

ROBERT III THE STORY OF A FEARFUL HIGHLAND TOURNAMENT

The eldest son of King Robert II was called John. But that name was thought to be unlucky. The people remembered John Baliol and his unhappy reign, they had also heard that King John of England, and King John of France, had been unfortunate, so they changed John Stewart's name to Robert, and he was crowned as Robert III. But changing his name made no difference either to his fortunes or to his nature.

Robert III was not a strong man, and he was lame, having been kicked by a horse when he was a boy. He was kind and gentle, and quite unfit to rule the fierce lords and barons. So, even after he came to the throne, he allowed his brother, who was also called Robert, to continue to rule as he had done at the end of their father's life.

King Robert had a son called David, to whom he gave the title of Duke of Rothesay. To Robert his brother, he gave the title of Duke of Albany. These were the first dukes ever made in Scotland.

Rothesay was young, gay, and handsome. He was wild, and wicked too, and often caused much sorrow to his father, who loved him dearly. Albany was silent, dark, and cunning. He hated Rothesay, because he knew that one day he would be King, and he himself wanted to be King. When Robert III came to the throne, there was peace with England. But not having England to fight against, the great lords fought all the more fiercely among themselves. They fought, too, with the Highland chieftains, who lived in the wild and mountainous parts of Scotland. These Highlanders were so fierce, that the English called them the Wild Scots. They were formed into various clans and families, and fought often among themselves, as well as with the Lowland lords.

Had the King been a strong man, he might have tamed the wild nobles. But he left everything to his brother Robert, the Duke of Albany. And Albany tried to make friends with the nobles by leaving their wicked deeds unpunished, for he hoped that some day they would help to put him upon the throne. So the whole land was full of fighting, quarrelling, and oppression. Those who were strong, took from those who were weak. There was neither justice nor mercy to be found anywhere, and Albany, although he was a strong and clever man, allowed these things to be.

Among the wildest of the Highland clans were two called Clan Kay and Clan Chattan. There was a deadly hatred between them. They were always fighting, and they filled the whole country round with war and bloodshed. At last they decided to settle their quarrels by a great tournament, thirty of the best men from one clan fighting against thirty of the other.

The place chosen for this battle was a beautiful plain close to the walls of Perth. Wooden galleries were built all round for the people who came to watch, and the King and all his court consented to be present. This was no ordinary tournament, such as knights often took part in, for the knights fought in full armour and often with blunted weapons. These Highlanders, when they entered the lists, wore no armour, and carried not only bows and arrows, but swords, battle-axes, and short, keen daggers. They were all fierce, strong men, and they meant to fight to the death.

But at the last moment, when the trumpets sounded for this fearful tournament to begin, one of the Clan Chattan men lost heart. Throwing down his weapons he fled from the lists. Full of fear he leaped the barriers, plunged into the river, and, swimming across it, disappeared into the wood beyond.

The King, who did not love bloodshed, was not ill pleased at the thought that the fight could not take place. For the numbers were now uneven, and no man of the Clan Kay would retire lest he

should be thought cowardly. But from the bystanders, a little crooked-legged man, who was a blacksmith in Perth, stepped forward.

'I will take the coward's place,' he cried, 'if you pay me half a French crown.' The offer was at once accepted, for there was no time to send to the Clan Chattan country for another man, and rather than not fight at all, they were glad to have the little crooked-legged blacksmith.

So the trumpets sounded and the bagpipes screamed, and with mighty yells the two clans closed upon each other. A terrible fight it was. The great battle-axes swung and fell, sword and dagger flashed, and the fair meadow was red with blood.

In the middle of the fight the crooked-legged blacksmith, having killed a man, stood still. 'How now,' said the Clan Chattan chief, 'are you afraid?'

'Not I,' replied the smith, 'but I have done enough for half-a-crown.'

'On and fight,' cried the chief, 'I will not grudge wages to him who does not grudge his work.'

So the smith fell to again, and fought as fiercely as any. Both sides fought, filled with bitter hatred of each other, till at last only one man of Clan Kay was left alive. Of Clan Chattan there were ten, and the little crooked-legged blacksmith, all sorely wounded.

Then the King flung down his baton, and cried out that Clan Chattan had won the day. This was a very terrible way of settling a quarrel, but probably some of the great Lowland nobles encouraged the clans to fight, in the hope that if some of the fiercest of the Highlanders were killed, the others would be more easily kept in order. And indeed, for a long time after this slaughter, the Highlands remained more peaceful.

ROBERT III THE STORY OF THE DUKE OF ROTHESAY

The Duke of Rothesay, although he was wild and wicked, was handsome and had pleasant manners, and the people loved him. He had many friends and Albany had few, and Parliament decided that as the King was ill, and could not himself rule, his son, the Duke, should be Governor.

Albany had always hated Rothesay; now that he was obliged to yield the power to him, he hated him more than ever.

Soon after this the truce with England came to an end, and the Scottish Borderers, who had been waiting eagerly for that time to come, once more broke into England and laid the country waste. The English Borderers too were not slow to fight, and soon the terrible wars were raging as fiercely as before.

The King of England, who was now called Henry, remembering the old claim of the English Kings to be over-lords of Scotland, determined to conquer the country. He sent a letter to King Robert, telling him that he meant to march to Edinburgh, there to receive his homage.

King Robert took no notice of this letter, but treated it with silent scorn. Then Henry, gathering a great army, marched into Scotland. He marched right on to Edinburgh. There Rothesay, who commanded the castle, sent a fiery letter to King Henry. In it he told Henry that he had only come into Scotland for love of plunder, and dared him to settle the quarrel by a tournament between an equal number of knights from either side. To this Henry would not listen, and he began to besiege

Edinburgh.

Albany had meanwhile gathered an army, and he now came marching toward Edinburgh. But instead of helping his nephew, he encamped a little way off and did nothing. This made the people very angry, for they believed that Albany wanted King Henry to defeat the Duke of Rothesay, and either to kill or take him prisoner.

Winter was coming on. The English had eaten up all the food they had, and they began to starve. Many of them, too, had died of sickness and cold. And last of all Henry heard that the Welsh were rebelling, so he gave up the siege, and marched back again to England.

This is the last time that an English King ever brought an army into Scotland. When armies came again, they were not led by the King, but by one of his generals. Unlike all the other armies which had come before, this one did little damage. For Henry did not allow his troops to burn and ravage as they went, but made them march peacefully and quietly through the land.

While his country was in danger, the Duke of Rothesay had fought well, and kept the castle of Edinburgh from falling into the hands of the King of England, but now that the danger was over, he again took to his former wild ways. Albany, who hated his nephew, was not slow to tell the King all the evil things which he heard about him. At last, the poor old King, hurt to the heart that his son should do such things, ordered Albany to imprison him until he should promise to behave better.

Then Albany was very glad. For many years he had longed for the death of Rothesay. Now he felt that he could safely kill him. In those days, it was easy for prisoners to be killed, for the dungeons were dark and hideous, and it was not wonderful that few should come out alive. And Albany had the King's orders, signed and sealed by the King's ring, telling him to put the Prince in prison.

So one day as the Duke rode towards St. Andrews, attended only by a few followers, he was suddenly seized by Albany and his friends. Rothesay was first taken to the castle of St. Andrews, but that was not secret or safe enough to please his wicked uncle. So in a storm of wind and rain, mounted upon a cart horse, and with only a rough peasant's cloak thrown over his beautiful clothes, he was rudely hurried away to the castle of Falkland, which belonged to Albany. There he was thrown into a dark and gloomy dungeon under the castle walls.

He had no light except what came through the tiny barred window, just above the ground. He was given no food, no drink. His cruel uncle meant him to die by one of the most terrible of deaths. He meant him to starve.

In this dungeon he remained day and night without food, or drink, or light, until he cried aloud in pain. The daughter of the Governor of the castle heard his cries, and she came to the window. She knew that dreadful things often happened in these dark dungeons, and when the poor Prince, dragging himself to the window, told her that he was being starved to death, she was full of pity. She hurried away, and returned as quickly as she could, with some thin oat-cakes hidden in the white muslin veil which it was then the fashion for ladies to wear on their heads. It was all that she dared to bring, for fear of the soldiers who watched. Day after day she went, pretending to walk in the garden, and always she stopped at the little window, and let the oat-cakes drop through the bars. Another woman gave the Duke milk, but all that those two kind women could bring him was not enough to satisfy his terrible hunger, and soon even that was stopped, for the cruel jailers began to wonder why the Duke did not die. They watched more carefully than before, and when they found out what the Governor's daughter and her servant were doing, they put them to death. The poor Duke was now left without a single friend, and one morning his groans ceased and there was silence in the little cell. He was dead.

Then the Duke of Albany caused it to be made known that the Prince had become ill, and had died in prison. Every one believed that he had been murdered by his uncle, but no one dared to tell this to the poor old King, who wept and mourned greatly for the loss of his son, whom he had loved very dearly, in spite of his wildness and wickedness.

Albany now once more became Regent, for although King Robert had another son called James, he was only a little boy, too young to rule. But King Robert began to be afraid of his brother. He began to feel sure that he had murdered Rothesay. So to keep his son James safe, he made up his mind to send him to France, pretending that he thought he would receive a better education there than in Scotland.

A ship was fitted out, and, accompanied by several nobles, the young Prince James, who was about nine years old, set out for France.

The weather was fine, and they sailed along without fear, for there was a truce between England and Scotland at the time. But in spite of the truce, they had not gone far when an armed English ship came sailing towards them and attacked them. The Prince was taken prisoner and carried away to the King of England.

When they were led before him, the nobles fell upon their knees, and begged him to set the Prince free, reminding him that the two kingdoms were at peace, and that to take the Prince prisoner was an act of war. But King Henry only laughed at all they said. 'If King Robert had been truly friendly,' he said, 'he would have sent his son to England to be taught. For I know French indifferently well, and nowhere could he find a better master.'

So instead of going to France, the poor little Prince was put into an English prison. When this news was brought to King Robert he was sitting at supper. As he listened to the messenger, his face grew pale and he fell forward senseless. His servants thought that he had died. They carried him to his room and laid him upon his bed. There he lay like one dead, and indeed he was so full of grief that he did not care to live, and soon after, on the 1st of April 1406 A.D., he died. He had reigned for sixteen years. He was a good and gentle man, but no fit King for those troublous times.