

another; and they continued silent for several minutes, though the wine-cup went round with startling rapidity.

At length one tall and stalwart young man who had drunk very freely, sprang up from his seat and said:

"What is this, my masters? what are we going to do? We have had a serpent amongst us; we have taken him to our bosom, and he has stung us well nigh to the heart. This Scotchman who despises our motives and sneers at our acts—who talks of his reverence for his queen but will not strike a blow on her behalf—this man knows all our secrets: what guarantee that this cavalier who has been seen flaunting it at Elizabeth's court while his lawful queen was pining in a dungeon, will not, has not betrayed us! Eh, my masters! I say he must die, or swear the most solemn oaths not to betray."

A murmur of applause ran round the board: the frequent draughts of sack were doing their work.

"Hugh Huntley," remonstrated Babington, "is a gentleman, a soldier, and a man of honor."

"He is a Scot," retorted the previous speaker, "who is false to his own queen."

This remark was received with marked applause; and subdued murmurs of "He must die the death!" were heard on every side.

"Gentlemen," said Babington, rising, pale but calm, "it is I who am responsible for having brought this man here. It is, therefore I who must compel him to take the oath of secrecy or slay him. Not a moment shall be lost: I will follow him this instant."

And donning his cap and grasping his sword, he rushed from the room.

Babington hurried along the Chepe at topmost speed till he reached St. Paul's Church. Under the shadow cast by the walls and towers of the Gothic structure (which has since been replaced by Sir Christopher Wren's great building) in the moonlight, he beheld a tall lithe figure stalking on before him with easy swinging stride; and Anthony recognized his friend Huntley at once. Hurrying up, he tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hugh!"

"Why, friend Anthony!" exclaimed Huntley in surprise. "Body o' me! man, what wouldst thou of me now?"

"Hugh," said Babington, somewhat embarrassed, "you are acquainted with all our secrets and our lives are at your mercy. My comrades are filled with apprehension that a man who is not one of them should know all their schemes. They have decided that you must take the oath of secrecy, or"—

"Or what?"

"Or die!"

"Pooh, pooh," said Hugh with a light laugh—"a Huntley does not die so easily as that."

"I am commanded to administer the oath," said Babington, "or kill you."

Huntley only laughed again, with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"Will you not take the oath, Hugh?"

"No, Master Babington, I will take no oath," said Huntley, drawing himself up haughtily. "I regard it as an insult to ask me."

"Then draw and defend yourself," cried Babington; and his own blade flashed in the moonlight. "You called us assassins, and while alone I could have run you through with my sword. But, though like the Roman patriot, I scruple not to destroy a tyrant by any means, I would not slay a brave man so. Draw and defend yourself for your life."

In an instant Hugh's rapier was out, and steel crossed and clashed with steel. Babington was a good swordsman, and, with quick fierce thrust and parry pressed his adversary hard. But the Scot was as cool as ice, and he had a wrist of iron. Watching his opportunity till the Englishman began to tire himself with his ineffectual vehemence, Hugh turned on the offensive, pressed him back, caught a desperately aimed thrust upon his guard, and with one rapid twirl of his rapier wrested Babington's sword from his grasp, and sent it flying a dozen yards away. He raised his point to the other's throat. Babington calmly folded his arms and awaited the thrust.

"Striko!" he said.

"No!" replied Huntley lowering his blade and stepping back to take up the other's sword, the hilt of which he presented to him with a courteous bow.

"I will not have an old friend's blood upon my hands. Go thy way, friend Anthony, and tell thy companions that a Scottish gentleman's word of honor is