypt, I invoke the like judgments to fall on this rebellious land and its blasphemous leader! And thus I leave it to your curse."

Wallace smiled. Lord Arundel observed him. "You despise this malediction, Sir William Wallace. I thought more piously had dwelt with so much military nobleness."

"I should not regard the curses of a congregated world," replied Wallace, "when my conscience as loudly proclaims that God is on my side. And is He not omniscient, that He should be swayed by the prejudices of men? Does He not read the heart? Is He not master of all causes? And shall I shrink, when I know that I hold his commission? Shall I not regard these anathemas even as the artillery with which the adversary would drive me from my post? But did the clouds rain fire, and the earth open beneath me, I would not stir; for I know who planted me here; and as long as He wills me to stand, neither men nor devils can move me hence."

"Thou art incorrigible!" cried Beck. "I would say firm," rejoined Arundel, "could I regard as he does the cause he has espoused. But as it is, noble Wallace, I must regret your infatuation, and, instead of the peace I thought to leave with you, hurl war, never ending, expiring war, upon the head of this devoted nation!" As he spoke, he threw his lance against the opposite wall, in which it struck, and stood shivering; and, taking up the casket and its splendid contents, replaced it in his bosom.

Beck had turned away in wrath from the table; and, advancing with a magisterial step to the door, he threw it open, as if he thought that longer to breathe the same air with the person he had excommunicated would infect him with his own curses. At that instant, a group of Scots, who waited in the ante-chamber, hastened forward. At sight of the prelate, they raised their bonnets, but hesitated to pass, as he stood on the threshold, proudly and forgetful of the respect. In the next minute, Wallace appeared with Lord Arundel.

"Brave knight," said the earl, "the adieu of a man as sensible of your private worth, as he regrets the errors of your public opinions, abide with you!"

"It is the same," replied Wallace; "the valour and fidelity of such as we are as staunch to my arms, and bring a more grateful empire to my heart, than all the crowns which may be in the power of Edward to bestow."

"I have often seen the homage of the body," said the earl, "but here I see that of the soul; and, were I asking, I should envy Sir William Wallace!"

"You speak either as a courtier or a traitor!" exclaimed Beck, turning with a threatening brow on Lord Arundel. "Beware, earl! for what has now been said must be repeated to the royal Edward; and he will judge whether flattery to this proud rebel be consistent with your allegiance."

"Every word that has been uttered in this conference I will myself deliver to King Edward," replied Lord Arundel; "he shall know the man on whom he may be trusted for justice to denounce the empire of rebellion; and when the puissance of his royal arm lays this kingdom at his feet, the virtues of Sir William Wallace may then find the mercy he now contemns."

Beck did not listen to the latter part of this explanation; but proceeding to the courtyard, had mounted his horse before his worthier colleague appeared from the hall. Taking a gracious leave of Sir John Graham, who attended him to the door, the earl exclaimed, "What a miracle is before me! Not the mighty mover only of this wide insurrection is in the bloom of manhood, but all his generals that I have seen appear in the very morning of youth. And you conquer our veterans; you make yourselves names which, with us, are only purchased by long experience, and hairs grown in camps and battles!"

"Then by our morning, judge what our day will be," replied Graham; "and show your monarch that, as surely as the night of death will in some hour close upon prince and peasant, this land shall never again be overshadowed by his darkness."

"Listen not to their bold treasons!" cried Beck; and setting spurs to his horse, he galloped out of the gates. Arundel made some courteous reply to Sir John Graham, and, with what the countess affected, and with what she really felt, she welcomed the Earls Badenoch and Athol to their native country. "Indeed, my dear lord," continued he, "I cannot guess what vain passion has taken possession of her; but the day I went to Snowdon to receive her commands for you, I found her seated on a kind of throne, with ladies standing in her presence and our younger chieftains thronging the gallery, as if she were their sovereign herself. Her order she had given, but she started (for she had never before witnessed the morning courts of her stepmother), and retiring, I followed."

But Edwin did not relate all that passed in this conference between himself and his cousin. Blushing for her father's wife, Helen would have retired to her own apartments; but Edwin drew her into one of Lady Mar's rooms, and began to speak of his anticipated meeting with Wallace. He held her hand in his. "My dearest cousin," said he, "will not the gentle country which has suffered so much for our brave friend, write him one word of kind remembrance? Our queen here will send him volumes."

"Then he would hardly have time to attend to one of mine," replied Helen. Besides, he requires no new assurance to convince him that Helen Mar can never cease to remember her benefactor with the most grateful thoughts. "And is this all I am to say to him, Helen?"

"All, my Edwin."

At this instant the door opened, and Lady Mar appeared. Both rose. She bowed haughtily to Helen. To Edwin she graciously extended her hand. "Why, my dear nephew, did you not come into the audience-hall?"

Edwin answered, that he did not know the governor of Stirling's lady lived in the state of a queen, he hoped he should be excused for mistaking lords and ladies-in-waiting for company; and for that reason, having retired till he could bid adieu in a less public scene.

Lady Mar, with statelyness, replied: "Perhaps it is necessary to remind you, Edwin, that, though Lord Mar's wife, I am not only heiress to the sovereignty of the northern isles, but, like Lord Badenoch, of the blood of the Scottish kings. Rely on it, I do not degenerate, and that I affect no state to which I may not pretend."

Edwin smiled at the pride of his aunt, Edwin turned towards the window; but not before the countess had observed the ridicule which played on his lips. Vexed, but afraid to reprimand one who might so soon resent it by speaking of her disparagingly to Wallace, she unburthened her anger upon Helen. "Lady Helen," cried she, "I request an explanation of that look of object with which I now see on your face. I wish to know whether the intoxication of your vanity dare impel you to despise claims which may one day be established to your confusion."

This attack surprised Helen, who had hardly attended to who had passed. "Neither deride you, Lady Mar, nor despise the claims of Lord Badenoch; but I must, out of respect for yourself, and tenderness for my father, frankly say that the assumption of honours not legally in your possession may involve you in ridicule, and pluck danger on your nearest relatives. It is what my father would never approve, were he to know it; and awakening the jealousy of other ladies of the royal houses is not a probable mode to facilitate the succession of Lord Badenoch."

Provoked at the just reasoning and coolness of this reply, and at being misapprehended with regard to the object with whom she was to share the splendours of a throne, Lady Mar answered: "Your father is an old man, and has outlived every generous feeling. He neither understands my actions, nor shall he control them; and as to Lord Badenoch giving me the rank to which my birth entitles me, that is a foolish dream—I look to a greater hand."

"What!" inquired Edwin; "does your highness expect my uncle to die, and that Bruce will come hither to lay the crown of Scotland at your feet?"

"I expect nothing of Bruce, nor of your uncle," returned she; "but I look for respect from the daughter of Lord Mar, and from the friend of Sir William Wallace."

She rose, and presenting Edwin with the packet for Wallace, told Helen she might retire to her own room.

"To my father's I will, madam," returned Sir John Graham; and, turning to Edwin, said, "You know that the dignity of this situation must be maintained; and, while others attend his couch, I must his reputation."

"I have often heard that Fame is better than life," replied Edwin; "and I thank Lady Mar for showing me how differently people may translate the same lesson. Adieu, sweet Helen!" said he, bending to kiss her hand. "Farewell," returned she; "may good angels guard you!"

The substance of the latter part of this scene, Edwin did relate to Wallace. He smiled at the follies of the countess, and broke the seal of her letter. It was the same style with her conversations; at one moment declaring herself his interested friend, and, in the next, uttering wild professions of attachment. The conclusion of this strange epistle told him that the gratitude of all her relations of the house of Cummin was ready at any moment to relinquish its claims on the crown, to place it on brows so worthy to wear it. The words of this letter were so artfully, and so persuasively penned, that had not Edwin described the vanity of Lady Mar, Wallace might have believed that she was ambitious only for him, and that, could she share his heart, his throne would be a secondary object. To establish this deception in his mind, she added—"I live here as at the head of a court, and fools around me think I take pleasure in it; but did they look into my actions, they would see that I serve, while I seem to reign. I am working in the hearts of men for your advancement."

But whether this were her real motive or not, it was the same to Wallace; he felt that she would always be, not merely the last object in his thoughts, but the first of his aversion. Therefore, hastily running over her letter, he returned to a second perusal of Lord Mar's. In this he found satisfactory details of the success of his dispositions. Lord Lochnave had possessed himself of the western coast of Scotland, from the Mull of Kintyre to the farthest mountains of Glenmore. There the victorious Lord Ruthven met him, and completed the recovery of the Highlands, by a range of conquests from the Spey to the Moray Frith and Inverness-shire. Lord Bothwell, as his colleague, brought from the shores of Ross, and the hills of Caithness, every Southern banner which had waved on their embattled towers. Graham was sent for by Wallace to hear these tidings.

"Ah!" cried Edwin, "not a spot north of the Forth now remains, that does not acknowledge the supremacy of the Scottish lion!"

"Nor south of it either," returned Graham; "from the Mull of Galloway to my gallant father's government on the Tweed, from the Cheviots to the northern ocean, all now is our own. The door is locked against England; and Scotland must prove unfaithful to herself, before the Southrons can again set foot on her borders."

The more private accounts were not less gratifying to Wallace; for he found that his plans for disciplining and bringing the people into order were everywhere adopted, and that alarm and penury had given way to peace and abundance. To witness the success of his designs, and to settle a dispute between Lord Ruthven and the Earl of Athol re-

lative to the government of Perth, Lord Mar strongly urged him to repair to the scene of contest. "Go," added the earl, "through the Lothians, and across the Queen's ferry, directly into Perthshire. I would not have you come to Stirling, lest it should be supposed that you are influenced in your judgment either by myself or my wife. But I think there cannot be a question that Lord Ruthven's services to the great cause invest him with a right which his opponent does not possess. Lord Athol has no claim, but that of superior rank; and, being the near relation of my wife, I believe she is anxious for his elevation. Therefore, come not near us, if you would avoid female importunity."

Wallace now recollected a passage in Lady Mar's letter, which, though not speaking out, insinuated how she should expect he should decide. Well pleased to avoid another rencontre with this lady's love and ambition, Wallace sent off the substance of these despatches to Murray, and then, with Edwin and Sir John Graham, set off for the Frith of Forth.

The Regent's arrival at Perth was soon spread throughout the province, and the hall of the castle was crowded with chieftains, come to pay their respects to their benefactor. An army of grateful peasantry filled the suburbs, begging for one glance of their beloved lord. To oblige them, Wallace mounted his horse, and, attended by his brother Ruthven and the populace covered plain on the west of the city. He gratified their eagerness by his condensation, and received the sincere homage of a thousand grateful hearts. The Grampians echoed with acclamations of "Our deliverer—Our Prince—The champion of Scotland—The glorious William Wallace!" and the shores of the Tay resounded with similar rejoicings.

Ruthven beheld this with sympathetic feeling. His just sense of the merits of the Regent had long internally acknowledged him as his sovereign; and he smiled with approbation at every breathing amongst the people, which intimated what would at last be their general shout.

Different were the thoughts of the gloomy Athol. Could he by a look have blasted those arms, have passed that head, gladly would he have made Scotland the sacrifice, so that he might never again find himself in the triumphant train, of one whom he deemed a boy and an upstart.

The issue of Ruthven's claims did not lessen Lord Athol's hatred of the Regent. Wallace simply stated the case to him, only changing the situations of the opponents; he supposed Athol to be in the place of Ruthven, and then asked the crowning earl, if Ruthven had demanded a government which Athol had bravely won and nobly secured, whether he should deem it just to be sentenced to relinquish it into the hands of his rival? By this question he was forced to decide against himself; but while Wallace hoped that, by having made his own judgment, he had found an expedient both to soften the pain of disappointment, and to lessen the humiliation of defeat, he had only redoubled the hatred of Athol, who thought he had thus been ejected out of even the privilege of complaint. He, however, affected to be reconciled to the issue of affairs, and taking a friendly leave of the Regent, retired to Blair; and there, amongst the numerous fortresses which owned his power, he determined to pass his days and nights in devising the fall of Wallace.

Meanwhile the unconscious object of his hatred, oppressed by the crowds which were assembling in Perth to do him homage, retired to Huntingtower castle of Lord Ruthven's, at some distance from the town. Secluded from the throng, he there arranged matters of consequence to the internal repose of the country; but receiving applications for similar regulations from the counties farther north, he decided on going thither himself. He bade adieu to the hospitalities of Huntingtower; and, accompanied by Graham and Edwin, with a small but faithful train, he commenced a journey which he intended should comprehend the circuit of the Highlands. With the chieftain of almost every castle in his progress he passed a day, and according to the interest which the situation of the peasantry created in his mind, he lengthened his sojourn. Everywhere he was welcomed with enthusiasm; and his glad eye beheld the festivities of Christmas with a delight which recalled past emotions till they wrung his heart.

The last day of the old year he spent with Lord Lochnave in Kilehorn castle, and in the course of a few days the earl accompanied his guest to make the circuit of Argyleshire. At Castle-Urquhart they parted; and Wallace, proceeding with his two friends, performed his legislative visits from sea to sea. Having traversed, with satisfaction, the whole of the northern parts of the kingdom, he returned to Huntingtower on the very morning that a messenger had reached it from Murray. That chieftain informed the Regent of King Edward's arrival from Flanders, and that he was preparing a large army to march into Scotland.

"We must meet him," cried Wallace, "on his own shores; and let the horrors attending the seat of war fall on the country whose king would bring desolation on ours."

CHAPTER XXIX. BATTLE OF STAMORE. The gathering word was despatched from chief to chief, to call the clans of the Highlands to meet their Regent in Clydesdale. Wallace set forward to summon the strength of the Lowlands; but at Kinclavin Castle, on the coast of Fife, he was surprised with another embassy from Edward—a herald, accompanied by that Sir Hugh le Despencer, who had conducted himself so insolently on his first embassy. On entering the chamber where the Regent sat with the chieftains who had accompanied him from Perthshire, the two Englishmen walked forward; but before the herald had paid the customary respects, Le de Spenser advanced to Wallace, and broke forth: "Sir William Wallace, the contumely with which the ambassadors of Prince Edward were treated is so resented by the

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