

CHAPTER IV

THE MAGICIAN

THE sun was beginning to prick out the black crags on the brow of Ben Vrackie as Montrose and his companion left the Castle.

"Promise of a fair day, Pate," said the Marquis, like a hunter sniffing the wind in satisfaction.

"And a hot as well," returned Pate, thinking of feuds and bloodshed. "Hark you how blithely their chanter's discourse for the onset. Were your lordship's coming delayed another hour these spit-fires would be quenching their rage in each other's blood. I would we had them in a fitter humour."

"Patience till we shuffle the cards, Pate," rejoined Montrose lightly. "We will presently divert their rage to a worthier purpose. There has been grievous ruffling of feathers, as I can see. The Atholmen, as one surmises, somewhat disliked the manner of Col-kitto's coming, and in consequence took to the whetting of dirks. 'Tis a pretty way these Murrays, Robertsons, and Stewarts have of conducting an argument. On his side likewise, friend Alastair must needs appeal to the logic of pikes and Lochaber