

[No. 6,

KING JAMES

AND THE

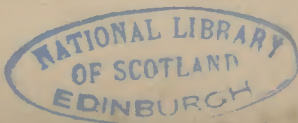
EGYPTIAN ROBBERS,

OR THE

COURT CAVE OF FIFE.



GLASGOW:
PRINTED FOR THE BOOKSELLERS.



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COURT CASE OF THE



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A FEW years before the pride of Scotland had been prostrated by English bows and bills, on the disastrous day of Flodden, the holding of Balmeny, in the county of Fife, was possessed by Walter Colville, then considerably advanced in years. Walter Colville had acquired this small estate by the usual title to possession in the days in which he lived. When a mere stripling, he had followed the latest Earl of Douglas, when the banner of the bloody heart floated defiance to the Royal Stuart. But the wavering conduct of Earl James lost him at Abercorn the bravest of his adherents, and Walter Colville did not disdain to follow the example of the knight of Cadzow. He was rewarded with the hand of the heiress of Balmeny, then a ward of Colville of East Wemyss. That baron could not, of course, hesitate to bestow her on one who brought the king's command to that effect; and, in the brief wooing space of a summer day, Walter saw and loved the lands which were to reward his loyal valour, and wooed and wedded the maiden by law appended to the enjoyment of them. The marriage proved fruitful, for six bold sons sprung up in rapid succession around his table, and one 'fair May' being added at a considerable interval after, Walter felt, so far as his iron nature could feel, the pure and holy joys of rental love, as his eye lighted on the stalwart frames and

glowing aspects of his boys, and on the mild blue eyes and blooming features of the young Edith, who, like a fair pearl set in a carcanet of jaspers, received an added lustre from her singleness. But, alas ! for the stability of human happiness. The truth of the deep-seated belief, that the instrument of our prosperity shall also be that of our decay, was mournfully displayed in the house of Walter Colville. By the sword had he cut his way to the station and wealth he now enjoyed ; by the sword was his habitation rendered desolate, and his grey hairs whitened even before their time. On the field of Bannoekburn—once the scene of a more glorious combat—three of his sons paid with their lives for their adherence to the royal cause. Two more perished with Sir Andrew Wood, when Steven Bull was forced to strike to the ‘Floure and Yellow Carvell.’ The last, regardless of entreaties and commands, followed the fortunes of the ‘White Rose of York,’ when Perken Warbeck, as history malignantly continues to style the last Plantagenet, carried his fair wife and luckless cause to Ireland ; and there young Colville found an untimely fate and bloody grave near Dublin.

Thus bereft of so many goodly objects of his secret pride, the heart of Walter Colville naturally sought to compensate the losses which it had sustained, in an increased exercise of affection towards his daughter. The beauties of infancy had now been succeeded by those of ripening maidenhood. The exuberant laugh which had so often cheered his hours of care or toil, while she was yet a child, had given place to a smile still more endearing to his time-stricken feelings ; face and form had been matured into their most captivating proportions, and nothing remained of the blue-eyed, fair-haired child, that had once elung round his knee, save the artless openness of her disposition, and the unsullied purity of her heart. Yet, strange to tell, the very intensity of his affection was the source of bitter sorrow to her who was its object, and his misdirected desire to secure her happiness threatened to blench, with the paleness of secret sorrow, the cheek it was his dearest wish to deck with an everduring smile of happiness.

Edith Colville was but an infant when her three brothers fell at Sauchie, and had scarcely completed her eighteenth year, when the death of her youngest brother made her at once the object of her father’s undivided regard, and of pursuit to many who saw and were smitten with charms in the heiress of Balmeny, which had failed to attract their attention while her brother yet stood between the maiden and that heritage. But the heart they now deemed worth the

winning, was no longer hers to give. The death of her mother, while she was yet a child, had left her her own mistress long before the period when maternal care is most essential; and Edith's love was sought and won by one who had little but youth and a warm heart to recommend him.

Arthur Winton was the orphan son of a small proprietor in the neighbourhood, who, having been deprived of the best property by what he conceived the injustice of King James III., and the rapacity of his favourite Cochrane, was easily induced to join the insurgent nobles, who wrought the destruction of that monarch. He was, however, disappointed in his expectations of personal reward, having fallen in the conflict; and his son was too young to vindicate his claim in an age so rude as that of which we write.

Walter Colville, whose family had been so sadly thinned in the battle we have mentioned, though they had fought on the other side, naturally bore no good-will to the boy; but his younger son, who was nearly of the same age, viewed him with different feelings. He was much about the house of Balmeny: and, to be brief, he won the affections of the young Edith long before she knew either their nature or their value. Until the departure of young Walter Colville, Arthur's visits were attributed by the old man to his friendship for his son, but when Edith had unhappily become his heirress, he at once attributed them to their proper cause. A stern prohibition of their repetition was the consequence, and the lovers were henceforth reduced to hurried and sorrowful meetings in secret.

On the morning wherein we have chosen to begin the following veritable narrative, the youthful pair had met unobserved, as they imagined, in a shady corner of Balmeny wood, and had begun, the one to lament, and the other to listen, when the sudden apparition of the angry father checked the pleasing current of their imaginings.

He drew his sword as he approached, but the recollection of his seventy years, and his now enfeebled arm crossing his mind, he replaced the useless weapon, and contented himself with demanding how the youth had dared thus clandestinely to meet his daughter.

Arthur attempted to allay his anger, and to plead his passion as he best could; but the grim and angry frown that sat on Walter Colville's brow, as he listened to him, soon shewed how vainly he was speaking, and he ceased in confusion.

'Have you finished, young master,' said Walter, with a sneer. 'Then listen—you are not the wooer I look for to Edith. I should prefer him something richer, something

wiser, and something truer to the king, than any son of your father is likely ever to prove; so set your heart at rest on that matter. And you, giglot, sooth! to your rock and your chisart. But stay; before you go, tell this gallant gay t'prowl no longer about my dwelling. By St Bride; an' he doe' he may chance to meet a fox's fate.'

'Dear father,' said the weeping girl, 'upbraid us not. Never will I disobey you, never be his, without your own consent.'

'Hold there,' replied Walter, smiling grimly, 'I ask n' more.' And he led away the maiden, who dared not so much as steal a parting look.

Arthur Winton bore this fiat of the old man, and the dutiful acquiescence of his daughter, (though he doubtless thought the latter pushed to the very extreme of filial obedience,) not with equanimity, at least with so much of it as enabled him to leave the presence of his mistress and her father with something like composure. He wandered slowly to the beach, which lay at no great distance, as if he had hoped to inhale with the cool breeze that floated from off the waters, some portion of the calmness in which they then lay bound, his mind occupied in turning over ill-assorted plans for the future, ever broken in upon by some intruding recollection of the past. The place where he now walked was one well calculated, according to the creed of those who believe in the power exercised over the mind by the face of external nature, to instil soothing tranquillizing feelings. It was a smooth grassy lawn, forming the bottom of a gentle eminence, undulating and stretching downwards to the pebbly beach, among whose round white stones the quiet waters of the Forth fell kissingly. The view was bounded to the north by the rising eminences we have mentioned, and shut in on the west by the woody promontary which is still crowned by Wemyss Castle. To the eastward, several rocky eminences stretch into the Forth, the more distant still increasing their seaward march, until the bay is closed by the distant point of Kin-craig. Before him lay the silver Forth, and, half-veiled in the distance, the green fields and hills of Lothian, terminated by the picturesque Law of North Berwick, and the great Bass, frowning like some vast leviathan awakening from his sleep. One or two white-sailed barks lay motionless upon the water. The effect of the whole was so stilling and sedative, that Arthur, half forgetting his recent disappointment, stretched himself upon the sward, and abandoned himself to contemplation. While he lay thus chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, the sounds of distant song and merriment ocea-

sionally broke upon his ear. He at first regarded them as the mere offspring of imagination, but at length the choral swell of a seemingly joyous ballad, followed by a hearty far reverberated shout, convinced him that the merry-making was real, and at no great distance. He started to his feet in some alarm, for his first impression was, that the Good Neighbours were holding their revels near him, and he well knew the danger of being detected as a prying overlooker of their mystic merriment. A moment served to dissipate this fear. The voices which he had listened to were too rough and boisterous ever to be mistaken for the singing of those tiny minstrels, whose loudest notes never exceeded in sound the trumpet of the bee. There was no fairy ring round the spot on which he had lain, nor was the hour either the 'ce of day,' or that of midnight, at which, as is well known; the elfin power was most formidable. After looking and listening for some time, he ascertained that the sounds proceeded from a cave which we have not yet mentioned, but which forms a striking ornament to the beach, and an object of considerable interest to the geologist, having been doubtless formed long before the Forth had found its present modest limits. Being anxious to dispel the feelings that now preyed on his peace, by a diversion of whatever kind, he walked towards the place. As he approached, the mirth was renewed with increased vehemence, and he perceived, at the western entrance of the cave, a female, from whose swarthy hue and singular habiliments he at once divined the nature of its present inmates. The woman, whose features were stern and somewhat repulsive, wore a long gown, of some coarse dark-coloured material, which fell almost to her feet, having short wide sleeves, which left the arms at perfect liberty, and, coming up to the neck, was there fastened with a golden brooch. Her head-dress consisted of a red and yellow coloured shawl, twisted fantastically into a conical shape. Pendants of gold hung from her ears, and rings of the same metal, in many of which were set rubies and other sparkling gems, garnished her tawny fingers. Arthur at once recognised an Egyptian or gipsy in the dark-featured damsel who stood before him, and hesitated a moment whether he should pursue the determination of mixing with the revellers within, to which his eager desire of escaping from his present unhappy feelings had prompted him. The Egyptians were in those days of a much darker character than the remnants of their descendants, which, in spite of press-gangs and justice-warrants, still linger amongst us. Murder among themselves was a thing of every-day occurrence, and desperate robberies, committed upon the

king's lieges, by no means rare. The present gang, from their vociferation, seemed in a state of excitement likely to remove any little restraints which the fear of the law's vengeance might at another time have imposed on them; and the features of the woman, contrary to their custom, wore no look of invitation, but rather seemed to deepen into a warning frown the nearer he approached the door at which she was posted. On the other hand, the honour of the race, to such as trusted them, was proverbial. His curiosity to know more intimately the manners of a people so remarkable as the Egyptians then were, and still are—perhaps a latent wish of being able to extract from their prophetic powers some favourable auspice to his almost expiring hopes—or that nameless something which at times impels us to court the danger we at other times shun with care—all conspired to induce him to enter the cave, and he accordingly attempted to do so. In this, however, he was opposed by the gipsy, who, stepping exactly in his way, waved her arm in a repelling attitude; and, seeing him disinclined to obey this silent injunction, coming still closer to him, whispered, 'Get you gone; your life will be endangered if you enter here.'

Before Arthur could reply to this injunction, she who gave it was suddenly attacked by a man, who, issuing from the entrance, struck her a smart blow across the shoulders with a staff which he carried, and then, with a scowling look and angry accent, spoke a few words to her in a language which Arthur understood not. She muttered something in reply, and proceeded towards the beach. 'The woman is mad at times, young sir,' said the man, now addressing Arthur; 'heed her not, I beseech you. We are only a few wandering pair folks, making merry; and if you wish to share our revelry, enter, and welcome. Some of our women may be able to read your weird, should you so incline; you have nothing to fear.'

Arthur was by no means satisfied either that the woman was mad, or that the man meant him fairly; but, as he could not now retreat without betraying his fear to the dark searching eye which the gipsy bent on him, and was besides conscious that he possessed a well-proved sword, and considerable skill and strength in the handling of it, he signified his wish to join the merry-making, and followed the gipsy into the cave.

On entering, he found himself in the interior of a high-roofed cavern, of considerable extent, partly exposed to the seaward side by two arched openings between the lofty recesses of rock which support the roof, that towards the east being the smaller and lower of the two, and the other

rising in height nearly to the roof, affording a view of the Forth, and admitting light to the place.

The inhabitants of the cave had ranged themselves along the north and inner side. Nearest the western entrance, stretched on sacks, sheepskins, cloaks, and other nondescript articles of clothing, sat, or rather lay, ten or twelve men, with rather more than double that number of women, all busily engaged in drinking; farther off, some ragged crones were busily superintending the operation of a wood-fire on a suspended pot; while, farther off still, a few barebacked asses, and a plentiful variety of worse-clad children, were enjoying their common straw.

Arthur was immediately introduced to the company of carousers, some of whom received him with a shout of welcome, but others, with evident dissatisfaction; and he overheard, as he seated himself, what seemed an angry expostulation and reply pass between his conductor and one of the party. This individual, who was evidently the chief of the gang, was an aged man, with a beard of silver-grey, which, as he sat, descended to his lap, entirely covering his breast. His head was quite bald, with the exception of a few hairs that still struggled for existence behind his ears, and this, added to the snowy whiteness of his eye-brows, and the deep wrinkles in his brow and cheeks, would have conferred an air of reverence on his countenance, had not the sinister expression of his small and fiery-looking eyes destroyed the charm. On each side of him sat a young girl, the prettiest of the company; and the familiar manner in which they occasionally lolled on the old man's bosom, and fondled with his neck and beard, shewed the intimate terms on which they lived with him. The rest of the men were of various ages; and, though all of them were marked with that mixed expression of daring recklessness and extreme cunning, which has long been 'the badge of all their tribe,' they attracted (with one exception) little of Arthur's attention. Of the women, the very young ones were extremely pretty, the middle-aged and old ones more than equally ugly. Young and old, pretty and ill-favoured, all were alike deficient in that retiring modesty of expression, without which no face can be accounted truly lovely, and the want of which darkens into hideousness the plainness of homely features. They joined freely in the draughts which their male companions were making from the horns, which, filled with wine and ale, circulated among the company, and laughed as loud and joked as boldly as they did.

Arthur seated himself in silence, and, something neglectful

of the kindness of the female who sat next him, occupied himself in surveying the motley group before him. His eye soon rested on a man seated next the damsel who occupied the place immediately to the left of the chief, and the moment he did so, he became anxious and interested. The individual was a man of rather more than middle height, of a muscular, though by no means brawny frame. His countenance was ruddy, and of a pleasant mirthful expression; his eyes were full, of a dark hazel colour; his nose, though prominent, gracefully formed; and his mouth small and piquant. His beard was of a dark auburn hue, and he wore moustachios of the same colour. He was dressed in a hodden-grey doublet and hose, which were fastened round his body by a strong leathern girdle, from which hung a broadsword of the two-edged shape. The manner of this individual was evidently different from those of his present companions, and that from the very pains which he took to assimilate it. There was all their mirth without their grossness, and his kind, affable demeanour to the female part of the company differed widely from the blunt and sometimes brutal behaviour of his comrades.

‘Who is that on the left of the old man?’ whispered Arthur to the man who had introduced him.

‘That—that’s his favourite dell,’ replied the man.

‘Nay, I mean not the woman—the man upon her left.’

‘Why, I know not—he’s none of us—strayed in like you to share the revelry, I fancy—though, if he takes not the better care of his eyes and hands, an inch or two of cold iron will pay his reckoning. I think he dallies too much with the mort.’

The cool even tone in which this annunciation of probable murder was uttered, rendered the communication more startling to Arthur than if it had been made with a vindictive exclamation or suppressed groan; and he looked anxiously and steadily on the stranger, whose gallant bearing more and more attracted him. The latter had observed him more than once bending his eyes on him, and was not apparently pleased with the strictness of his scrutiny. Twice, when their eyes met, the stranger had checked a rising frown by emptying the horn which he held in his hand; the third time he set it down untasted, and, fixing on Arthur a look of calm commanding dignity, which seemed more native to him than aught around, exclaimed, in a deep and powerful accent,

‘Friend, wherefore peer you so steadily this way? If you have aught to say, out with’t—if not, reserve your ogling for some of the fair eyes near you.’

Arthur felt abashed beneath the rebuke, which his solicitude for this individual had exposed him to, and he could only mutter in reply something about the young damsel beside him.

'Ah! ah!' replied the stranger, resuming his good humour, 'it is to her your looks were sent? Soul of Bruce! but she is well worthy of your wonder. Never—and I have seen many bright eyes—have I lighted on a pair so witching.' Then, turning to the object of these praises, he took her hand, and whispered in her ear something, which, though incredible to those present, was evidently of no displeasing nature, as her dimpling cheek unquestionably testified.

The patriarch had viewed, for some time, with ill-dissembled anger, the approaches of the stranger to the temporary sovereign of his affections. But whether he thought them becoming too close, or was enraged at the placidity with which they were received, his indignation now burst out, and, as usual in matters of violence, the weight of his vengeance fell heaviest on the weaker individual. He smote the girl violently on the cheek, and, addressing the stranger in a voice coarse with passion, poured forth a torrent of words, which were to Arthur utterly unintelligible.

The stranger, who did not seem to understand the expressions of this address, could not, however, mistake its meaning. The language of passion is universal—and the flashing eye, and shrivelled brow of the Egyptian chief, were too unequivocal to be misunderstood. He remained silent but a moment, and then, drawing from his bosom a purse, apparently well filled, he took out a golden Jacobus, and proffered it to the patriarch, as a peace-offering to his awakened anger. The fire of indignation fled from the old man's eyes as they lighted on the gold, but they were instantaneously lighted up by a fiercer and more deadly meaning. Arthur could observe significant looks circulating among the men, who also began to speak to one another in a jargon unintelligible to him. He felt convinced that the purse which the cautious stranger had produced had determined them to destroy him; and, prepossessed with this idea, he saw at once the necessity of the keenest observation, and of the danger which attended his scrutiny being detected. He pretended to begin to feel the influence of the potations in which he had indulged, and apparently occupied himself in toying with the willing dell who sat beside him. He now perceived one or two of the men rise, and proceed to the several openings of the cave, evidently to see that no one approached from without, or perhaps to cut off retreat. He saw, too, that

they plied the stranger and himself with wine and ale ; and, more convincing than all, he perceived on the darkening brow and gleaming eye of the hoary Egyptian, the awakening excitement of a murderous design. The stranger, in the mean time, apparently unconscious of the peril he was in, began again to bandy kind words and looks with the favourite of the chief. The old man looked grimly on, but did not now seem to wish to interrupt the dalliance. Suddenly, he drew his hand from his bosom. It was filled with a dagger, which he raised high, evidently with the intention of slaying the unguarded stranger, who was too much occupied with the eyes and hands of the beauty to perceive his villanous intention.

Arthur, who at the moment was lifting to his mouth the ponderous pewter *stoup*, or flaggon, containing the ale on which the Egyptians were regaling, saw the wretch's intent, and, in the impulse of the moment, flung the vessel at the lifted hand. His aim was fortunately true ; the villain's arm fell powerless by his side, while the dagger flew to a considerable distance. Arthur then rose, and, crying hastily to the stranger to defend himself, drew his blade, and made towards him.

The stranger had perceived the intended blow, though, entangled as he at the moment was, he would unquestionably have fallen a victim to it. He now leaped hastily up, and, exclaiming loudly, '*Morte de ma vie !*' 'Treason !' drew out his sword, and looked for the foe. Arthur now joined him, and, setting their backs to the rocky wall of the cave, they prepared to defend themselves against the enraged gipsies, who, now shouting wildly, drew from under their cloaks long sharp knives, which they brandished furiously in their faces. The stranger swept his sword around him in a manner that proved him a practised master, and Arthur manfully seconding him, the Egyptians were kept completely at bay, for none seemed daring enough to trust himself within the sweep of the stranger's sword, or that of his new companion. But it was only while they could keep their backs to the rocky wall that they could hope to cope with their savage enemies, who, though they did not come near enough to stab, surrounded them as nearly as they could, and yelled and shouted like so many disappointed fiends. There was apparently no means of escape, though there might of resistance, as the moment they quitted the wall their backs would have been exposed to the daggers of the infuriated assassins. Arthur perceived, too, to his dismay, that sure means were taking to render their length of sword unavailing. Several women were clambering

up the rock behind them, carrying large blankets and other cloths, clearly for the purpose of throwing over their swords and themselves; and thus yielding them up a fettered prey to the knives of these butchers. All hope of escape died in his bosom as he perceived the wretched design, and he was about to rush on the savages, and at least sell his life dearly, when he perceived the woman who carried the blankets pause, and look upwards. He too looked up, and saw, with a consternation that for a moment unmanned him, an immense fragment of loose rock in the very act of being removed from its immemorial resting-place, and precipitated on their heads.

'Holy Virgin! help us, or we are lost,' exclaimed the youth; and the prayer had hardly left his lips ere the threatened engine of their destruction was converted into the means of their immediate escape. The ponderous stone dropped so far directly on its fatal errand, that Arthur instinctively crouched beneath the apparently inevitable blow; but, encountering a few feet only above his head a projecting piece of rock, it rebounded from the side of the cave in a slanting direction, and, falling clear of its intended victims, smote to the earth the hoary head of the patriarch. He fell beneath the huge fragment, which hid from their sight the face and neck of the Egyptian; but the convulsive writhings of the unhappy man, which for a moment contorted his frame, only to leave it in utter stillness, told plainly that his long career had ceased, and that the man of blood had become the victim of his own pitiless design.

The Egyptians, panic-struck by this sudden death-blow, set up a loud and stunning wail, as they crowded round the body of their chief; but the stranger and Arthur stayed not to observe their farther demeanour; and, taking advantage of the opening among their enemies, which was now afforded them, sprang out of the cave, and ascended at the top of their speed to the brow of the eminence behind it.

They continued their rapid walk for some time in silence, indeed, no doubt, by the tumultuous nature of their feelings, and the violence of their present exertion. At length, having entered a few yards into a wood, which then decorated the place, though soon after to be converted into keel and timbers for the 'Great Michael,' the stranger halted, and, taking Arthur by the hand, said, breathlessly,

'By Saint Andrew, young sir, you have done us this day good service. I never thought to have been so indebted to a pint stoup, trow me.'

'But what sorrow tempted you man,' replied Arthur, rather crossly, 'to play the fool with the old villain's dearie in yon

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wild sort of fashion ; and, above all, what induced you to flourish your well-filled purse in the eyes of those who love gold better than anything else, save blood ?

‘Whim—chance—fate, I thought at one time. It is long since cunning men have told me that I shall die for a woman, and, by the Bruce’s soul, I thought the hour had come. As for my Jacobuses, I rejoice I saved them from the fleehing crew, as they will serve for an earnest, a poor one to be sure, of my thankfulness to my brave deliverer ;’ and, so saying, he drew from his bosom the purse which had excited the fatal cupidity of the Egyptians, and gracefully proffered it to the youth.

Arthur had all along suspected, nay felt assured, that his companion was of a rank superior to his appearance ; and, had it not been so, his present conduct would have convinced him.

‘Whoever you are, sir,’ said he, ‘that in this lowly disguise speak the language and sentiments of a noble-born, your own heart will, I know, convince you that I dare not accept your gold. The service I rendered you I would have rendered to the poorest earle in Fife, but were it ten times greater than it was, it must not be repaid with coin.’

‘All are not earles who wear hoddin-grey and blue bonnets with you, I find,’ replied the stranger, smiling approvingly. ‘But come, if gold cannot repay the service you have done me, tell me what can.’

‘Nothing in your power to perform,’ replied Arthur, calmly.

‘Try,’ continued the stranger ; ‘I bear with me a talisman which can command all objects which men in general desire—Choose then—wealth, worship, or a fair wife.’

There was something so frank, open, yet condescending in the tone and appearance of this extraordinary stranger, that Arthur could not resist their fascinating influence ; and, although he could not imagine that any interference on the part of his new friend would produce the slightest change in the unalterable sentence of Walter Colville, he communicated to him a general outline of his present situation.

The stranger listened attentively to the detail—then demanded how far distant the dwelling of Colville was ; and, on being informed of its near vicinity to the spot on which they then stood, declared his intention of immediately proceeding thither, and using his influence on Arthur’s behalf.

The latter opposed this resolution but faintly ; for, though he was, as we have said, utterly at a loss to conceive how his ears were to be benefited by the proffered kindness of the

stranger, yet a vague and almost latent hope of still obtaining Edith never entirely forsook him.

He conducted the stranger through the wood, therefore, by the path which led most directly to the house of Balmeny. On reaching the skirt of the forest, it was agreed that the former should proceed alone to the dwelling of Colville, and that Arthur should remain where he was, and await the result.

The stranger set out on his voluntary mission at a rapid pace, and soon arrived at the house. The door stood open, and he entered with the careless sauntering air of one entirely indifferent as to the welcome he might be greeted with. He found Walter seated apparently in no very pleasant humour, and his daughter bustling about among the serving-maids, wearing on her flushed cheek and suffused eye undoubted symptoms of the sorrow with which the morning's adventure had afflicted her.

'Give you good-e'en, gudeman of Balmeny,' said the stranger, seating himself, without waiting an invitation, on the bench opposite Walter.

'The same to you, neebour,' said the landlord, in a tone that had little of welcome in it.

A few moments' silence now ensued—Walter evidently waiting with some impatience for the tidings which the other seemed in no haste to communicate to him. But this could not last.

'Have you anything to tell, ask, or deliver, friend,' at last said Walter.

'This bright-e'd maiden is the bonny lass of Balmeny, I'm thinking,' was the unreplying answer.

'That is my daughter, truly,' said Walter, becoming more and more impatient. 'Does your coming concern her?'

'That it does,' replied the stranger. 'There's an auld by-word, that foul fish and fair daughters are nae keeping ware. This fair May is the object of my visit; in short, gudeman, I come a-wooing.'

At the sound of this magnetic word, an universal commotion arose in the dwelling of Colville. The maiden, who was its object, surveyed the stranger with indignation and surprise; the servants whispered and tittered amongst each other; and Walter seemed for a moment about to give vent to the feelings of his anger, when the current of his feelings suddenly changed, and, directing a look of malicious joy to his daughter, he addressed the stranger—

'Welcome, wooer—welcome. Come, lasses, set meat and drink before this gentle here; as the auld Earl of Douglas said,—It's ill arguing between a fu' man and a fasting.'

This order was obeyed with great readiness by the serving-maidens, who set before the stranger the household bread and cheese, and a bicker of no scanty dimensions, containing the reaming ale, for which Scotland has been so long famous. There was a malicious merriment twinkling from every eye as the scene went on ; for all knew well that the overstrained kindness of the host was soon to be converted into outrageous and overwhelming abuse of the guest. The stranger, however, seemed either not to notice or to slight these indications. He partook heartily of the good cheer set before him, and amused himself by returning with good-humoured smiles the stolen looks of the simpering maidens. He looked in vain, however, for Edith, who had retired from the place.

‘ And now,’ said Walter, who began to think the stranger somewhat more at ease than he could have wished, ‘ Your name, wooer ?’

‘ My name !’ said the stranger, somewhat embarrassed.

‘ Ay, your name—all men have a name. *Knaves*, (laying an emphasis on the word,) many.’

‘ True, gudeman, true. My name, then, is Stuart—James Stuart. I hope it pleases you ?’

‘ The name is the best in the land,’ said the old man, touching his bonnet. ‘ As to the wearer—hem !—a’ Stuarts are no sib to the king, ye ken. What countryman are you ?’

‘ I was born at Stirling,’ said the stranger.

‘ Aye, aye, it may be, it may be,’ replied Walter,—‘ but, to bring the matter to a point, what lands and living hae ye, friend ?’

‘ Sometimes less, sometimes more,’ replied the stranger, ‘ as I happen to be in the giving or the taking humour. At the lowest ebb, however, I think they are at least worth all that ever called a Colville master.’

‘ Faith, and that’s a bauld word, neebour,’ cried Walter, bitterly—‘ and one that I’m jalousing you’ll find it difficult to make gude.’

‘ At your own time it shall be proved, gudeman ; but it is not for myself I come to woo the bonny lass of Balmeny. I am, thanks to a wise old man who sits in Windsor, wived already.’

‘ And who, in Beelzebub’s name, may you be blackfit for ?’ said Walter, rising in wrath.

‘ Give your daughter to the youth I shall name, and I will, on her wedding-day, fill you up one lippie with the red gold, and five running o’er with silver.’

‘ Give her ! To whom ?’

‘ To one who loves her dearly ; and, what is more, is dearly loved in return, old man.’

'Who is he?' reiterated Walter?

'One who is worthy already the hand of the best ae daughter of any laird in Fife; and who, ere to-morrow's sun sets, will be wealthier than yourself.'

'Who—who—who is he?' cried the old man, stamping in paroxysm of rage.

'Arthur Winton!' said the stranger.

The anger of Walter, when this displeasing name was uttered, almost overwhelmed him.

'Out of my doors, you rascally imposter,' at length he was able to exclaim; 'out of my doors. Swith away to the minion who sent you here, an' you wish not to taste the discipline of the whip, or to escape being worried by the tykes.'

To the stranger the anger of the old man, instead of fear, seemed only to occasion merriment. He laughed so heartily at the violences into which the rage of his host seduced him, that the tears actually stood in his eyes—conduct that naturally increased the passion which it fed on. The servants stood looking on in silent wonder; and Edith, startled by the noise of the discordant sounds, returned to the place in wonder and alarm.

An unexpected termination was suddenly put to the scene by the entrance of Winton. His cheek was flushed with haste; and he was so breathless that he could hardly exclaim—'Save yourself, sir stranger, by instant flight; the Egyptians have tracked our path hither, and are pursuing us here with numbers ten times exceeding those we encountered in the cave.'

'Let them come,' said the stranger, with a smile. 'Egyptians though they be, they cannot eat through stone walls or baken doors. We will carouse within while they howl without, and drink the *dirige* of their chief.'

Arthur said nothing, but looked doubtingly at Walter.

'And do you really imagine, worthy youth, and no less worthy blackfit, that I am to have my house sieged, my cattle stolen, and my corn carried off, to shield you from the consequences of your drunken brawls? Not I, by the cat of blessed Bride. Out of my doors, you caitiffs—they can but slay you, and the whittle has crossed the craig of mony a better fellow than any of ye twasome is likely to prove. Begone, I say.'

'Nay, my dear father,' said Edith, imploringly, 'do not drive them furth now; the Egyptians are approaching the house—they cannot escape.'

'And they shall not stay here,' replied the old man, harshly, the tone of agony in which Edith's intreaties were uttered recalling all the bitterness of his feelings against Arthur.

'At least, Walter Colville,' said Arthur, 'save this stranger. He cannot have offended you. It was on my errand he came hither. I will go forth alone. Perhaps one vicar may suffice.'

'Nay, brave youth,' said the stranger, 'we go together. Farewell, old man. You are a Scot, and yet have betrayed your guest. You are a Colville, and the first of the line that ever turned his back upon a Stuart at his utmost need.'

The tone and sentiment of these words had a powerful effect on Walter Colville. A momentary confusion rested on his countenance, and then, with a smile ill put on, he said, 'Come, come, sirs; I but joked wi' ye. Did you really think that Walter Colville would abandon to his enemy any who have bitten his bannock, and kissed his cup as you have done? Na, na; here you are safe while the auld wa's stand. I'll go above and look out for the laud-louperers.'

The old man left the place accordingly; and Arthur, seizing the opportunity, retired to one corner with Edith, where the nature of their conversation could be only guessed from their animated looks and gestures of the affectionate pair.

The stranger in the mean time strode up and down the place, regardless of the affrighted servants, singing to himself,

'O whar will I get a bonny boy,
That will win hose and shoon;
That will run to Lord Barnard's yett,
And bid his ladye come?'

'What say you, my little man,' he continued, addressing the boy of twelve or thirteen years, who sat before the fire, shagging, with a shaggy colley, the contents of an ample eog, altogether unheeding the agitation which reigned around him. 'will you run to Wemyss Castle with a message to Sir David?'

'I' the noo!' said the boy, looking up with an air expressive of his sense of the unparalleled oppression proposed, interrupting him during the sacred ceremony of supper.

The stranger laughed, and drawing from his bosom the purse we have so often spoke of, he displayed another Jacobus, and offered it to the boy. 'Na, I'll no gang for the yellow bawbec,' said the urchin; 'but if ye'll gie me the braw whitt I'll rin.' The stranger immediately put into his hand the dagger he had coveted, and, drawing him aside, conveyed to him in whispers the message he was to deliver.

Walter now re-entered, and informed them that he had reconnoitred the Egyptians, who, including women and children, seemed to amount to above a hundred.

'Could I but get this younker beyond their clutches,' said the stranger, 'a short half hour would disperse them like the leaves of autumn.'

Walter stared at this avowal, but was silent. The conviction of Arthur that the speaker was not what he seemed, now seized on his mind also, but it appeared to inspire him with no pleasant feeling; on the contrary, anxiety deepened on his countenance the more and more he gazed on the handsome features of his guest, and the wild shouts of the Egyptians, which he had previously heard with comparative indifference, now evidently inspired him with the deepest terror.

It was agreed at length that the boy should make the attempt. To get him out of the house without endangering its inmates was comparatively easy, as the Egyptians as yet stood at some distance from the door. Once out, they had only his own ready wit and speed of foot to trust to. While Walter and Arthur therefore undid, with due caution, the massy bars and bolts which protected the oaken door, the stranger, anxious to witness the success of his messenger, ascended to the upper story, and stood at the open casement. He was immediately observed by the Egyptians, who set up a yell of savage impatience at the sight, the men brandishing their weapons, and the women waving their arms, as if threatening vengeance against him.

Their attention was now, however, directed from him to the youthful messenger, who approached towards them undauntedly. They went forward to meet him.

'The maister sent's to see what ye're a' here for,' said the boy.

'Tell him,' said one of the Egyptians, harshly, 'we are come to demand the two strangers who have just entered his dwelling. Let him give them to our vengeance, and we will depart peaceably—not a feather or a rag of his shall be scathed by us.'

'And what if he should na just agree to this,' said the boy, edging toward the west, covering the manoeuvre, as if retiring toward the house.

'If he refuse us, woe unto him. We will leave him neither corn nor cattle, kith nor kin; burn his house with fire, and his own red blood shall lapper on his cold hearth-stone.'

'Haith, carle, you maun tell him that yoursel,' said the boy, as with one wild bound he sprung from the group, and, with the speed of a greyhound, made for the wood. There was a cry of disappointment burst forth from the Egyptians as they perceived his intention, and many set out in pursuit. The chase was viewed with deep interest by the inmates of the house—for Walter, Edith, and Arthur had now joined

the stranger.) The wood was not far distant, the boy was famous for his swiftness of foot, and they could see that his pursuers were falling fast behind. To their dismay, however, they perceived, at length, that there was a powerful dog among the number, who continued the chase after all his human competitors had abandoned it in despair. He gained fast upon the boy. 'He is lost,' said Edith, piteously; 'that villanous dog will tear him to pieces.' But the event belied the maiden's fear. Just as the ferocious animal seemed about to seize him, the boy was seen to turn upon his pursuer, the dog gave a loud howl, and fell to the ground, and the stranger could perceive his own dagger gleaming in the stripling's hand, as he waved it in triumph over his head ere he disappeared among the trees.

'I could stake an earldom,' said the stranger exultingly, 'on that boy's proving a noble soldier. By the soul of Bruce, he can both fight and flee.'

Walter's terror, as he listened to these words, fairly mastered the assumed composure which he had hitherto affected. He took off his bonnet, and, bending lowly to the stranger, said, in a voice tremulous with fear,

'In God's name, say, oh! say, sir, are you not the king!'

'Even so, good Walter, James of Scotland stands before you. Are you sorry to see me? By Saint Andrew, I had hoped I should be welcome to every honest house, aye, and every honest heart in my dominious.'

Walter had dropped on his knee as the truth, which he had for some time suspected, was confirmed to him; and, looking up to his royal guest, while tears stood in his eyes, 'Welcome, my noble prince; what is it of Walter Colville's, from the bodle in his purse to the last drop of his heart's blood, that the king is not welcome to? I and mine, my liege, have fought, and bled, and died for the royal house. But to see your grace here in peril, surrounded by so many villains, and this old arm alone left to assist you. Oh! for the six brow fellows that I have seen prancing on youder lea; they would have cleared a way for your highness through them all.'

'Never fear for me, Walter Colville; I am not doomed to fall by a brawl of this kind, or in mine own land. So runs the rede.'

The king now turned round, and perceived Arthur and Edith, who had retired to a little distance. When they saw they were observed, they advanced, and would have kneeled; but the prince prevented this; he took them both by the hand, and imprinted on the lips of Edith a kiss, savouring as much of warm affection as of kingly courtesy.

Their attention was now directed to the operations of the

Egyptians. They perceived, with some surprise, that a considerable number of them left the rest, and made for the wood, and that those who remained, ceased the yelling manifestations of sorrow and revenge which had so affrightened Edith.

'They are meditating a retreat, methinks,' said the king.

'I fear, my liege,' said Walter, 'they are rather planning some mode of successful assault;' and the return of the Egyptians too soon verified the apprehension. They bore with them the trunk of a fallen tree, and the besieged at once saw the use for which this powerful engine was intended.

'My door can never withstand the shock of a ram like this,' cried Walter; 'they will force a passage and out, and, alas! your highness will be murdered—murdered in the house of Balmeny.'

James was proverbially brave, but it cannot be denied that he looked a little grave as he perceived the ponderous engine borne along, which, in all probability, would, in a few minutes, lay open the passage to a band of miscreants thirsting for his blood, and against whose rage the bravery of himself and his friends seemed a poor defence.

'Let the worst come to the worst,' said he at length; 'we three will make good this staircase for a stricken hour at least; before that time, the rescue must arrive.'

The King, Walter, and Arthur, now sought the floor below—Edith, with the serving-maidens, being stationed above, to be, in case of the Egyptians forcing an entry, still within the defence of the stair.

The door was of massive oak, studded with iron nails, and supported by three iron bolts of considerable thickness. An additional defence was now added in the shape of planks placed diagonally under these bolts, and for a few moments the besieged imagined it might withstand the efforts of the assailants. But a few strokes of the tree soon shewed the fallacy of this hope. The door shook under the first blow, and, ere a score had been given, the yielding hinges shewed that the Egyptians had well calculated the force of their instrument.

'It must be cold steel that saves us after all,' said the king, retreating to the staircase.

'Oh, that I and all my kin were stark dead on this floor, and your highness safe on Falkland Green,' said Walter, wringing his wrinkled hands, and following.

They had scarcely gained their intended position at the upper landing of the staircase, when, yielding to a desperate

stroke, the door flew open, and the infuriated Egyptians, shouting, made their way to the interior. Not finding those they sought below, they next proceeded to ascend the stair. This, however, was an ascent fatal to all who attempted it. Corpse after corpse fell backward among the enraged ruffians under the blows of the king and Arthur, until no one could be found daring enough to attempt the passage.

'Let us sineik them in their hive,' at length cried a hoarse voice, 'and so let them either roast or come forth.' A shout of approbation followed this advice; and, while a chosen few remained to guard the stair, the remainder roamed about the house, collecting together everything which could assist their diabolical design.

The king's heart, and that of his brave companions, sunk as they heard this resistless plan of destruction proposed and set about. It was for a moment only, however; for suddenly they heard the clear, sweet voice of Edith exclaiming, 'We are saved, we are saved; yonder comes the Lord of Wemyss and his gallant followers;' and immediately after the maiden herself appeared to reiterate the tidings.

'Are you sure of what you say, Edith,' asked the king eagerly; 'how do the horsemen ride?'

'As if their coursers were winged,' replied Edith; 'all of them, but one, who backs a grey steed of surpassing power, is far before the rest, and ever and anon turns round, as if upbraidingly to his followers.'

'My trusty David,' cried the king with emotion, 'well wert thou worthy of the gallant grey!'

There now arose a shout of a peculiar cry from among the Egyptians without, which was rightly interpreted as a signal of retreat, for it was immediately followed by the evacuation of the house; and so speedy and simultaneous was their flight, that the king could only perceive the latest of the tribe as they made for the wood, leaving to Wemyss and his companions a deserted field and an open entrance.

'Thanks, David, for this timely rescue,' said the king, as the knight bended the knee before him. 'By my crown, the spurs were well bestowed on one who can so fairly use them.'

James, followed by Sir David, Walter, Arthur, and the rest, now led the way to the upper chamber, where the immoderate joy and hospitality of the old man displayed itself in the most substantial form. When they had caroused for some time, the king, turning to Walter, said,

'Mine host, did I hear rightly when you said there was nothing beneath this roof-tree to which I was not welcome?'

'Your highness heard rightly.'

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‘ Give me, then, this fair maiden. We kings, you know, seldom choose the least valuable of our subjects’ chattels.’

‘ Your grace may command me,’ said Walter, though somewhat hesitatingly, for he saw the turn which things were taking.

‘ And you, too, sweet Edith?’ said the king, again saluting the blushing girl; and then, without waiting for her answer, continued—‘ That you may all know, my lieges, that we accept your benevolences merely for your own benefits, I give away this treasure, tempting as it is, to one who has well deserved the favour at our hand. Take her, Arthur, and confess that I have found a way to repay the debt I owed you. Receive his hand, fair maiden; and if it will add anything to its value in your eyes, know that it has this day saved a king’s life.’

The sentiments of Walter in regard to Arthur Winton had been undergoing a change, imperceptible even to himself, from the moment he had perceived him the companion and probable favourite of the king; but the revolution was completed when he was made acquainted with the particulars of his interference in the royal behalf, a merit which would, in his eyes, have outweighed a thousand faults in his intended son-in-law.

King James shortly left the house of Balmeny amid the blessings of its inmates; and to close our somewhat tedious tale, we have only farther to acquaint our readers, that the gift of the monarch was shortly after confirmed at the altar, where Edith became the happy bride of Arthur Winton; and that the royal gratitude flowed freely on the wedded pair, as any who chooses to peruse the time-worn records of the Great Seal may satisfy himself.

THE END.

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