

Seeking Ramorgny, Rothsay communicated to him the intentions of his mother, and the commands of his father and the nation, and asked his advice in so trying an emergency.

'By your father's crown,' cried Ramorgny, 'I see nothing for it but to obey. The difficulty lies in the selection; for, if I am able to appreciate the beauty of woman, thou wilt have to choose between a crow and a rook.—Elizabeth of Dunbar is the descendant of Black Agnes, who defended that old castle, in the days of the second David, against the arms of the Duke of Salisbury; and Elizabeth of Douglas cannot fail to have in her some portion of the blood of the black Earl, who fell in Spain, trusting to the protecting charm of Robert's heart, which he carried with him in a casket. So thou seest the black choice thou hast got; and the matter is not mended by having two in thy option, if the old proverb carries faith, which sayeth that, 'Two blacks will not make a white.'"

"By the faith of a prince," replied the Duke, "it is a black business; but thou hast been talking genealogically, good Ramorgny, while I wished to have thy opinion physically. Blood doth not follow the high law of the mountain stream, by getting more maddy as it descends—neither are men and women of the nature of the gaffled cocks we used to fight at the mains on the inch of Perth, which send down their fighting propensities to the tenth gallinaceous generation. The two Besses may be whiter than their progenitors, and of less pugnacious propensities!"

"Ha! thy argument, good lieutenant," cried Sir John, "hath the goodly property of proving two things:—In the first place, it proves that the two Besses may have white skins; and, secondly, that thou mayest have a white liver; for, if courage hath no descent but in cocks, thou canst not boast of having the heart of the first Robert!"

"Hold! thou art too severe," cried Rothsay, "and not logical. Thou art mixing up actuality with potentiality—for that my liver is not white, is proved by the blue evidences I painted on thy back when, in the gipsy tent at Bothwell, I fought thee for a kiss of the brown morris dancer, Marion of Leghorn, who, having given me the reward of my victory, dressed thy wounds for pity's sake, and then cudgelled thee for mine."

"I could turn thy argument against thee," answered Ramorgny; "for thy courage was so much at fault that thou didst require the aid of an Italian morris-dancer to do that which good King Robert would have done himself. But we have wandered from the two Besses, whom it now behoves us to take up, and treat with more respect. What is thy course?"

"As lieutenant of Scotland, I commission thee Sir John de Ramorgny, to repair to the castle of Dunbar, and, thereafter, to that of Douglas, to examine the persons of Elizabeth of Dunbar and Elizabeth Douglas—to note the height of their persons—the hue of their skins—the colour of their eyes—and the nature of their dispositions—and, thereafter, to report as becometh a trusty and faithful commissioner of the King."

"Thou shalt be obeyed," answered Ramorgny; "but if the commissioner may be allowed to judge of the matter of his mission I would suggest that, in my opinion, thou hast left out the most important part of the instructions."

"What is that?" inquired the Prince.

"The Dowery, to be sure," answered Ramorgny. "What are complexions and dispositions to golden acres? What carest the housewife, who wanteth strong broth for the colour of the capon's tail? ha!"

"We will leave that to the Queen," said the Duke, "Her Majesty wisheth to put me up to sale, and knock me down to the highest bidder. We can bring the Earls to whet in a few acres of each other, and of the pigeons, both equally fat, and brought in equally within shot, I, to please my fairer may strike the fairest."

Ramorgny was satisfied, and proceeded on his mission. He first went to the residence of March, which, at that time, was in a castle situated near the town of Dunse; the castle of Dunbar having been, during the late wars, so much shattered that it required to be put in a state of repair. Ramorgny's rank procured him admittance to the family of the Earl, and his intimacy with Rothsay was sufficient recommendation to entitle him to the greatest attention and respect. March viewed his visit as one of examination and discovery, and took the precaution to prepare his daughter to treat him as the friend and confidant of her future husband. A grand dinner was got up in honour of the knight,