

KATE DOUGLAS.

FEW monarchs have left behind them a fairer fame than James I. of Scotland. Generous, high-souled, magnanimous, a scholar and a poet of no mean order, he sought to govern in accordance with the principles of justice—principles which hitherto had met with scant recognition from his subjects. For up to the date of his accession, might had been right in Scotland. The strong plundered the weak; the weak robbed the helpless; the nobles fell to fighting whenever the spirit moved them, and at a whim plunged the country in the horrors of civil war.

To a man of the king's character this lawlessness and barbarity was intolerable. The cruelty of the tyrants fired his indignation, while the sufferings of their victims cut him to the heart. He resolved to put an end to this chaos and savagery, to curb the turbulence of his unruly chiefs, and to give equal laws to all.

During the whole of his all too brief career (for, unhappily for Scotland, he was king for only fourteen years) he laboured incessantly to this high end; but in so doing he could not escape the penalty of all great reformers, for if, on the one hand, he gained the loving regard of the more thoughtful of his people, on the other hand, he incurred the undying hate of those who had profited by the old order of things. The freebooting chieftains realised that they were being gradually shorn of their ancient privileges. The right of levying war was theirs no longer. Instead of being a law unto themselves, they found, to their unspeakable disgust, that they were to be bound by the same statutes as the common people! This last was an indignity that no self-respecting chief could endure, and therefore it came about that a number of the nobles grew bitterly hostile to the king and set themselves more or less secretly to compass his death.

Foremost amongst his enemies was a certain Sir Robert Graham, whom James had once mortally offended by committing him to prison for a breach of the law. So deeply had the pride of the Graham been wounded by this indignity that he openly renounced his allegiance, and, flying to the highlands, vowed

that he would kill the king with his own hand. Thus forewarned, James should, of course, have been forearmed; but, like many another honest man, so confident was he in the integrity of his own motive, that he scorned the precautions which one less innocent would have taken.

It was the winter of 1437, and the royal court had travelled north to celebrate the Christmas festival in Perth. There being no palace nor castle in the city, the King and Queen and their immediate attendants had taken up their residence in the Abbey of Black Friars, while the guard were quartered in the neighbouring town. The King and Queen were thus left almost unprotected, and seeing that Perth lies within sight of the Grampians, where it was known that the Graham lay, biding his time, it must be admitted that the prudence of the King was no match for his magnanimity.

The 20th of February was a gala day in Perth, and the Court had spent it in hunting and feasting. During their absence the conspirators had gained access to the abbey, where they broke the locks and removed the bars from the doors of the royal chambers. This was unhappily unnoticed by the hunting-party, who, on their return from the chase, sat down to a sumptuous banquet and passed the evening in mirth and gaiety.

It was just midnight. The last of the guests had departed, and the King was chatting gaily with the Queen and her women before retiring to rest. Suddenly the chamber was lit up by a lurid red glare from without. The women fell silent and looked at each other terrified. The King sprang to the window. The garden below was ablaze with torches and full of armed men. James knew his danger in an instant. "The Graham!" he cried, and he called to the women to keep the door while he sought means of escape. He tried the windows, but they were barred; the doors—they only led him to the enemy. Escape there was none. He was caught like a rat in a pit, with never so much as a dagger to defend him.

As he stood thus baffled, looking on all

sides for a chance of safety, one of the women remembered that there was an old, disused vault under the chamber. James seized the fire-tongs, and by dint of superhuman exertions succeeded in wrenching up some planks in the flooring. He disappeared just as the clang of armed men was heard hurrying down the passage. Keep them out! At any cost, keep them out till the planks were in their place again! The Queen smote at them with all her strength, but they would not sink level with the floor, and every instant those dreadful feet were hurrying nearer and nearer. "Bar the door!" she cried, and the women sprang to obey her, but—treachery! the bars had been removed, and the locks were all broken. What was to be done? Time was everything. A King's life hung on a second.

The assassins were at the door. Was there nothing to stop them? Yes, there was this. Kate Douglas, the Queen's favourite maid, had thrust her arm through the staples—a bar of flesh and blood. The conspirators were checked. They tried the door, but Kate, with clenched teeth, clung to her post. The Queen toiled on with the frenzy of love and despair, and the planks were at last driven back to their place as the assassins burst into the chamber, and Kate with her arm broken fell fainting to the floor.

It is a thousand pities that this is not the end of the story. But alas, Kate's heroism was only temporarily successful. At first indeed, the murderers were baffled, and they searched the Abbey in vain; but the secret vault was known to some of them, and they, returning to the chamber, wrenched up the floor, discovered the King and barbarously butchered him before the eyes of his Queen.

These were dark days in Scotland, but even at their blackest they were from time to time illuminated by bright deeds of love and loyalty. Kate's devotion has been the theme of poets and historians, and such was the people's pride in her heroine that they gave her a name of honour, and knew her henceforth as Kate Barlass.

G. K. M.

"MY ROOM": OUR ESSAY COMPETITION (FOREIGN).

PRIZE WINNERS AND REPORT.

One Guinea Each.

- Helen Jackson, Mozzuttapore, Tirhoor, Bengal, India.
Muriel F. Carrall, Chefoo, China.
"Armenian Sweet Seventeen," c/o British Post-Office, Smyrna, Asia Minor.

Half-a-Guinea Each.

- Margarida, Pinewood Villa, Portugal.
Cécile Rahier, Rampe 5, Brest, France.
Baroness Rosa Teschenberg IV, Gusshausstrasse No. 12, Vienna.

Honourable Mention.

- Mrs. A. Tooth, Ingleside, P.O. Manitoba, Canada.
"Arrow," Ottawa, Canada.
"Wattleblossom," Elonera, Wheatland Road, Malvern, Victoria, Australia.
"Trinidad Heliotrope," Duke Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad, B.W.I.
Lucie Nathan, Avenue des Champs Elysees, Paris.
Agnes Young Gemmill, c/o Freifrau von Masschall, Neisse, Schlesien, Germany.

REPORT.

The Foreign Competition Papers, describing "My Room," which have just arrived, have afforded the Editor unusual pleasure and encouragement; for not only have English girls dwelling in all parts of the world competed, but foreigners, including Armenians, Germans, French, Spanish and Portuguese, have done the same, and have sent in papers graphically described and exceedingly well-written in English, which to them is a foreign tongue; and to add to his pleasure one and all speak of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER as a friend who has elevated their tastes and helped them to live higher and nobler lives.

A Portuguese married woman, twenty-nine years of age, says: "I am a reader of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER from its very beginning, and it has taught me many a useful lesson both as a single and as a married woman. I do not know any other publication so complete and so thoroughly good as this one; and one of my objects in teaching my children English is that they may read it and learn by it the many lessons of usefulness, kindness and helpfulness that I have myself learnt of it."

A reader from New Zealand says: "I look upon THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER as having been a very valuable friend to myself and family, and I thank you with all my heart for the way in which it has helped me. I trust the Paper may long live to be a comfort and help to many more busy mothers and make the young folk of sterling worth, and pure and beautiful minds."

This is exactly what the Editor has aimed at from its very commencement, and he is deeply thankful that up to this time it should have fulfilled its mission, and with God's blessing he hopes to increase its usefulness and comfort to the girls all over the world.

If, as has been said, there is an atmosphere about houses, there certainly is about the rooms of individuals, and the Editor feels it possible, from the descriptions given, to picture the owners of the rooms as they sit reading THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER, whether in the log houses of Canada or Australia, or in the sunny rooms of India, China or Armenia, and it is a special satisfaction to him to hear that in all the rooms THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER holds an honoured place.