

will say nothing against it; and, as I bethink me, it were better he should stay to see the dismissal of this same Piercie Shafton."

"I receive him as your hostage, nevertheless, and shall treat him as such," said the Earl of Murray. But Foster, turning away as if to give directions to Bolton and his men, affected not to hear this observation.

"There rides a faithful servant of his most beautiful and Sovereign Lady," said Murray aside to Morton. "Happy man! he knows not whether the execution of her commands may not cost him his head; and yet he is most certain that to leave them unexecuted will bring disgrace and death without reprieve. Happy are they who are not only subjected to the caprices of Dame Fortune, but held bound to account and be responsible for them, and that to a Sovereign as moody and fickle as her humorous ladyship herself!"

"We also have a female Sovereign, my lord," said Morton.

"We have so, Douglas," said the Earl, with a suppressed sigh; "but it remains to be seen how long a female hand can hold the reins of power in a realm so wild as ours. We will now go on to St. Mary's, and see ourselves after the state of that House.—Glendinning, look to that woman and protect her.—What the fiend, man, hast thou got in thine arms?—an infant, as I live!—where couldst thou find such a charge, at such a place and moment?"

Halbert Glendinning briefly told the story. The Earl rode forward to the place where the body of Julian Avenel lay, with his unhappy companion's arms wrapt around him, like the trunk of an uprooted oak borne down by the tempest with all its ivy garlands. Both were cold-dead. Murray was touched in an unwonted degree, remembering, perhaps, his own birth. "What have they to answer for, Douglas," he said, "who thus abuse the sweetest gifts of affection?"

The Earl of Morton, unhappy in his marriage was a libertine in his amours.

"You must ask that question of Henry Warden, my lord, or of John Knox—I am but a wild counsellor in women's matters."

"Forward to St. Mary's," said the Earl; "pass the word on—Glendinning, give the infant to this same female cavalier, and let it be taken charge of. Let no dishonour be done to the dead bodies, and call on the country to bury or remove them.—Forward, I say, my masters!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Gone to be married?—Gone to swear a peace!

King John.

THE news of the lost battle, so quickly carried by the fugitives to the village and convent, had spread the greatest alarm among the inhabitants. The Sacristan and other monks counselled flight; the Treasurer recommended that the church-plate should be offered as a tribute to bribe the English officer; the Abbot alone was unmoved and undaunted.

"My brethren," he said, "since God has not given our people victory in the combat, it must be because he requires of us, his spiritual soldiers, to fight the good fight of martyrdom, a conflict in which nothing but our own faint-hearted cowardice can make us fail of victory. Let us assume, then, the armour of faith, and prepare, if it be necessary, to die under the ruin of these shrines, to the service of which we have devoted ourselves. Highly honoured are we all in this distinguished summons, from our dear brother Nicholas, whose grey hairs have been preserved until they should be surrounded by the crown of martyrdom, down to my beloved son Edward, who, arriving at the vineyard at the latest hour of

the day, is yet permitted to share its toils with those who have laboured from the morning. Be of good courage, my children. I dare not, like my sainted predecessors, promise to you that you shall be preserved by miracle—I and you are alike unworthy of that especial interposition, which, in earlier times, turned the sword of sacrilege against the bosom of tyrants by whom it was wielded, daunted the hardened hearts of heretics with prodigies, and called down hosts of angels to defend the shrine of God and of the Virgin. Yet, by Heavenly aid, you shall this day see that your Father and Abbot will not disgrace the mitre which sits upon his brow. Go to your cells, my children, and exercise your private devotions. Array yourselves also in alb and cope, as for our most solemn festivals, and be ready, when the tolling of the largest bell announces the approach of the enemy, to march forth to meet them in solemn procession. Let the church be opened to afford such refuge as may be to those of our vassals, who, from their exertion in this day's unhappy battle, or other cause, are particularly apprehensive of the rage of the enemy. Tell Sir Piercie Shafton, if he has escaped the fight"—

"I am here, most venerable Abbot," replied Sir Piercie; "and if it so seemeth meet to you, I will presently assemble such of the men as have escaped this escaramouche, and will renew the resistance, even unto the death. Certes, you will learn from all, that I did my part in this unhappy matter. Had it pleased Julian Avenel to have attended to my counsel, specially in somewhat withdrawing of his main battle, even as you may have marked the heron eschew the stoop of the falcon, receiving him rather upon his beak than upon his wing, affairs, as I do conceive, might have had a different face, and we might then, in a more bellicose manner, have maintained that affray. Nevertheless, I would not be understood to speak any thing in disregard of Julian Avenel, whom I saw fall fighting manfully with his face to his enemy, which hath banished from my memory the unseemly term of "meddling coxcomb," with which it

pleased him something rashly to qualify my advice, and for which, had it pleased Heaven and the saints to have prolonged the life of that excellent person, I had it bound upon my soul to have put him to death with my own hand."

"Sir Piercie," said the Abbot, at length interrupting him, "our time allows brief leisure to speak what might have been."

"You are right, most venerable Lord and Father," replied the incorrigible Euphuist; "the præterite, as grammarians have it, concerns frail mortality less than the future mood, and indeed our cogitations respect chiefly the present. In a word, I am willing to head all who will follow me, and offer such opposition as manhood and mortality may permit, to the advance of the English, though they be my own countrymen; and be assured, Piercie Shafton will measure his length, being five feet ten inches, on the ground as he stands, rather than give two yards in retreat, according to the usual motion in which we retrograde."

"I thank you, Sir Knight," said the Abbot, "and I doubt not that you would make your words good; but it is not the will of Heaven that carnal weapons should rescue us. We are called to endure, not to resist, and may not waste the blood of our innocent commons in vain—Fruitless opposition becomes not men of our profession; they have my commands to resign the sword and the spear,—God and our Lady have not blessed our banner."

"Bethink you, reverend lord," said Piercie Shafton, very eagerly, "ere you resign the defence that is in your power—there are many posts near the entry of this village, where brave men might live or die to the advantage; and I have this additional motive to make defence; the safety, namely, of a fair friend, who, I hope, hath escaped the hands of the heretics."

"I understand you, Sir Piercie," said the Abbot—"you mean the daughter of our Convent's miller?"

"Reverend my lord," said Sir Piercie, not without hesitation, "the fair Mysinda is, as may be in some sort

alleged, the daughter of one who mechanically prepareth corn to be manipulated into bread, without which we could not exist, and which is therefore an employment in itself honourable, nay, necessary. Nevertheless, if the purest sentiments of a generous mind, streaming forth like the rays of the sun reflected by a diamond, may ennoble one who is in some sort the daughter of a mendicant mechanic"——

"I have no time for all this, Sir Knight," said the Abbot; "be it enough to answer, that with our will we war no longer with carnal weapons. We of the spirituality will teach you of the temporality how to die in cold blood, our hands not clenched for resistance, but folded for prayer—our minds not filled with jealous hatred, but with Christian meekness and forgiveness—our ears not deafened nor our senses confused by the sound of clamorous instruments of war; but, on the contrary, our voices composed to Halleluiah, Kyrie-Eleison, and Salve Regina, and our blood temperate and cold, as those who think upon reconciling themselves with God, not of avenging themselves of their fellow-mortals."

"Lord Abbot," said Sir Piercie, "this is nothing to the fate of my Molinara, whom, I beseech you to observe, I will not abandon, while golden hilt and steel blade bide together on my falchion. I commanded her not to follow us to the field, and yet methought I saw her in her page's attire amongst the rear of the combatants."

"You must seek elsewhere for the person in whose fate you are so deeply interested," said the Abbot; "and at present I will pray of your knighthood to inquire concerning her at the church, in which all our more defenceless vassals have taken refuge. It is my advice to you, that you also abide by the horns of the altar; and Sir Piercie Shafton," he added, "be of one thing secure, that if you come to harm, it will involve the whole of this brotherhood; for never, I trust, will the meanest of us buy safety at the expense of surrendering a friend or a guest. Leave us, my son, and may God be your aid!"

When Sir Piercie Shafton had departed, and the Abbot was about to betake himself to his own cell, he was surprised by an unknown person anxiously requiring a conference, who, being admitted, proved to be no other than Henry Warden. The Abbot started as he entered, and exclaimed, angrily,—“Ha! are the few hours that fate allows him who may last wear the mitre of this house, not to be excused from the intrusion of heresy? Dost thou come,” he said, “to enjoy the hopes which fate holds out to thy demented and accursed sect, to see the besom of destruction sweep away the pride of old religion—to deface our shrines—to mutilate and lay waste the bodies of our benefactors, as well as their sepulchres—to destroy the pinnacles and carved work of God’s house and Our Lady’s?”

“Peace, William Allan!” said the Protestant preacher, with dignified composure; “for none of these purposes do I come. I would have these stately shrines deprived of the idols which, no longer simply regarded as the effigies of the good and the wise, have become the objects of foul idolatry. I would otherwise have its ornaments subsist, unless as they are, or may be, a snare to the souls of men; and especially do I condemn those ravages which have been made by the heady fury of the people stung into zeal against will-worship by bloody persecution. Against such wanton devastations I lift my testimony.”

“Idle distinguisher that thou art!” said the Abbot Eustace, interrupting him; “what signifies the pretext under which thou dost despoil the house of God? and why at this present emergence wilt thou insult the master of it by thy ill-omened presence?”

“Thou art unjust, William Allan,” said Warden; “but I am not the less settled in my resolution. Thou hast protected me sometime since at the hazard of thy rank, and what I know thou holdest still dearer, at the risk of thy reputation with thine own sect. Our party is now uppermost, and, believe me, I have come down the valley, in which thou didst quarter me for sequestration’s

sake, simply with the wish to keep my engagements to thee."

"Ay," answered the Abbot, "and it may be, that my listening to that worldly and infirm compassion which pleaded with me for thy life, is now avenged by this impending judgment. Heaven hath smitten, it may be, the erring shepherd, and scattered the flock."

"Think better of the Divine judgments," said Warden. "Not for thy sins, which are those of thy blinded education and circumstances; not for thine own sins, William Allan, art thou stricken, but for the accumulated guilt which thy mis-named church hath accumulated on her head, and those of her votaries, by the errors and corruptions of ages."

"Now, by my sure belief in the Rock of Peter," said the Abbot, "thou dost rekindle the last spark of human indignation for which my bosom has fuel—I thought I might not again have felt the impulse of earthly passion, and it is thy voice which once more calls me to the expression of human anger! yes, it is thy voice that comest to insult me in my hour of sorrow, with these blasphemous accusations of that church which hath kept the light of Christianity alive from the times of the Apostles till now."

"From the times of the Apostles?" said the preacher eagerly. "*Negatur, Gulielme Allan*—the primitive church differed as much from that of Rome, as did light from darkness, which, did time permit, I should speedily prove. And worse dost thou judge, in saying I come to insult thee in thy hour of affliction, being here, God wot, with the Christian wish of fulfilling an engagement I had made to my host, and of rendering myself to thy will while it had yet power to exercise aught upon me, and if it might so be, to mitigate in thy behalf the rage of the victors whom God hath sent as a scourge to thy obstinacy."

"I will none of thy intercession," said the Abbot, sternly; "the dignity to which the church has exalted me, never should have swelled my bosom more proudly

in the time of the highest prosperity, than it doth at this crisis—I ask nothing of thee, but the assurance that my lenity to thee hath been the means of perverting no soul to Satan, that I have not given to the wolf any of the stray lambs whom the Great Shepherd of souls had intrusted to my charge."

"William Allan," answered the Protestant, "I will be sincere with thee. What I promised I have kept—I have withheld my voice from speaking even good things. But it has pleased Heaven to call the maiden Mary Avelnel to a better sense of faith than thou and all the disciples of Rome can teach. Her I have aided with my humble power—I have extricated her from the machinations of evil spirits, to which she and her house were exposed during the blindness of their Romish superstition, and, praise be to my Master, I have not reason to fear she will again be caught in thy snares."

"Wretched man!" said the Abbot, unable to suppress his rising indignation, "is it to the Abbot of Saint Mary's that you boast having misled the soul of a dweller in Our Lady's Halidome into the paths of foul error and damning heresy?—Thou dost urge me, Wellwood, beyond what it becomes me to bear, and movest me to employ the few moments of power I may yet possess, in removing from the face of the earth one, whose qualities, given by God, have been so utterly perverted as thine to the service of Satan."

"Do thy pleasure," said the preacher; "thy vain wrath shall not prevent my doing my duty to advantage thee, where it may be done without neglecting my higher call. I go to the Earl of Murray."

Their conference, which was advancing fast into bitter disputation, was here interrupted by the deep and sullen toll of the largest and heaviest bell of the Convent, a sound famous in the chronicles of the Community, for dispelling of tempests, and putting to flight demons, but which now only announced danger, without affording any means of warding against it. Hastily repeating his orders, that all the brethren should attend in the choir,

arrayed for solemn procession, the Abbot ascended to the battlements of the lofty Monastery, by his own private staircase, and there met the Sacristan, who had been in the act of directing the tolling of the huge bell, which fell under his duty.

"It is the last time I shall discharge mine office, most venerable Father and Lord," said he to the Abbot, "for yonder come the Philistines; but I would not that the large bell of Saint Mary's should sound for the last time, otherwise than in true and full tone—I have been a sinful man for one of our holy profession," added he, looking upward, "yet may I presume to say, not a bell hath sounded out of tune from the tower of the house while Father Philip had the superintendence of the chime and the belfry."

The Abbot, without reply, cast his eyes towards the path, which winding around the mountain, descends upon Kennaquhair from the south-east. He beheld at a distance a cloud of dust, and heard the neighing of many horses, while the occasional sparkle of the long line of spears, as they came downwards into the valley, announced that the band came thither in arms.

"Shame on my weakness!" said Abbot Eustace, dashing the tears from his eyes; "my sight is too much dimmed to observe their motions—look, my son Edward," for his favourite novice had again joined him, "and tell me what ensigns they bear."

"They are Scottish men, when all is done," exclaimed Edward—"I see the white crosses—it may be the Western Borderers, or Fernieherst and his clan."

"Look at the banner," said the Abbot; "tell me what are the blazonries?"

"The arms of Scotland," said Edward, "the lion and its treasure, quartered, as I think, with three cushions—Can it be the royal standard?"

"Alas! no," said the Abbot, "it is that of the Earl of Murray. He hath assumed with his new conquest the badge of the valiant Randolph, and hath dropped from his hereditary coat the bend which indicates his own base

birth—would to God he may not have blotted it also from his memory, and aim as well at possessing the name, as the power, of a king!"

"At least, my father," said Edward, "he will secure us from the violence of the Southron."

"Ay, my son, as the shepherd secures a silly lamb from the wolf, which he destines in due time to his own banquet. Oh, my son, evil days are on us! A breach has been made in the walls of our sanctuary—thy brother hath fallen from the faith. Such news brought my last secret intelligence—Murray has already spoken of rewarding his services with the hand of Mary Avenel."

"Of Mary Avenel!" said the novice, tottering towards and grasping hold of one of the carved pinnacles which adorned the proud battlement.

"Ay, of Mary Avenel, my son, who has also abjured the faith of her fathers. Weep not, my Edward, weep not, my beloved son! or weep for their apostasy, and not for their union—Bless God, who hath called thee to himself, out of the tents of wickedness; but for the grace of Our Lady and Saint Benedict, thou also hadst been a castaway."

"I endeavour, my father," said Edward, "I endeavour to forget; but what I would now blot from my memory has been the thought of all my former life—Murray dare not forward a match so unequal in birth."

"He dares do what suits his purpose—The Castle of Avenel is strong, and needs a good castellan, devoted to his service; as for the difference of their birth, he will mind it no more than he would mind defacing the natural regularity of the ground, were it necessary he should erect upon it military lines and entrenchments. But do not droop for that—awaken thy soul within thee, my son. Think you part with a vain vision, an idle dream, nursed in solitude and in inaction.—I weep not, yet what am I now like to lose?—Look at these towers, where saints dwelt, and where heroes have been buried—Think that I, so briefly called to preside over the pious flock, which has dwelt here since the first light of Christianity, may

be this day written down the last father of this holy community—Come, let us descend, and meet our fate. I see them approach near to the village.”

The Abbot descended, the novice cast a glance around him; yet the sense of the danger impending over the stately structure, with which he was now united, was unable to banish the recollection of Mary Avenel.—“His brother’s bride!” he pulled the cowl over his face, and followed his Superior.

The whole bells of the Abbey now added their peal to the death-toll of the largest which had so long sounded. The Monks wept and prayed as they got themselves into the order of their procession for the last time, as seemed but too probable.

“It is well our Father Boniface hath retired to the inland,” said Father Philip; “he could never have put over this day, it would have broken his heart!”

“God be with the soul of Abbot Ingilram!” said old Father Nicholas, “there were no such doings in his days.—They say we are to be put forth of the cloisters; and how I am to live any where else than where I have lived for these seventy years, I wot not—the best is, that I have not long to live any where.”

A few moments after this the great gate of the Abbey was flung open, and the procession moved slowly forward from beneath its huge and richly adorned gate-way. Cross and banner, pix and chalice, shrines containing relics, and censers steaming with incense, preceded and were intermingled with the long and solemn array of the brotherhood, in their long black gowns and cowls, with their white scapularies hanging over them, the various officers of the convent each displaying his proper badge of office. In the centre of the procession came the Abbot, surrounded and supported by his chief assistants. He was dressed in his habit of high solemnity, and appeared as much unconcerned as if he had been taking his usual part in some ordinary ceremony. After him came the inferior persons of the convent; the novices in their albs or white dresses, and the lay brethren distin-

guished by their beards, which were seldom worn by the Fathers. Women and children, mixed with a few men, came in the rear, bewailing the apprehended desolation of their ancient sanctuary. They moved, however, in order, and restrained the marks of their sorrow to a low wailing sound, which rather mingled with than interrupted the measured chant of the Monks.

In this order the procession entered the market-place of the village of Kennaquhair, which was then, as now, distinguished by an ancient cross of curious workmanship, the gift of some former monarch of Scotland. Close by the cross, of much greater antiquity, and scarcely less honoured, was an immensely large oak-tree, which perhaps had witnessed the worship of the Druids, ere the stately Monastery to which it adjoined, had raised its spires in honour of the Christian faith. Like the Bentang-tree of the African villages, or the Plaistow-oak mentioned in White’s Natural History of Selbourne, this tree was the rendezvous of the villagers, and regarded with peculiar veneration; a feeling common to most nations, and which perhaps may be traced up to the remote period when the patriarch feasted the angels under the oak at Mamre.¹²

The monks formed themselves each in their due place around the cross, while under the ruins of the aged tree crowded the old and the feeble, with others who felt the common alarm. When they had thus arranged themselves, there was a deep and solemn pause. The monks stilled their chant, the lay populace hushed their lamentations, and all awaited in terror and silence the arrival of those heretical forces whom they had been so long taught to regard with fear and trembling.

A distant trampling was at length heard, and the glance of spears was seen to shine through the trees above the village. The sounds increased, and became more thick, one close continuous rushing sound, in which the tread of hoofs was mingled with the ringing of armour. The horsemen soon appeared at the principal entrance which leads into the irregular square or market-place which

forms the centre of the village. They entered two by two, slowly and in the greatest order. The van continued to move on, riding round the open space, until they had attained the utmost point, and then turning their horses' heads to the street, stood fast; their companions followed in the same order, until the whole market-place was closely surrounded with soldiers, and the files who followed, making the same manœuvre, formed an inner line within those who had first arrived, until the place was begirt with a quadruple file of horsemen closely drawn up. There was now a pause, of which the Abbot availed himself, by commanding the brotherhood to raise the solemn chant *De profundis clamavi*. He looked around the armed ranks, to see what impression the solemn sounds made on them. All were silent, but the brows of some had an expression of contempt, and almost all the rest bore a look of indifference; their course had been too long decided to permit past feelings of enthusiasm to be anew awakened by a procession or by a hymn.

"Their hearts are hardened," said the Abbot to himself in dejection, but not in despair; "it remains to see whether those of their leaders are equally obdurate."

The leaders, in the meanwhile, were advancing slowly; and Murray, with Morton, rode in deep conversation before a chosen band of their most distinguished followers, amongst whom came Halbert Glendinning. But the preacher Henry Warden, who, upon leaving the Monastery, had instantly joined them, was the only person admitted to their conference.

"You are determined then," said Morton to Murray, "to give the heiress of Avenel, with all her pretensions to this nameless and obscure young man?"

"Hath not Warden told you," said Murray, "that they have been bred together, and are lovers from their youth upward?"

"And that they are both," said Warden, "by means which may be almost termed miraculous, rescued from the delusions of Rome, and brought within the pale of the true church. My residence at Glendearg hath made

me well acquainted with these things. Ill would it be seen my habit and my calling, to thrust myself into match-making and giving in marriage; but worse were it in me to see your Lordships do needless wrong to the feelings which are proper to our nature, and which, being indulged honestly and under the restraints of religion become a pledge of domestic quiet here, and future happiness in a better world. I say, that you will do ill to rend those ties asunder, and to give this maiden to the kinsman of Lord Morton, though Lord Morton's kinsman he be."

"These are fair reasons, my Lord of Murray," said Morton, "why you should refuse me so simple a boon as to bestow this silly damsel upon young Bennygask. Speak out plainly, my lord; say you would rather see the Castle of Avenel in the hands of one who owes his name and existence solely to your favour, than in the power of a Douglas, and of my kinsman."

"My Lord of Morton," said Murray, "I have done nothing in this matter which should aggrrieve you. This young man Glendinning has done me good service, and may do me more. My promise was in some degree passed to him, and that while Julian Avenel was alive, when aught beside the maiden's lily hand would have been hard to come by; whereas you never thought of such an alliance for your kinsman, till you saw Julian lie dead yonder on the field, and knew his land to be a waif free to the first who could seize it. Come, come, my lord, you do less than justice to your gallant kinsman, in wishing him a bride bred up under the milk-pail; for this girl is a peasant wench in all but the accident of birth. I thought you had more deep respect for the honour of the Douglasses."

"The honour of the Douglasses is safe in my keeping," answered Morton haughtily; "that of other ancient families may suffer as well as the name of Avenel, if rustics are to be matched with the blood of our ancient barons."