

THE PAGE OF JAMES V. OF SCOTLAND.

Translated from the French by S. A. C., with the author's permission.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KIRKLISTON CAMP.

Our reader has doubtless not forgotten that, according to the plan arranged by the Cardinal, a small band of men, who were to serve as an escort to the King, was to wait not far from the postern on the side of the castle opposite to the river, the key of which had been entrusted to Francis, whose office was to conduct James out of the fortress.

"Then, if fortune smiles upon us, Shell, the King shall sleep this evening in Edinburgh. I pray it may be so."

"Amen, my lord," responded Shell; "but I doubt it. I have said forebodings, and I am sorry that you left the Black Gorge, where you would have been in greater security."

"None of these cowardly fears, Master Shell," replied Cardinal Beaton; "for it was none other than a knight, and not a military attache of a knight, who was to be the first to receive James V. on free ground. As to danger, there is none. Francis, our little page, in whom I have great confidence, will make good use of the surprise occasioned by Sir Walter's attack to escape with the King, and we shall be at Kirkliston before those at Melrose have discovered his flight."

"May your words prove true, my lord. In any case we shall not be kept long in suspense, for already the day begins to dawn, and it seems to me as if the wind bore towards us the clash of arms. Either I am very much mistaken or Sir Walter is beginning the assault."

"Let us rein our friends, then," said the Cardinal, "and wait in silence." Followed by Shell, Beaton returned to the little band, and an hour passed in silent expectation. As time went on the greater grew the Cardinal's impatience. Day was advancing more and more, and soon it would be impossible to hide themselves. The King did not appear, and the postern remained pitilessly closed.

"He comes not," at length exclaimed the Cardinal. "All is lost! Oh, my God! can the young page have betrayed us?" "Do not think such a thing, my lord," said Shell, "I know that young Frenchman well, and he is incapable of treachery."

"Nevertheless, you see," replied Beaton, "the King comes not." "Wait," rejoined Shell quickly. "It seems to me that the postern is being opened."

"This surmise was true. It was opened, and a group of people appeared outside. "It is they," said the Cardinal, "and he was about to go forward, when Shell drew him back, saying: "Take care! Supposing it were not the King?"

the place by surprise, he had been himself surprised. "There can be no doubt," said Lennox, highly incensed, "we have been sold to the Douglas, and the traitor can be no other than that young page, who know all our secrets. What are we to do now? What are we to do?"

"Sir Walter, Lennox, the Cardinal, and the other chiefs of the enterprise, at once assembled in council. The Cardinal proposed to march upon Edinburgh. "A coup de main," he said, "might surprise the city, and put it into the hands of the King's partisans. Once in possession of the capital, it would be easy to rally the citizens who are enemies of the Douglas, and thus force Angus to set the King at liberty."

"This advice was upheld by some, but combated by many others, who reasoned very justly that as long as the King was not with them such an attempt would be looked upon simply as a revolt, and would cause them to be regarded as conspirators. This was a strong argument, and weighed with many of the lords. Their ardor had been cooled by the bad success of the enterprise, and they feared to see the Cardinal throw himself into great danger, the results of which would inevitably be felt by themselves. Sir Walter Scott, who was greatly discouraged by his defeat and the declaration of his clan, gave it as his opinion that, their concerted measures having failed, there was nothing left but to return to their own domain, and defer to a more auspicious moment the attempt to liberate the King. Notwithstanding the opposition of Beaton, who could not thus relinquish the hope he had so long cherished of seeing James V. once more free, Sir Walter's counsel prevailed, and already the chiefs were preparing to issue orders for departure, when Lennox, who till now had listened in silence, burst forth:

"Stop!" he cried, "stop, by St. Dunstan! Are these in truth Scottish nobles that I hear speak thus? What will be thought of us when one day it is said, 'The King was held in close captivity by the Douglas: Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch, Lord Allan of Duffries, Sir James Bilsdon of Bilsdon Moor, the Earl of Lennox, and many others who had taken up arms for the delivery of James V. fled like cowards after their first defeat, as though we had staked our own loyalty and courage on the conduct of a young Frenchman who had proved to be a traitor?'"

"My lord," said Shell, who had drawn near the group, and had caught the final words, "pardon me for daring to interrupt you; but you are accusing the memory of a child who has not as yet been tried, for I have certain proof to the contrary."

"What!" cried the Cardinal, "the memory! What are you saying?" "Alas, my lord! the page and his servant have fallen victims to the treachery which you impute to the young Frenchman."

"What do you mean? Speak, speak!" "I heard this brave boy, he whom I have loved ever since the day when he made me do the first good action I ever did in my life—I heard him called 'traitor and unworthy,' and my mind revolted against it, and I said to myself, 'It is impossible that so brave a lad should be capable of treachery.' So I determined to procure information, and I can now still render him a service by clearing his character, and preventing his name from becoming a byword of reproach. Alas! it will be the last service I shall render him."

"He is, then, dead!" cried the Cardinal with emotion, for he had always loved Francis. "Poor child! And I was accusing him!" "But what is it that has happened?" asked Lennox impatiently, hoping to find in the soldier's words the explanation of the warning given to the Douglas.

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"Let the hand that is armed in the holy cause, let the great worker of the deliverance, bless a poor sinful woman!" The Cardinal having complied with her request, the old woman rose, and in a fervent tone she said: "Who has dared to call traitor one who is truly a martyr? Who is he that has dared to attach infamy to him who was the companion of the King who suffers? He has lied!"

"She was silent for a few moments. Her face, which once had been beautiful, assumed a stern and resolute aspect. She looked from one to another of the group around her, but seeing the chiefs were waiting in silence for her to continue, she resumed: "Yes, yes! he who said that has lied, and doubtless he who put forward that accusation in order to hide his own cowardice, which urged him to give up the cause he had espoused. If that one wishes to go, let him go. Who would keep him back? The martyr King, like God, needs only devoted servants. As to the child, hear what I shall say, and let the courage of that fearless youth serve as an example to older and warlike men."

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"Scolded and escaped her, but none of the gentlemen who witnessed the scene thought of interrupting her, notwithstanding the imminent danger hanging over them, so strong was the interest awakened in them by this strange woman. At length, wiping away her tears, she continued: "I have not told you all, and, composing herself, she went on: "Where was I? Ah! this is what took place under my eyes—yes, I see it now. I soon arrived at the gates of Edinburgh. The soldiers of the King issued forth from the city, and advanced in my direction, the mountaineer amongst them, who, addressing the chief of the band, said: 'You will obey the Earl's orders; as for me, I return at once to Melrose to inform them there of what I have learnt.' I glanced at the man to whom this pretended mountaineer was speaking. It was he whom I now saw again after a lapse of twenty years. The enormous scar on his face! I soon recognized him, and he recognized me. The enormous scar on his face! I soon recognized him, and he recognized me."

"I heard this brave boy, he whom I have loved ever since the day when he made me do the first good action I ever did in my life—I heard him called 'traitor and unworthy,' and my mind revolted against it, and I said to myself, 'It is impossible that so brave a lad should be capable of treachery.' So I determined to procure information, and I can now still render him a service by clearing his character, and preventing his name from becoming a byword of reproach. Alas! it will be the last service I shall render him."

"He is, then, dead!" cried the Cardinal with emotion, for he had always loved Francis. "Poor child! And I was accusing him!" "But what is it that has happened?" asked Lennox impatiently, hoping to find in the soldier's words the explanation of the warning given to the Douglas.

"Here, my lord," said Shell, "is old Peggy, who will repeat to you what she has just said to me." He made a sign, and the old woman, with her hair all dishevelled, advanced to the middle of the group. After looking in silence at those who composed it, she at last perceived the Cardinal, and, in spite of the warlike apparel which so altered his appearance, knelt at his feet and bent her head.

"Let the hand that is armed in the holy cause, let the great worker of the deliverance, bless a poor sinful woman!" The Cardinal having complied with her request, the old woman rose, and in a fervent tone she said: "Who has dared to call traitor one who is truly a martyr? Who is he that has dared to attach infamy to him who was the companion of the King who suffers? He has lied!"

"She was silent for a few moments. Her face, which once had been beautiful, assumed a stern and resolute aspect. She looked from one to another of the group around her, but seeing the chiefs were waiting in silence for her to continue, she resumed: "Yes, yes! he who said that has lied, and doubtless he who put forward that accusation in order to hide his own cowardice, which urged him to give up the cause he had espoused. If that one wishes to go, let him go. Who would keep him back? The martyr King, like God, needs only devoted servants. As to the child, hear what I shall say, and let the courage of that fearless youth serve as an example to older and warlike men."

She paused, and passed her hand over her forehead, as if striving to collect her thoughts, and then said: "I had seen the young man set out, and the very sign of him was enough to cause my heart to follow him to the Black Gorge. It was easy to read in his face the fidelity of his heart and his courage. Six hours had elapsed since the time when he must have reached the Shepherd of the Mountains. I was at my door waiting to see him pass on his return, when the noise of a galloping horse attracted my attention. I looked with the eyes of my body and of my soul to see him who had been near the King and our holy Shepherd. Alas! it was not he, but a man in a mountaineer's dress, who asked me the way

to Edinburgh. I saw that he had come from the mountains, and thought it might be a messenger in the holy cause, so I pointed out the road to him. But hardly had he left me, when a doubt came into my mind. Never did a mountaineer wear his plaid in the way he did. 'He is no mountaineer!' I cried. I know not why; no doubt God enlightens me. The thought that occurred to me that, if he were not a mountaineer, he would probably be an enemy of the King or of his faith or adorns, and throwing a cloak over my old shoulders, I set out in great haste towards the gate of Edinburgh. What was I going to do? I knew not, but God was with me, urging me on, saying to me 'walk,' as He said before to the cursed Jew Assurus, only the Lord was not irritated with me, as He was with the wicked Jew: His voice was sweet and persuasive within me, and the history of my life and its sorrows rose up before me. I saw myself once more a young girl, then the wife of a monster of iniquity. Oh, yes, yes, a monster!" she repeated wildly, "though you do not know that man. It was—"

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