

THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS; OR THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE

BY MISS JANE PORTER.

CHAPTER XXV.

WALLACE AND LADY HELEN AT STIRLING CHAPEL—DE VALENCE ATTEMPTS THE LIFE OF WALLACE.

Though burning with stifled passions, Earl de Valence accepted the invitation of Lady Mar. He hoped to see Helen, and to find some opportunity of taking his revenge upon Wallace. The dagger seemed the surest way, and could he render the blow effectual, he should not only destroy the rival of his wishes, but by riding his monarch of a powerful foe, deserve every honour at the royal hands. He accompanied De Warenne to the palace. Resentful alike at his captivity and thwarted passion, he had hitherto refused to show himself beyond the ramparts of the citadel: he was therefore surprised, on entering the hall of Snowdon, to see such regal pomp and at the command of the woman who had so lately been his prisoner at Dumbarton, and whom he had treated with the most rigorous contempt. Forgetting these indignities in the pride of displaying her present consequence, Lady Mar came forward to receive her illustrious guests. Her dress corresponded with the magnificence of the banquet: a robe of cloth of golds enriched while it displayed the beauties of her person; her simple blazed with jewels; and a superb carmine emitted its rays from her bosom. De Warenne followed her with his eyes as she moved from him. With an unconscious sigh, he whispered to De Valence, "What a land is this, where all the women are fair and the men brave!"

"I wish that it and all its men and women were in perdition!" returned De Valence. Lady Ruthven entering with the wives and daughters of the honouring chieftains, checked the further expression of his spleen; and he now sought amongst them, but sought in vain, for Helen. The chieftains of the Scottish army, with the Lords Buchan and March, were assembled around the countess at the moment a shout from the populace without announced the arrival of the Regent. His noble figure was now disencumbered of armour; and he appeared with no more sumptuous garb than the simple maid of his country. De Valence frowned as he looked on him, and thanked his stars that Helen was absent from sharing the admiration which seemed to animate every breast. The eyes of Lady Mar at once told the libertine De Valence what were her sentiments towards the Regent. The entertainment was conducted with every regard to that chivalric courtesy which a noble conqueror always pays to the vanquished. Indeed, from the wit and pleasantry which passed from the opposite side of the tables, and in which the ever gay Murray was the leader, it rather appeared a convivial meeting of friends than an assemblage of mortal foes. During the banquet, the bards sung legends of the Scottish worthies, and as the board was cleared, they struck at once into a full chorus. Wallace caught the sound of his own name, accompanied with epithets of extravagant praise; he rose and motioned them to cease. They obeyed; but Lady Mar remonstrating with him, he said it was an ill omen to sing a warrior's actions till he were incapable of performing more, and begged she would excuse him from hearkening to his.

"Then let us change their strains to a dance!" replied the countess. "I have no objection," answered Wallace; and, putting the hand she presented to him into that of Lord de Warenne, he added, "I am not of a sufficiently gay temperament to grace the change; but this earl may not have the same reason for declining so fair a challenge!" Lady Mar coloured with mortification; for she had thought that Wallace would not venture to refuse before so many; but, following the impulse of De Warenne's arm, she proceeded to the other end of the hall, where the younger lords of both countries had already singled out ladies, and were marshalled for the dance.

As the hours moved on, the spirits of Wallace subsided into a sadness which he thought might be noticed, and whispering to Mar that he would go for an hour to visit Montgomery, he withdrew unnoticed by all but his watchful enemy. De Valence, who hovered about his steps, had heard him inquire of Lady Ruthven why Helen was not present. He was within hearing of this whisper also, and stole out after him; but, for once, the fury of hatred met a temporary disappointment. While De Valence was prowling along the paths to the citadel, Wallace had taken a different track. As he walked through the illuminated archways which led from the hall, he perceived a darkened passage. Hoping to quit the palace unnoticed (for he was aware that, should he go the usual way, the crowd at the gate would recognize him, and he could not escape their acclamations,) he followed this passage, and at last found himself in the chapel.

While advancing towards the altar, he was startled by a voice which uttered these words:—"Defend him, Heavenly Father! Defend him, day and night, from the devices of this wicked man; and above all, in these hours of revelry, guard his unshielded breast from treachery and death." The voice faltered, and added, with greater agitation, "Ah, unhappy me, that should be the cause of danger to the hope of Scotland, that I should pluck peril on the head of William Wallace!" A figure, which had been hidden by the rails of the altar, rose suddenly, and stretching forth her clasped hands, exclaimed aloud, "But Thou, who knowest I had no blame in this, wilt not afflict me by his danger! Thou wilt deliver him, O God, out of the hands of this cruel foe!"

Wallace was not more astonished at hearing these words, than he was at seeing the face of the woman who had so lately been his prisoner at Dumbarton, and whom he had treated with the most rigorous contempt. Forgetting these indignities in the pride of displaying her present consequence, Lady Mar came forward to receive her illustrious guests. Her dress corresponded with the magnificence of the banquet: a robe of cloth of golds enriched while it displayed the beauties of her person; her simple blazed with jewels; and a superb carmine emitted its rays from her bosom. De Warenne followed her with his eyes as she moved from him. With an unconscious sigh, he whispered to De Valence, "What a land is this, where all the women are fair and the men brave!"

moved forward. "Lady Helen," said he, in a respectful and even tender voice. At the sound, a fearful rushing of shame seemed to overwhelm all her faculties, for she knew not how long he might have been in the church, and that he had not heard her beseech Heaven to make him less the object of her thoughts. She sunk on her knees beside the altar, and covered her face with her hands.

The action, the confusion, might have betrayed her secret to Wallace; but he only thought of her pious invocations for his safety; he only remembered that it was she who had given a holy grave to the only woman he could ever love; and full of gratitude, as a pilgrim would approach a saint, he drew near her, kneeling down beside her, "in this lonely hour, in the sacred presence of Almighty Purity, receive my soul's thanks for the prayers I have this moment heard you breathe for me! They are more precious to me, Lady Helen, than the generous plaudits of my country; they are a greater reward to me than would have been the crown with which Scotland sought to endow me; for, do they not give me, when all the world cannot, the protection of Heaven?"

"I will pray for it!" softly answered Helen, but not venturing to look up. "And the prayer of the virtuous, we know, avails much; what then may I not expect from thine? Continue to offer up that incense for me," added he, "and I shall march forth to-morrow with redoubled strength; for I shall yet think, holy maid, that I have a Marion to pray for me on earth, as well as in heaven!"

Lady Helen's heart beat at these words; but it was no unhallowed emotion. She withdrew her hands from her face, and, clasping them, looked up; "Marion will indeed echo all my prayers; and He who reads my heart will, I trust, grant them! They are for your life, Sir William Wallace," added she, turning to him with agitation, "for it is menaced."

"I will inquire by whom," answered he, "when I have first paid my duty, at this altar, for guarding it so long. And dare I, daughter of goodness, to ask you to unite the voice of your gentle spirit with the secret one of mine? I would beseech Heaven for pardon on my own transgression; I would ask of its mercy to establish the liberty of Scotland. Pray with me, Lady Helen; and the invocations our souls utter will meet the promise of Him who said, 'Where two or three are joined together in prayer, there am I in the midst of them.'"

Helen looked on him with a holy smile; and, pressing the crucifix to her lips, bowed her head on it in mute assent. Wallace threw himself prostrate on the steps of the altar, and the fervor of his sighs alone breathed to his companion the deep devotion of his soul. How soon time passed, he knew not, he was so absorbed in the communion which his spirit held with the sublimest of beings. But the bell of the palace reminded him that he was still on earth; and, looking up, his eyes met those of Helen. His devotional cross hung on his arm; he kissed it:—"Wear this, holy maid," said he, "in remembrance of this hour!" She bowed her neck, and he put the consecrated chain over it:—"Let thy wear witness to a friendship," added he, clasping her hands in his, "which will be cemented by eternal ties in heaven!"

Helen bent her face upon her hands; he felt the sacred tears of so pure a compact upon them; and while he looked up, as if he thought the spirit of his Marion hovered near, to bless a communion so remote from all infringement ever to her, Helen raised her head, and, with a shriek, throwing her arms around Wallace, he felt an assassin's steel in his back; and she fell senseless on his breast. He started to his feet, and a dagger fell from his garments; but the hand which had struck the blow he could nowhere see. To search further was then impossible, for Helen lay on his bosom like one dead. Not doubting that she had seen his assailant, and so had fainted, he was laying her on the steps of the altar, that he might bring some water from the basin of the chapel to recover her, when he saw that her arm was not only stained with his blood, but streaming with her own. The dagger had pierced it in reaching him. How wild "Execrable villain!" cried he, turning cold at the sight; and instantly comprehending that it was to defend him she had thrown her arms around him, he exclaimed in a voice of agony, "Are two of the most matchless women the earth ever saw to die for me?" Trembling with terror, and with renewed grief for the terrible scene of Ellerslie was now brought in all its horrors before him, he tore off her veil, and, reaching the blood, but the gash was too wide for his surgery; and losing every other consideration in fears for her life, he took her in his arms, and bore her out of the chapel. He hastened through the dark passage, and, almost flying along the lighted galleries, entered the hall. The noisy fright of the servants, as he broke through their ranks at the door, alarmed the revellers, and, turning round, what was their astonishment, to behold the Regent, and bloody, bearing in his arms a lady apparently lifeless, and covered with the same dreadful hue!

Mar instantly recognised his daughter, and rushed towards her with a cry of horror. Wallace sunk with his breathless load upon the nearest bench, and while her head rested on his bosom, ordered that assistance should be brought. Lady Mar gazed on the spectacle with dismay. None present durst ask a question; till a priest, drawing near, unbound the arm of Helen, and discovered its deep wound.

"Who has done this?" cried Mar, turning to Wallace, with all the anguish of a father in his countenance. "I know not," replied he; "but I believe some villain who aimed at my life." "Where is Lord de Valence?" exclaimed Mar, recollecting his enmities against Wallace. "I am here," replied he, in a composed voice; "would you have me seek the assassin?" "No, no," cried the earl, "but there has been some foul work, and my daughter is slain!"

"Oh! not so!" cried Murray, "she will not die; so much excellence cannot die." A stifled groan from Wallace, accompanied by a look, told Murray that he had known the death of similar excellence.

The wound was closed, and Helen sighed convulsively. At this intimation of recovery, the priest made all excepting those who supported her, stand back; but as Lady Mar lingered near Wallace she saw the paleness of his countenance turn to a deadly hue, and his eyes closing, with a gasp he sunk back on the bench. Her shrieks now resounded through the hall, and falling into hysterics she was taken into the gallery, while the more collected Lady Ruthven remained to attend the victims before her. At the instant Wallace fell, De Valence, losing all self-command, caught hold of De Warenne's arm, and whispering, "I thought it was sure; long live King Edward!" rushed out of the hall. These words revealed to De Warenne who was the assassin; and, though struck to the soul with the turpitude of the deed, he thought the honor of England would not allow him to accuse the perpetrator, and he remained silent.

The inanimate body of Wallace was now drawn from under that of Helen; and, in the act, another priest, who had arrived, discovered the tapestry clotted with blood, and that the Regent's back was also bathed in the same vital stream. Having found his wound, the priests laid him on the ground, and were administering their balsams, when Helen opened her eyes, and looking around her with an aghast countenance, her sight met the out-stretched body of Wallace. "Oh! it is he!" cried she, throwing herself into the bosom of her father. He understood what she meant. "He lives, my child; but he is wounded, like yourself. Have courage; revive, for his sake and for mine!"

"Helen! Helen! dear Helen!" cried Murray; "while you live, what that loves you can die?" While these exclamations surrounded her couch, Edwin supported the insensible head of Wallace, and De Warenne, inwardly execrating the perfidy of De Valence, knelt down to assist the priests in their office. A few minutes longer, and the staunch blood refluxing to the chieftain's heart, he opened his eyes, and instantly starting on his arm—"What has happened to me?" demanded he; "where is Lady Helen?"

At his voice, which aroused Helen, who, believing that he was dead, was relapsing into her former state, she could only press her father's hand to her lips, as if he had given her the life she so valued, and bursting into tears, breathed out her thanks to God. Her low murmurs reached the ear of Wallace, and looking round to Edwin, whose colorless cheek told the depth of his fears, "We both live," said he, "your cousin speaks, and it restores me to hear her voice. Let me declare my gratitude to my sweet preserver."

The dimness having left his eyes, and the blood being stopped, he felt no further inconvenience from his wound; and rising, hastened to the side of Helen. Lord Mar whispered to his daughter, "Sir William Wallace is at your feet, my dearest child; look on him, and tell him that you live." "I am well, my father," returned she; "and may it indeed please the Almighty to preserve him!" "I am alive and well," answered Wallace; "but thanks to God, and to you, that I am so! Had not that lovely arm received the greater part of the dagger, it must have reached my heart."

An exclamation of horror burst from the lips of Edwin, who could have sworn he had seen the dagger, when he schooled it; but she now held her feelings under too severe a rein to allow them so to speak. "Thanks to the protector of the just," cried she, "for your preservation! When I raised my eyes, I saw the assassin with his gown so held before his eyes, that I could not discern who he was, but the dagger was aimed at the back of Sir William Wallace! How I caught it I cannot tell; for I seemed to die on the instant."

Lady Mar having recovered, re-entered the hall just as Wallace had knelt down beside Helen. Maddened at the sight of the man on whom her soul doted in such a position before her rival, she advanced hastily; and in a voice which she vainly attempted to render composed and gentle, sternly said, "Alarmed as I have been by your apparent danger, I cannot but be uneasy at the attendant circumstances; tell me, therefore and satisfy this anxious company, how it happened that you should be with the Regent, when we supposed you an invalid in your room, and were told he was gone to the citadel?"

A blush overspread the cheeks of Helen; but as innocence dictated, she answered, "I was in the chapel at prayers. Sir William Wallace entered with the same design, and at the moment he desired to mingle mild with his, this assassin appeared. I saw his dagger raised against our protector, and I saw no more." There was a heart present that did not give credence to this account but the polluted one of Lady Mar. She smiled incredulously, and turning to the company, "Our noble friends will accept my apology if, in so delicate an investigation, I should beg that my family alone may be present."

Wallace perceived the tendency of her words, and doubting the impression they might make on the minds of men ignorant of the virtues of Lady Helen, he hastily rose. "For once," cried he, "I must countenance a lady's orders. It is my wish, lords, that you will not leave this place till I explain how I came to disturb the devotions of Lady Helen. Wearied with festivities in which my alienated heart can so little share, I thought to pass an hour with Lord Montgomery in the citadel; and in seeking to avoid the crowded avenues of the palace, I entered the chapel. To my surprise, I found Lady Helen there. I heard her pray for the happiness of Scotland, for the safety of her defenders, and my mind being in a frame to join in such petitions, I apologised for my unintentional intrusion, and begged permission to mingle my devotions with hers. Nay, impressed and privileged by the sacredness of the place, I presumed still further; and before the altar of

ing from Wallace with an affected disdain, said to the shivered weapon, "You shall not betray me again!" "Nor you betray our honors, Lord de Valence," exclaimed Earl de Warenne; "and therefore, though the nobleness of Sir William Wallace leaves you at large after this outrage on his person, we will assert our innocence of connivance with the deed; and, as Lord Warden of this realm, I order you under an arrest till you pass the Scottish lines." "As well," cried Baron Hilton, "that such is your determination, my lord; else no honest man could have continued in the same company with one who has so tarnished the English name."

De Valence, with an ironical smile, looked towards the squadron which approached to obey De Warenne, and said—"Though it be dishonour to you to march with me out of Scotland, the proudest of you all will deem it honor to be allowed to return with me hither. I have an eye on those who stand with you in rebellion. And for you, Sir William Wallace," added he, "I hold no terms with a rebel, and deem all honor that would rid my sovereign and the earth of such low-born arrogance." Before Wallace could answer, he saw De Valence struck from his horse by the Lochaber-axe of Edwin. Indignant at the insult offered his commander, he had raised his arm, and aiming a blow with all his strength, the earl was immediately precipitated to the ground.

At sight of the fall of the Southern chieftain, the Scottish troops, aware of there being some misund standing between the Regent and the English lords, uttered a shout. Wallace sent to the lines to appease the tumult, and throwing himself on his horse, hastened to the prostrate earl. A fearful pause reigned throughout the Southern ranks. They did not know but that the enraged Scots would now fall on them, and in spite of the Regent, exterminate them on the spot. The troops were running forward when Wallace's messenger arrived and checked them; and calling to Edwin, stopped his farther chastisement of the recovering earl. "Edwin, you have done wrong," cried he; "give me that weapon which you have sullied by raising it against a prisoner totally in our power."

With a blush he resigned the weapon; yet, with a look on the prostrate De Valence, he said, "But have you not granted life twice to this prisoner? and has he not in return raised his hand against your life and Lady Helen? You pardon his again; and, in a moment of your clemency, he insults the Lord Regent of Scotland in the face of both nations. I could not bear this and live, without making him feel that you have those about you who will not forgive such crimes." "Edwin," returned Wallace, "had not the Lord Regent power to punish? and, if he see right to hold his hand, those who do it for him invade his dignity. I should be unworthy the honor of a brave nation, did I stoop to tread on every reptile that stings me in my path. Leave Lord de Valence to the sentence his commander has pronounced, and as an expiation for your having offended military and moral law, this day you must remain at Stirling till I return into Scotland."

De Valence, hardly awake from the stupor which the blow had occasioned, was raised from the ground, and was taken, foaming with rage and mortification, into the centre of the Southern lines. Alarmed at the confusion he saw at a distance, Lord Montgomery ordered his litter round from the rear to the front; and hearing all that had passed, joined with De Warenne in pleading for Edwin. "His youth and zeal," cried Montgomery, "are sufficient to excuse the intemperance of the deed." "No!" interrupted Edwin; "I have offended, and I will expiate. Only, my honored lord," said he, approaching Wallace, "when I am absent, sometimes remember that it was Edwin's love which hurried him to this disgrace!"

"My dear Edwin," returned Wallace, "there are many impetuous spirits in Scotland who need the lesson I now enforce upon you; and they will be brought to maintain the law of honour, when they see that their Regent spares not its slightest violation, even when committed by his best beloved friend. Farewell, till we meet again." Edwin kissed Wallace's hand in silence; and drawing his bonnet over his eyes, he retired into the rear of Lord Mar's party.

CHAPTER XXVII. DEFEAT OF LORD PERCY—INVASION OF ENGLAND—TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF WALLACE. Wallace and his troops, attending the Southern prisoners, pursued their journey. Dawn was brightening the dark head of Brunswark, as they advanced towards the Scottish boundary. At a distance lay the English camp along the southern bank of the Esk. At this sight, Wallace ordered his bugles to sound; they were answered by those of the opposite host. The heralds of both armies advanced; and the sun shone full upon the legions of Scotland winding down the precipices of Vauchope. Two hours arranged every preliminary to the exchange of prisoners; and when the trumpet announced that each party was to pass over the river to the side of its respective country, Wallace stood in the midst of his chieftains, to receive the last adieu of his illustrious captives. When De Warenne approached, the regent took off his helmet. The Southern had already his in his hand. "Farewell, gallant Scot," said he; "if aught could imbitter this moment of recovered freedom, it is, that I leave a man I so revere, still confident in a finally hopeless cause."

"It would not be the less just, were it indeed desperate," replied Wallace; "but had not heaven shown on which side it fought, I should not have had the honour of thus bidding the brave De Warenne farewell." The earl passed on; and the other lords, with grateful and respectful looks paid their obeisance. The litter of Montgomery drew near; the curtains were thrown open; Wallace stretched out his hand to him; "The prayers of sainted innocence are thine!" "Never more shall her angel spirit behold me here, as you now be-

hold me," returned Montgomery; "I must be a traitor to virtue, before I ever again bear arms against Sir William Wallace." Wallace pressed his hand and they parted. The escort which guarded De Valence advanced; and the proud earl, seeing where his enemy stood, took off his gauntlet, and throwing it fiercely towards him, exclaimed, "Carry that to your minion, Ruthven, and tell him, the hand that wore it will yet be tremendously revenged!"

As the Southern ranks fled off towards Carlisle, those of the returning Scottish prisoners approached their deliverer. Now it was that the full clangour of joy burst forth from every breast and instrument in the Scottish legions; now it was that the echoes rang with loud huzzas of "Long live the valiant Wallace, who brings our nobles out of captivity! Long live our matchless Regent!"

As these shouts rent the air, the Lords Badenoch and Athol drew near. The princely head of the former bent with proud acknowledgment to the mild dignity of Wallace. Badenoch's penetrating eye saw that it was indeed the patriotic guardian of his country to whom he bowed, and not the vain affecter of regal power. At his approach, Wallace alighted from his horse, and received his offered hand and thanks with every grace in his noble nature. "I am happy," returned he, "to have been the instrument of recalling to my country one of the princes of our royal blood." "And while one drop of it exists in Scotland," replied Badenoch, "its possessor must acknowledge the bravest of our defenders in Sir William Wallace."

Athol next advanced; but his gloomy countenance contradicted his words, when he attempted to utter a similar sense of obligation. Sir John Monteith was eloquent in his thanks; and Sir William Maitland was not less sincere in gratitude than Wallace was in joy, at having given liberty to so near a relation of Helen Mar. The rest of the captive Scots, to the number of several hundreds, were ready to kiss the feet of the man who thus restored them to their honours, their country, and their friends; and Wallace bowed his head under a shower of blessings, which poured on him from many grateful hearts.

In pity to the wearied travellers, he ordered tents to be pitched; and he despatched a detachment to the top of Langholm hill, to send forth a smoke in token of the armistice being at an end. He had hardly seen it ascend the mountain, when Graham arrived, and told him that an English army was approaching by the foot of the hills. "They shall find us ready to receive them," was the reply of Wallace. Leaving his harassed friends to rest on the banks of the Esk, he put himself at the head of five thousand men; and sending a thousand to the top of the Cheviots, and another to the Southrons when he should give the signal, he marched forward, and fell in with some advanced squadrons of the enemy among the recesses of those hills. Little expecting such a rencontre, they were marching in files upon the ridgy crags, to avoid the swamps which occupied the broader way.

At sight of the Scots, Lord Percy, the Southern commander, ordered a party of his archers to discharge their arrows. Wallace drew his sword, and called aloud to his followers. His voice echoed from hill to hill, and the higher detachments of the Scots, pouring downwards with impetuosity, precipitated their enemies into the valley; while Wallace with his pike-men, charging the horse in those slippery paths, drove the terrified animals into the morasses, where some sunk at once, and others, plunging, threw their riders to perish in the swamp. Desperate at the confusion which ensued, as his archers fell from the rocks, and his cavalry lay drowning before him, Lord Percy called up his infantry, and they appeared, but though ten thousand strong, the Scots met their first ranks breast to breast, and levelling them with their companions, rushed on the rest with the force of a thunderstorm. It was at this period that the signal was given from the horn of Wallace; and the division of Graham, meeting the retreating Southrons as they attempted to form behind the hill, completed their defeat. The slaughter became dreadful, the victory decisive. Sir Ralph Latimer, the second in command, was killed, and Lord Percy, dead, covered with wounds, towards Alnwick.

This being the season of harvest in the northern counties of England, Wallace carried his reapers, not to lay their sickles to the fields, but with their swords to open themselves a way into the Southern granaries. He, meanwhile, provided for the wants of his friends on the other side of the Esk. The plunder of Percy's camp was despatched to them, which, being abundant

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Eye Strain Headaches

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