

THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS: OR THE LIFE OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE

BY MISS JANE PORTER.

CHAPTER XXII. CONTINUED.

CAPTIVITY OF STIRLING.

At this explanation, Lady Ruthven gave way to the happiness of her soul, and, falling on the neck of her son, embraced him with a flood of tears. "And thy father, Edwin! where is he? Did not the noble Wallace rescue him from Ayr?"

"He did, and he is here," Edwin then related to his mother the affectionate embassy of his father, and the particulars of his release. Perceiving how happily they were engaged, Murray rose and requested the lieutenant to conduct him to Lady Helen. His guide led him into a gallery, where, letting Lord Andrew into a spacious apartment, divided in the midst by a screen of carved cedar-wood, he pointed to a certain entrance—"Within that chamber," said he, "is the Lady Helen."

"Ah! my poor cousin!" exclaimed Murray; "though she seems not to have tasted the hardships of her parents, she has shared their misery. I do not doubt," he spoke, and Murray entered the room. The chamber was magnificent, and illumined with a lamp hung from the ceiling. He cautiously approached the bed, fearing too hastily to disturb her, and pulling aside the curtain, beheld a vacancy. An exclamation of alarm had almost escaped him when, observing a half-open door at the other side of the apartment, he drew towards it, and there beheld his cousin with her back to him, kneeling before a crucifix. She spoke not; but the fervour of her action manifested how earnestly she prayed. He moved behind her, but she heard him not; her whole soul was absorbed in the success of her petition, and at last, raising her clasped hands in a paroxysm of emotion she exclaimed—"If that trumpet sound the victory of the Scots, then, Power of goodness! receive thy servant's thanks; but if De Valence failed, if all whom I love be lost to me here, take me then to thyself, and let my freed spirit fly to their embraces in heaven!"

"Ay, and on earth too, thou blessed angel!" cried Murray. She started from her knees, and with such a cry as the widow of Serepta uttered when she embraced her son from the dead, threw herself on the bosom of her cousin, and closed her eyes in a blissful slumber. The impression of joy played about her heart, and the animated throbbings of her arms, at last aroused her to recollection. "My father? All are safe?" demanded she. "All my best beloved!" answered Murray, forgetting that what he felt and what he uttered were beyond even a cousin's limits—"My uncle the countess, Lord and Lady Ruthven, all are safe."

"And Sir William Wallace?" cried she. "You do not mention him. I hope so!"

"He is the conqueror here!" interrupted Murray. "He has subdued every obstacle between Berwick and Stirling; and has sent me hither to set you and the dear prisoners free."

Helen longed to ask whether the unknown knight, from whom she had parted in the hermit's cell, had ever joined Sir William Wallace. At the thought of the probability of his having fallen, her soul seemed to gasp for existence; and dropping her head on her cousin's shoulder, "Tell me, Andrew," said she; "and thank to heaven, none have fallen."

"Thanks, indeed!" cried Helen. "Now, Andrew, lead me to my father." Murray would perhaps have required a second bidding, had not Lord Mar, impatient to see his daughter, appeared with the countess at the door of the apartment. Hastening towards them, she fell on the bosom of her father, and while she bathed his face and hands with her glad tears, he too wept and mingled blessings with his caresses. Lady Margazet with a frown on Helen as she wound her arms about the earl in filial tenderness. "Wallace will behold these charms!" cried her distracted spirit to herself, "and then, where am I?"

As her thoughts followed each other, she darted looks on Helen, which, in an evil eye had all her beauty. At one of these portentous moments, the eyes of Helen met her glance; she started with horror. It made her remember how she had been betrayed, and all she had suffered from Souils; but she could not forget that she had been rescued; and with the thought, the image of her preserver rose before her. At this gentle idea, her alarmed countenance took a softer expression, and tenderly sighted, she turned to her father's question of how she did come to be with Lady Ruthven, when he had been taught by Lord Andrew to believe she was safe at St. Fillan's.

"Yes," cried Murray; "I saw in a letter to Sir William Wallace, that you had been betrayed by some traitor Scot from your asylum; and but for the goodness of my joy at our meeting, I would have inquired who a deadly sickness at her heart on hearing that Wallace was so far acquainted with her daughter as to have received a letter from her; and she prepared to listen to what she had expected would bring a death-stroke to her hopes. They had met; they wrote to each other. Then, far indeed had proceeded that communication of heart, which was the aim of her life, and she was undone!"

Helen glanced at the face of Lady Mar, and observing its changes, regarded them as corroboration of her guilt. It was conscience accusing her

of having intended to betray her daughter to Souils at Bothwell, and bidding her prepare to hear how, in consequence, she had afterwards fallen into his hands. "If conscience disturbs you thus," thought Helen, "let it rend your heart with shame; and perhaps remorse may follow."

As the tide of success seemed so full for the Scots, Helen no longer feared that her cousin would rashly seek vengeance on Souils, when he might probably so soon have an opportunity of making it certain at the head of the army. She therefore commenced her narrative from the time of Murray's leaving her at the priory, and continuing it to the hour when she met her father a prisoner in the streets of Stirling. As she proceeded the indignation both of the earl and of Murray against Souils was vehement; and the latter Souils was full of immedial personal revenge; but the earl calmed his nephew's rage. The countess of Lady Mar varied her checks with a thousand dyes, when, as Helen repeated part of the conversation with Maegregor's wife, Murray said, "Surely that woman could name the hands traitor who betrayed us into the hands of our enemies! Did she hint it?" Helen cast down her eye. Lady Mar said that she was acquainted with her guilt; and, expecting no more mercy than she knew she would show to Helen in the like circumstances, she rose from her chair, internally vowing vengeance against her daughter, and hatred of all mankind. But Helen thought she might have erred from blind affection to her husband; and she determined never to accuse her.

While all the furies raged in the breast of this guilty woman, Helen answered, "You do not think that Lord Souils would be so weak as to trust a secret of that kind to a servant?" and then hurrying the relation of subsequent events, the countess breathed again; and almost deceiving herself with the hope that Helen was ignorant of her treachery, listened with emotions of another kind, when she heard of the rescue of her daughter-in-law. She saw Wallace in the brave act; but as Helen passed over the most interesting parts of her conversation, and never named the names of her person, Lady Mar thought that to have viewed Wallace with so little notice would have been impossible; and therefore, without surprise at her first suspicion being entirely removed, but glad of such a conviction that he and her daughter had never met, she heard Helen say that the unknown chief had promised to join his arms with those of Wallace. She saw Murray looked on that made it pause, and Helen had whispered to him, what she had never dreamt before, that she was dearer to him than fifty thousand cousins; and while the blood flushed and retreated in the complexion of Helen, as she ran over the circumstances of her acquaintance with the stranger-knight, his own emotions declared the secret of hers; and with a lip as pale as her own, he said, "But where is this brave man? He cannot have told Wallace; for surely he would have told Wallace; or myself, if he came from you."

"I warned him not to do so," replied she, "for fear that your indignation against my enemies, my dear cousin, might have precipitated you into dangers inimical to the duty you owe your country."

"Then, if he has joined us," replied Murray, "you will probably soon know who he is. To-morrow morning Sir William Wallace will enter the citadel, attended by his principal knights; and in the train you will doubtless discover the man who has laid such obligations on us all by your preservation. Glad shall I be to have an opportunity of expressing my gratitude."

Helen now learned, for the first time, the cruelties which had been exercised on her father and his family since the capture of De Valence. She had been exempted from sharing them by the fears of Cressingham, who, knowing that English earl had particular views with regard to her, durst not risk offending him by outraging one whom he had declared himself ready to protect.

CHAPTER XXIII.
THE CAPTURE OF STIRLING—WALLACE RE-ENTERS SCOTLAND.

At noon next day Murray received a message from Wallace, desiring him to tell the Earl of Mar that he was coming to the citadel, to offer the palace of Snowdon to the ladies of Mar, and to request the earl to take charge of the illustrious prisoners he was bringing to the castle.

Each member of the family hastened to prepare for an interview that excited different expectations in each breast. Lady Mar, satisfied that Helen and Wallace had never met, and clinging to the vague words of Murray, that he had sent to give her liberty, called forth every art of the toilet. Lady Ruthven, with the eagerness of a chaste matron in prospect of seeing the man who had so often been the preserver of her brother, and who had so lately delivered her husband from a dungeon, was the first who joined the earl in the great gallery. Lady Mar soon after entered, in all her plumage of majesty and beauty.

The trumpet of Wallace had sounded in the gates, before the trembling Helen could leave her room. It was the herald of his approach, and she sunk breathless into a seat. She was now going to see, for the first time, the man whose woes she had so often wept; the man who had incurred them all for objects dear to her. When she had mourned as if stricken in sorrows, and feared for the garb of woe, but arrayed as a conqueror; as a champion of Scotland, giving laws to her oppressors, and entering in triumph over fields of their slain. Awful as this picture was to her gentle nature it alone did not occasion that inexplicable sensation which seemed to check the impulses of her heart. Was she, or young and noble Bruce? Was she to be assured that he still existed; or by seeking him everywhere in vain, that he had perished, lonely and unknown?

While these ideas thronged into her mind, the platform below was filling with the triumphant Scots; and her door opening, Edwin entered. "Come,

cousin," cried he, "Sir William Wallace has almost finished his business in the great hall. He has made my uncle governor of this place, and has committed nearly a thousand prisoners of rank to his care. If you be not expeditious, you will allow him to enter the gallery before you."

Hardly observing her face, he seized her hand, and hurried her to the gallery. Her aunt and step-mother only were there. Lady Ruthven sat composedly on a tapestried bench; but Lady Mar was next the door, listening impatiently to the voices beneath. At sight of Helen she drew back, but smiled exultingly when she saw that all that splendour of beauty she so dreaded was fled. Her unadorned garments had no particular attraction to the simple lines of her form; the effulgence of her complexion was gone; and the tremulous motion of her step deprived her of that elastic grace which was the peculiar charm of her nymph-like figure.

Triumph now sat in the eyes of the countess, and she waved Helen to take a seat beside Lady Ruthven; but Helen, fearful of what might be her emotion when the train should enter, had just placed herself behind her aunt, when the steps of many a mailed foot sounded upon the gallery. The next moment the great doors opened, and a crowd of knights in armor flashed upon her eyes. A dimness overspread her faculties; and nothing appeared to her but an indistinct throng. She would have given worlds to have been removed from the spot, but was unable to stir her feet.

The covering senses beheld Lady Mar (who, exclaiming "Ever my preserver!" had hastened forward) now leaning on the bosom of one of the chiefs. His head was bent, as if answering her in a low voice. By the golden locks which hung down upon the tresses of the countess and obscured his face, she judged it to be the deliverer of her father, the knight of her dream; but where was he who had delivered herself from a worse fate than death? With a timid gaze she glanced from face to face of the chiefs, but all were strange; and, withdrawing her eyes with a conviction that their search was in vain, in the moment of despair she recognized a glimpse of the features of Wallace, and her secret was revealed. In that godlike countenance she recognized the object of her wishes; and, with a gasp of surprise, she would have fallen from her seat, had not Lady Ruthven, hearing a sound like the sigh of death, turned round and caught her in her arms. The cry of her aunt drew every eye to the countess; but all moved towards the beautiful and senseless form that lay on the bosom of Lady Ruthven. The earl and his agitated wife followed. "What ails my Helen?" asked the affectionate father. "I know not," replied his sister; "she sat behind me. I knew nothing of her disorder till she fell, as you see."

Murray supposed that she had discovered the unknown knight; and, looking from countenance to countenance, to see if he could discover the offender, he saw such emotions, he read in to an answering feeling with that of Helen. Wallace, who, in the pale form before him, saw not only the woman whom he had preserved with a brother's care, but the compassionate saint who had given a hallowed grave to the remains of an angel pure as herself, hung over her with an anxiety so eloquent in every feature, that the countess would willingly have stabbed her in every vein.

Lady Ruthven had sprinkled her niece with water, and she began to revive. Wallace motioned his chieftains to withdraw. Her eyes opened slowly, but recollection returned, and, fearful of again encountering the face which declared the Bruce of her meditations, and the Wallace of her veneration, to be one, she buried her face in the bosom of her father.

Trembling at what might be the consequence of this scene, Lady Mar determined to hint to Wallace that Helen loved some unknown knight, and, bending to her daughter, said in a low voice, yet loud enough for her to hear, "Retire, my child; you will be better in your own room, whether pleasure or disappointment about the person you wished to discover in Sir William's train has occasioned these emotions."

Helen blushed at this indelicate remark; and raising her head with that modest dignity which only belongs to the purest mind, gently but firmly said, "I obey you, madam; and he whom I love is seen will be too generous not to pardon the effect of my unexpected weight of gratitude." As she spoke, her eyes met the gaze of Wallace. His countenance became agitated, and dropping on his knee beside her, "Gracious lady," cried he, "mine is the weight of gratitude; but it is dear and precious to me; a debt that my life will not be able to repay. I was ignorant of all your goodness when we parted in the hermit's cave; but the spirit of an angel, like yourself, Lady Helen, will whisper to you all her wisdom and her thanks." He pressed her hand fervently between his, and left the room.

Helen looked on him with an eye in which the heroic vow of her soul spoke in every beam; but, as he arose, even then she felt its frailty, for her spirit seemed leaving her, and as he disappeared from the door, her world seemed shut from her eyes. Not to think of him was impossible; how to think of him as if made a desert; but heroism was there. She had looked upon the heaven-dedicated Wallace, on the widowed mourner of Marion, the saint and the hero, the being of another world; and as such she would regard him, till in the realms of purity she might acknowledge the brother of her soul! A sacred inspiration seemed to illumine her features, and to brace with the vigor of immortality those limbs which before sunk under her. She forgot that she was still on earth, while a holy love sat brooding on her heart.

Lady Mar gazed on her without understanding the meaning of those looks. Judging from her own impassioned feelings, she could only resolve the resplendent beauty which shone from the now animated face and form of Lady Helen into the rapture of finding herself beloved. Had she not heard Wallace declare himself to be the unknown knight

who had rescued Helen? She had heard him devote his life to her, and was not his heart included in that dedication? She had, then, heard that love vowed to another, which she would have sacrificed her soul to win!

Murray was confounded; but his reflections were far different from those of Lady Mar. At the moment in which he found that he loved his cousin above all of women's mould, an unappreciable voice in his bosom bade him crush every fond desire. That heart which, with the chaste transport of a sister, had throbbled so entrancingly against his, was then another;—was become the captive of Wallace's virtues; of the only man whom his judgment would have said deserved Helen Mar! "Well! be it so!" said he to himself; "if this too daring passion must be elipt on the wing, I have at least the consolation that it soars like the bird of Jove! But, birth. Your generous conduct to all that was dearest to me on earth, was witnessed by myself. I was in the tree above your head; and nothing but a conviction that I should embarrass the honor of my wife's protector, could at that moment have prevented my springing from my covert, and declaring my gratitude on the spot. Receive my thanks now, inadequate as they are, to express all I feel. But you offered me your heart on the field of Cambuskenneth; I will take that as a generous intimation how I may best acknowledge my debt. Receive, then, my never-dying friendship, the eternal gratitude of my immortal spirit!"

The answer of Montgomery, by presenting the tender form of his wife and her devoted love almost visibly before him, nearly forced open the fountain of tears which had buried in his heart; and, rising suddenly, for fear his emotions might betray themselves, he warmly pressed the hand of his English friend, and left the room. In the course of the day, the Southern nobles were transported into the citadel; and the family of Mar removed from the fortress, to take up their residence in the palace of Snowdon.

The fame of these victories—the seizure of Stirling, the conquest of about sixty thousand men, and the Lord Warden with his late deputy taken prisoners—spread through the country on the wings of the wind. Messengers were despatched by Wallace, not only to the nobles who had declared for the cause by sending him their armed followers, but to the clans who yet stood irresolute. But of the chieftains who had taken the side of Edward, he sent an exhortation. And when Lord Ruthven advised him to do so, "No, my lord," said he, "we must not spread a snare under our feet. All honest minds will come to us of their own accord; and those who are of so, had better be avoided than show the way by which treachery may effect what open violence cannot accomplish."

Lady Mar again applied to her fatal pen, but with other views than for the ruin of the cause, or the destruction of Wallace. It was to strengthen his hands with the power of all her kinsmen and finally, by the crown which they should place on his head, call her to the dignity of a queen. She wrote first to John Cummin, earl of Buchan, enforcing a thousand reasons why he should not leave a sinking cause, and join the rising fortunes of his country. She despatched her letter by a messenger whom she had bribed to secrecy, and added, in her postscript, that "the answer she should hope to receive would be an offer of his services to Sir William Wallace."

While the Countess of Mar was devising her plans (for the gaining of Lord Buchan was only a preliminary measure), the despatches of Wallace had taken effect; and, in a very short time after the messengers had left Stirling, the plain around the city was covered with a mixed multitude. All Scotland seemed pressing to throw itself at the feet of its preserver. A large body of men, brought from Mar by Murray, according to his uncle's orders, were amongst the first encamped on the Carse; and that part of Wallace's own particular band, which he had left at Dumbaron to recover of their wounds, now, under the command of Stephen Ireland, rejoined their lord at Stirling. Neil Campbell, the brave Lord of Lochawe, and Lord Bothwell, the father of Lord Andrew Murray, with a strong reinforcement, arrived from Angus, Perth, and the chiefs of Ross, Dundas, Gordon, Lockhart, Scott, Erskine, Lindsay, Cameron, and of almost every noble family in Scotland, sent their sons at the head of detachments from their clans to swell the ranks of Wallace.

When this patriotic host assembled on the Carse of Stirling, every inmate of the city turned out to view the glorious sight. Mounted on a rising ground, they saw each little the army, and the blazoned banners of all the chivalry of Scotland floating over the lengthened ranks. At this moment, the lines opened, and discovered Wallace advancing on a white charger. When the conqueror of Edward's hosts appeared, the deliverer of Scotland, a mighty shout rent the skies. Wallace raised his helmet, as, by an instinctive motion, every hand bent the sword and banner it contained.

"He comes in the strength of David!" cried the Bishop of Dunkeld, who appeared at the head of his church's train—"Scots, behold the Lord's anointed!" The exclamation struck to every heart. "Long live King William!" was echoed by every follower, and the lords themselves, believing that he who won had the best right to enjoy, joined in the glorious cry. Galloping up from the front of their ranks, they threw themselves from their steeds; and, before Wallace could recover from the surprise into which this salutation had thrown him, Lord Bothwell and Lord Lochawe, followed by the rest of their knights, and acknowledged him to be their sovereign. The Bishop of Dunkeld, drawing from his breast a silver dove of sacred oil, poured it upon the unbowed head of Wallace. "Thus, O King!" cried he, "do I consecrate, on earth what has already received the unction of heaven!"

Wallace was awe-struck; and, raising his eyes to heaven, his soul in silence breathed its unutterable devotion. Then, looking on the Bishop, "Holy

Wallace turned on him an inquiring look. "You have often spoken to me of Sir Gilbert Hambleton."

"And this is he!" interrupted Wallace. Edwin recounted the manner of the earl discovering himself, and how he came to bear that title. Wallace listened in silence, and as his young friend ended, sighed heavily. "I will thank him," was all he said; and he proceeded to the chamber of war which was filled with officers, come to inquire after their commander's health. Wallace advanced to the couch, and the Southrons drew back. The expression on his countenance told the earl that he now knew him. "Noblest of Englishmen!" cried Wallace, in a low voice, "I come to express a gratitude to you as lasting as the memory of the action which gave it birth. Your generous conduct to all that was dearest to me on earth, was witnessed by myself. I was in the tree above your head; and nothing but a conviction that I should embarrass the honor of my wife's protector, could at that moment have prevented my springing from my covert, and declaring my gratitude on the spot. Receive my thanks now, inadequate as they are, to express all I feel. But you offered me your heart on the field of Cambuskenneth; I will take that as a generous intimation how I may best acknowledge my debt. Receive, then, my never-dying friendship, the eternal gratitude of my immortal spirit!"

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father," said he, "this unction may have prepared my brows for a crown, but it is not of this world. Rise, lords! and, as ye are, be ye as ye are; preserve to you a lawful monarch, Bruce lives; and, were he extinct, the blood royal flows in too many noble veins in Scotland for me to usurp its rights."

"The rights of the crown lie with the only man in Scotland who knows how to defend them; else reason is blind, or the people abandon their own prerogative. What we have this moment vowed is not to be forsaken. Balfour has abdicated our throne; the Bruce deserts it; all our nobles sleep till you awake; and shall we allow to men who follow, but will not lead? No, Bruce lives; Wallace, from the moment you draw the first sword for Scotland, you are yourself her lawful king!"

Wallace turned to the veteran Lord of Lochawe, who uttered this with a blunt determination, that meant to say, the election which had passed should not be recalled. "I made myself her champion to fight for her freedom, not my own aggrandizement. Were I to accept the honour with which this too grateful nation would repay my service, I should not bring in that peace for which I contend. Struggling for the toils of my brave countrymen would be redoubled; for they would have to maintain the rights of an unallied king against a host of enemies. The circumstance of a man from a private station of life being elevated to such dignity, would be felt as an insult by every royal house; and foes and friends would arm against us. On these grounds of policy, were I not loyal to the vows of my ancestors, I should repel the mischief you would bring upon yourselves by making me your king. As it is, my conscience, as well as my judgment, compels me to reject it. As your general, I should never see you gloriously; as your monarch, in spite of myself, I should incur your ultimate destruction."

"From whom, noblest of Scots?" asked the Lord of Bothwell.

"From yourselves, my friends," answered Wallace. "Could I take advantage of the generous enthusiasm of a grateful nation—could I forget the duty I owe to the blood of our Alexanders, and leap into the throne—there are many who would soon revolt against their own election. You cannot be ignorant that there are natures who would endure no rule, did it not come by the right of inheritance. Jealousies and rebellions would mark my reign, till even my closest adherents, seeing the miseries of civil war, would fall from my side, and leave the country open again to the inroads of her enemies. These, my friends and countrymen, would be my reasons for rejecting the crown; the ambition point that way. But as I have no joy in titles, no pleasure in any power that does not spring hourly from the heart, let my reign be in your bosoms; and with the appellation of your fellow-soldier, your friend, I will fight for you, I will conquer for you—I will live or die!"

"This man," whispered Lord Buchan, "shows more cunning in repusing a crown, than most are capable of exertion to obtain one."

"Ay, but let us see," returned the Earl of March, "whether it be not Cusar's coyness; he twice refused the purple, and yet he died Emperor of the Roman."

"He that offers me a crown," returned Buchan, "shall never catch me playing the coquette with his charms. I warrant you I would embrace the lovely mischief in the first presentation." A shout rent the air. "What is that?" cried he.

"He has followed your advice," answered March. "It is the preliminary trumpet to 'Long live King William the Great!'"

Lord Buchan spurred forward to Seryngmour, and inquired where the new king was to be crowned. "We have not yet to thank him for the possession of Stone!"

"True," cried Sir Alexander, "but did Sir William Wallace accept the prayers of Scotland, neither Stone nor any other spot in the kingdom should reuse the place of his coronation."

"Not accept them?" replied Buchan; "then why that shout? Do the changelings resolve in being refused?"

"When we cannot gain the altitude of our desires," returned the knight, "it is yet subject for thankfulness that we reach a step towards it. Sir William Wallace has consented to be considered as the Protector of the kingdom, to hold it for the rightful sovereign, under the name of Regent."

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