

conversation; both girls were thinking busily. Suddenly Fay looked up.

"Nell, where do you think we should go if we had to leave West Dene?"

"To some little country village, I suppose, where we could bury ourselves from the world," replied Helen. "Mother would never like London after living here; else London would be better, for then we might be near Ted, and I might find work that might possibly help us."

"But aunty lived in London a great deal when she was first married, I thought," said Fay.

"Yes; but I think she got tired of it, and since she has been delicate she has preferred living here."

"I always wonder," Fay went on, "how aunty, who loved gaiety so much, could give it up so suddenly, and be contented with such a very quiet life now."

"Poor little mother, I do not think there was really much choice in the matter! But there—we will not discuss that. Dear father always said having to give up town enjoyments and gaieties was a blessing in disguise. My mother's health improved so much during the latter years of his life; and Ted and I were stronger and happier for remaining here, and being more constantly under their eyes. You knew little of my father, Fay; he took such delight in training and educating us both."

"You have been more fortunate than I, Helen; I never had much training; that is perhaps why I am so wilful and pleasure-loving."

"You are a dear, bright companion to all of us. Doctor Gray told mother when you first came to us that you reminded him of a wild pink hedge-rose."

"Wild and full of thorns, eh, Nell?"

"No; fresh and rosy and free, Fay. But go away to your bed now, dear, or you will lose your beauty sleep, and come down to-morrow a white rose instead of a red."

(To be continued.)

AN OLD SCOTTISH HEROINE.



THE 27th of March, 1306, was notable in the royal town of Scone, for on that day Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick, was crowned king of Scotland. A few weeks before he had met his rival, the

Red Comyn, in the cathedral church of Dumfries; a quarrel arose between them, and Bruce slew the Comyn with his own hand. Then the Bruce had to choose one of two courses. He must either flee for his life, and remain a fugitive and an exile, or, by a bold stroke, he might seize the throne of Scotland, throw down the gauntlet to the English, and assert the independence of his country while securing his own safety. He chose the latter course; and so he rode with his band of followers to the little town in Perthshire overhanging the Tay, which had been the scene of so many coronations.

It was a ceremony strangely bereft of its usual pomp. The kingly seat, that treasured Stone of Destiny, had been carried off by the English king to his own far-distant capital; the crown was gone, there were no robes of state in which to array the new monarch, and no member of the Macduffs was there to place him on his throne. But necessity puts up with strange shifts. Two bishops were in the little train of followers, and the episcopal wardrobes furnished an impromptu coronation robe, while the monks of the old abbey produced a circlet of gold and a stone seat.

Two days later the ceremony was repeated; but the figure of the king was no longer that to which all eyes were turned. Now a young and noble lady stood among the little band of faithful friends, and she it was who led the king to the altar and placed him on the royal seat.

This lady was of the Macduffs, a daughter of that Earl of Fife who was one of the guardians of the little maid of Norway. He had been murdered eighteen years before, when he was only twenty-six years old, and so his little daughter, and his son, Duncan, were early orphans. The boy was a ward of the English king, and spent much of his time in the south. Perhaps his sister was with him sometimes, but it seems more likely that she grew up among her Scottish hills. Certain it is she was no lover of the English, she hated the rule of the invaders, and longed to see her country free.

Her husband, John Comyn, Earl of Buchan, and Constable of Scotland, was a

vassal to the English king, and a cousin of that Red Comyn whom Bruce slew. For long he had looked with no kindly eye on the Bruce, but now he hated him with the fierce hatred of one who would avenge his kinsman's death. But the countess cared nothing for the claims of kinship if she might advance the liberty of her people; and when she heard the Bruce was crowned at Scone, her heart beat high. A Scottish king crowned and no Macduff to lead him to his royal seat! That should never be! Nay, if her recreant brother were so tame in spirit, or so neglectful of his sacred duties, she herself would do it. She would ride to Scone and place the king on his throne; if the men were laggards the women would lead, and no man should despise the Bruce because a Macduff failed in duty. For these Macduffs were one of the chief families in Scotland at that time, and had rights and privileges above other families. For centuries the king had been led to his coronation seat before the altar by the hand of a Macduff, and so great was the importance attached to this act, many deemed that without it the king were scarcely crowned.

And so the countess took her husband's war-horses and rode through the country with a band of followers to Scone, and recrowned the king with all the pomp her presence could add to the ceremony.

This is the first glimpse we have of this intrepid lady—a bright, proud figure, fired with enthusiasm and patriotism, who risked her life, her liberty, and even her good name, that she might do honour to her king.

The next and the last glimpse we have of her is some months later, and we can only surmise how the intervening time was spent. We know that she did not return to her husband or her English friends: indeed, had she done so, her welcome would have been a cold one. She probably threw in her lot with the wife and daughter of Bruce, and shared their trials and hardships.

Poor queen! she was not deceived about the perilous nature of the honour that had come to her. "You may be a summer king, but I suppose you will not be a winter king," she said to Bruce after his coronation; and so indeed it proved. The summer had hardly begun when Bruce was driven to the mountains, where he wandered about homeless, while the queen and her ladies took refuge in Aberdeen.

But these brave Scotchwomen loved not to live at ease while their husbands and brothers were in danger, so they soon rejoined the king at Breadalbane, determined to bear all hardships with him. But another defeat by the friends of the Comyn made matters still more

desperate, and again they separated, the king to take refuge for the winter in a little island on the Irish coast, the queen and her party to Kildrummie Castle. Not feeling safe there, they soon fled further north, to the Abbey of St. Duthac, in Ross-shire.

But sanctuary had lost much of its sacredness in the eyes of the rough English soldiers, and of its violation little was thought when a queen was the prize; so the monastery was stormed, and its inmates seized. The wife and daughter of Bruce were sent prisoners to England, where they were treated with consideration and respect; but a far worse fate awaited the brave Countess of Buchan. She had shown an unusual independence and strength of will, and it is probable that her act in claiming and exercising the ancestral privilege of the Macduffs had done much to legitimise the claims of the Bruce in the eyes of the people.

The significance of that act may best be gauged by the punishment it received at the hands of the English king. It is said the Earl of Buchan, her husband, would have killed her, but Edward restrained him.

The countess was carried to Berwick-on-Tweed, and there imprisoned. But no ordinary dungeon was fit for so illustrious a prisoner; to the captivity of the body a mental torture must be added. And so the Chamberlain was commanded to construct, in one of the turrets of Berwick Castle, "a cage, strongly latticed with wood, cross-barred, and secured with iron, in which he shall place the Countess of Buchan, and that he take care that she be so well and safely guarded therein that in no sort she may issue therefrom."

And there, in sight of all who came through the castle court, she lived for four weary years, having speech with no one but the women and guards who attended her. Could she have looked over the land from her lofty cell, she might have seen Bruce return in the spring-time of the year and slowly win his way against his enemies; she might have seen her husband advance once and again to meet him, and retire discomfited and defeated, till he finally withdrew to England. And if she had looked on the other side, she would have seen her vindictive enemy, Edward I., slowly dying with his favourite project unfulfilled.

But she was not there to see the English leave the land, and to see the Bruce firmly seated on the throne, to which she had led him at such a heavy cost, for in 1311 she was taken from her cage and transferred to the monastery of St. Carmel, in Berwick; and as the doors close on her there, she is lost to our view, and we see her no more. AGNES HANNAY.