

## James the Fifth's Papingo.

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Ane papingo, right pleasand and perfyte,  
Of whom the King ane lang time had delyte.

—*Sir David Lindsay.*

**T**HERE do be interesting creatures in the world—interesting people as well as animals, and the least interesting of them all is certainly not the papingo. Papingo, by the way, is but the old Scottish word for the Anglicized popinjay, and a popinjay, all the world knows, is a parrot. Some specimens of the parrot race are gifted with a remarkable power of speech,—some of them would indeed talk for a wager and win, for, nilly-willy, they must have the very last word. Their talk is not by any means edifying, but rather of a nature so unbecomingly impolite and impious that there are moments when one would willingly be alone than be forced to put up with their society. In bygone days monarchs had their popinjays, and these would often vie with the court zany as to which could most dexterously manufacture merriment for their royal masters.

The following remarkable story of the parrot which belonged to James V., the Commons' King, is culled from the works of that worthy courtier and philosopher, Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, the quotations being modernized as far as circumstances will permit. At the outset the poet propounds the broad, bald axiom that

Who climbs too high, perforce his feet must fail,

and to establish his position draws copious illustrations with the aid of his favourite papingo.

A fairer fowl never flew on wing, nor lived there a more famous—not even the famous “groat” parrot that dwelt in the Tower by the Thames. Into the hands of Sir David, King James committed the bird to teach her “language artificial.” Her guardian’s task, however, was evidently not a very arduous one, for so great was her natural inclination that, without his lore, she could imitate all creatures, feathered and unfeathered, more or less—could, in fact,

Sing like the merle, and crow like the cock,  
 Pew like the gled, and chant like the lav’rock,  
 Bark like a dog, and cackle like a kae (*jackdaw*),  
 Bleat like a hog, and buller like a bull,  
 Cry like a gowk (*cuckoo*), and greet when she was wae ;  
 Climb on a cord, then laugh, and play the fool ;  
 She might have been a minstrel gay for Yule.

Truly a wonderful creature and a pleasant companion ! And now to the piteous tale of how this fair bird was devoured by Death, and how she lay sorely wounded, yet could not give up the ghost till every mortal man had heard her dying testament. “Who,” remarks Tytler, “would not comply with a request so charitable ?”

The roseate hues of early morn were glinting athwart the eastern sky as the two companions—the poet and his feathered friend—repaired to the garden of the Mount to enjoy, as was their wont, the beauties of Nature. Flowers fragrant, fresh, and fair embalmed the soft morning air with the sweetest perfumes ; and when Phœbus arose on pencilled wings and rived the shadows of night-time, the heart of man and bird rejoiced for very thankfulness. No sign of stir or storm was in the air ; Æolus, the wind-fiend, was asleep at home in his tempest-keeping cave, and Neptune had hid his head as if afraid to intrude upon so calm a scene.

The sound of birds surmounted all the skies  
 With melody of warbling musical ;  
 The balmy drops of dew Tytan updries,  
 Hanging upon the tender branches small.

But the time of morning devotions drew nigh, and the poet, preparatory to saying "his hours," set his little green friend upon a branch close at hand. Nature, however, was strong within her. Freedom-loving and impetuous, she at once began to *speill*, and ere her master's orisons were completed had ascended beyond all chances of recapture. Lindsay was at his wit's end.

"Sweet bird," said he, "beware! mount not too high;  
Return in time—perchance thy feet may fail:  
Thou art right fat, and not well used to fly;  
The greedy gled, I fear, may thee assail."

Like most pampered individuals—and the third line above distinctly intimates that she had been spoiled by the care of a too indulgent master—the parrot scorned the sage advice, making the provoking reply that it was her "kind to climb."

So, on the highest little tender twist,  
With wings display'd, she sat full wantonly;  
But Boreas blew a blast before she wist,  
Which brake the branch, and blew her suddenly  
Down to the ground with many a careful cry:  
Upon a post she lighted on her briest,  
The blood rushed out, and she cried for a—Priest.

Woe, unutterable woe, filled the guardian's breast as he beheld his pet fluttering in agony among the flowers: tears of grief gushed to his eyes and fell unheeded down, while the poor bird, with many a bitter groan, poured forth a doleful lamentation over her misfortunes and unbidableness. Sir David says:—

"To hear that birdie's lamentation  
I did approach, under a hawthorn green,  
Where I might hear and see, and not be seen;  
And when this bird had swoonèd twice or thrice,  
She began to speak."

And what, think you, did Lindsay hear? A mournful tirade against fickle Fortune's beguiling, against the abuse of ambition in spurning prudent counsel, against the falsities of the world—

hie to its felicity, its avarice, its pride and corruption!—and the vacillation of its gifts to mankind, making him this day puffed up with the abundance of his riches, the morn with nothing wherewith to buy his bread,—in other words, a pompous lordling to-day, a miserable caitiff to-morrow, for Fortune's gifts are only lent.

All these things did Madame Papingo bear witness to in the testament which she bequeathed, the first legatee being her “Sovereign Lord, Kyng James the Fyft.”

“Prepotent Prince, peerless of pulchritude!  
 Glory, honour, laud, triumph, and victory  
 Be to thy high excellent Celsitude!  
 Since dolent death, alas! must us now part,  
 I leave to thee my true unfeignèd heart.”

The legacy consists of apothegms which are propounded by the unfortunate bird for his Majesty's good to edification. Herewith is an epitomized list of her handsome bequests:—

“Of thy virtues poets perpetually  
 Shall make mention, until the world be ended:  
 So exercise thine office prudently;  
 In heaven and earth thy Grace shall be commended:  
 Wherefore, take care that HE be not offended  
 Who hath exalted thee to such honour,  
 Of his people to be a Governor.

So in thine office be thou diligent;  
 But, be thou found slothful, or negligent,  
 Or unjust in thine execution,  
 Thou shalt not fail divine punition.  
 Of virtue then, exalt thy sails on high,  
 Trusting to 'scape that fatal destiny.

And, since the definition of a King  
 Is—One that has of people governance,  
 Address thee first, above all other thing,  
 To put thy body to such ordinance,  
 That thy virtue thine honour may advance:

For how should Princes govern great regions,  
Who cannot duly guide their own persons?

The Chronicles to know I thee exhort—

They may be mirror to thy Majesty :  
There shalt thou find both good and ill report

Of every prince, after his quality :

Though they be dead, their deeds shall not die.

Trust well, thou shalt be styled in that story,  
As thou deservest to be put in memory."

Not everybody gets such princely exhortations. Here, however, it does not concern us whether James acted upon them or not. Madame's next legacy is directed to her brethren at court. Hitherto Reflection has played an important part in the drawing up of the will, but now Dame Experience comes to the aid of the hapless testatrix, and she says :—

"The vain ascents of court, who will consider,  
Who sits most high shall find the seat most slider."

On him that has gained the topmost rundle of the ladder—even on him she tries to impress the lesson that the bitter blast of Fortune which never taketh rest spares neither pope, conqueror, nor king. The higher the ascent, the greater and more grievous is the downcome. "Let not courtiership bedazzle your reason," she adds, "for courts are but transitory things,

Changing as oft as weather-cock in wind :  
'Tis thus :—Some men will give you praise as lords,  
Who would be glad to see you hang in cords."

Experience teaches fools, but alas ! the teaching often comes too late to be of any avail. "In courtroom," Madame says, "are feigning fools, panders, parasites, and flatterers who, for some insignificant service, receive some significant reward, and from a state of servitude are ushered into the midst of the nobles of the realm." From such sycophants as these troubles arise, and in proof thereof the dying lady recalls to the

remembrance of her brethren example upon example. Rothesay was ruthlessly starved to death, his brother was taken prisoner, and his father's heart broke over the two-fold tragedy.

King James the First, the patron of prudence,  
 Gem of genius and pearl of policy,  
 Well of justice and flood of eloquence,  
 Whose virtue doth transcend my fantasy  
 For to describe ; yet, when he stood most high,  
 By false exorbitant conspiracy  
 That prudent prince was piteously cast down.

Some there were, like the presumptuous Cochrane and his caitiff company, who brought their monarch, James III., to confusion, and essayed to climb so high themselves that they overleapt their ladders and were strangled to death on Lauder Bridge. The vain and wilful ascent of James of the Iron Belt at "Dark Flodden Field," too,—who can forget it? And now events thicken around the shrine of their own memories, but as a warning she dares to fix deep in their minds how

The Archbishop of St Andrews, Beaton,  
 Chancellor and Primate in power pastoral,  
 Climb'd next the king, most high in this region ;—  
 The ladder shook—he leapt—and got a fall :  
 Authority, nor power spiritual,  
 Riches, friendship might not that time prevail,  
 When Dame Curia began to steer her tail.

Ere the dying lady concludes the dictation of her second bequest, she takes a long and sad farewell of the royal towns in which she had spent so many happy moments, and leaves a word of comforting assurance, as becomes an advocate going homewards, to her friends at court. She says in the codicil—

“ There is no constant court but one,  
 Where Christ is King, whose time interminable  
 And high triumphant glory is never gone.  
 That quiet court, mirthful, immutable,  
 Unchanging, standeth firm aye and stable ;  
 Dissimulation, flatt'ry, false report  
 Into that court shall never get resort.”

All this, and much more, did the Lyon-King hear as he played the eavesdropper in the shade of the hawthorn-tree. But quicker ears and keener eyes than his had heard and seen the death-fingered bird. In a twinkling a magpie, a raven, and a gled are fluttering round about her, anxious to alleviate the agony of her last moments; and these new-comers the poet deftly arrays in the holy habiliments of a canon-regular, a black monk, and a friar respectively, and pictures them Madame's executors. With many pitiful expressions of condolence they urge her to make provision for her spirit and confess, so that they may give her full remission. Whispered the Pye in her ear—

“ I think your goods natural  
Should be submitted whole into my care ;  
Ye know, I am a holy creature.”

“ I am a holy friar,” put in the Gled, while he tenderly held up her aching head, “ and have power to bring you quick to heaven. Everybody knows that my conscience is unblemished, and over you I shall pronounce a funeral prayer.”

“ Father,” says Mrs Parrot, “ by the Rood ! albeit thy raiment is religiouslike, thy conscience or thy memory, methinks, is not untarnished. But last evening I beheld thee treacherously snatch a chicken from its mother near yonder dyke. What say'st thou to that ?”

“ I grant,” said he, “ that hen was my good friend,  
And I that chicken took but for my teind.”

Time, however, with the glorious prospect of pickings of parrot bones in the background making their teeth water, whets the appetites of these holy executors, who crave the lady to hasten on her confession while nature grants her grace to do it. Friar Gled, in particular, is urgent. He promises her soul a speedy flight past the door of purgatory, straight on to heaven, on the wings of angels, and assures her that he shall murmur dirges round her grave, sing St Mungo's matins, say the “ auld

Placebo backward," and go the length, for her dear sake, of wearing mourning weeds.

"Ah! Father," she replied, "thy words are wondrous fair, yet I fear thy deeds contradict them. The marvel is that ye are not heartily ashamed of your defaults and imperfections, for men say, and that truly, ye are but a downright vagabond and hypocrite, debarred from the Consistory. Begone, then! To put my gear in your possession I will not!"

The inquisitors are tactful. Perceiving that Madame knows much, too much, in fact, of their degeneracy, they conjure her to declare unto them the reasons why people judge churchmen so abominable. She complies, and contrasts them with their peerless, prudent predecessors of the primitive Christian age, when

The prelates wedded were with Poverty,  
 Those days when they flourished in fame,  
 And with her cousin, lady Chastity,  
 And dame Devotion, notable of name :  
 Humble they were, simple, and full of shame.  
 Thus Chastity and dame Devotion  
 Were the chief cause of their promotion.

But the times changed—and in the cycle of events there reigned in Rome's great city a prince who soon found cause of divorce between Monsieur Kirk and Madame Poverty. The marriage was dissolved and Kirk espoused, with great solemnity, to an unpitying and unreasonable but exceedingly wealthy widow called Dame Property. The new wife prospered, while the Lady Devotion, left out in the cold to perish, withdrew to the caves and dens to lead the life of an anchorite. By and by, two daughters appeared upon the scene, goodly to look upon,—to the elder was given the name Riches and to the younger Sensuality.

This royal Riches and Lady Sensual,  
 From that time forth, took all the governance  
 Of the most part of the State Spiritual :  
 And these, in turn, with humble observance,



Their wits did amorously advance  
 As lovers true, their ladies for to please :  
 God knows if even then their hearts were at ease !

Study, prayers, and preaching all forgot, they fell victims of Sensuality. No longer would they be enthralled by wedlock vows. Their consorts were sent adrift, so that licentious husbands might the more easily lead their lustful existences unfettered. Dame Chastity was declared an apostate. "Shall we," they cry, "receive what Rome has refused and condemned? Nay, go hence; find a place for thyself among the nuns." From the nunnery, however, she was expelled to gratify the whimsical pleasures of Mademoiselles Riches and Sensuality—she fled for refuge to the Friars, and they denied her admittance, and slammed the door in her face.

"Where be she now?" inquired Friar Gled.

"Not among you, I assure you," replied Madame, "but with the Sisters of the Sciennes. There she has found Poverty, her cousin, and Devotion, her twin-sister, and Faith, Hope, and Charity, and a host of other virtuous maidens, as yet unpoluted;—nathless, defended by six great cannon, surnamed Perseverance, Constancy, Conscience, Austerity, Labour, and Abstinence, to resist the subversive subtlety of the ladies Riches and Sensuality,—defended, too, by a bombard called *Domine, custodi nos!*—Lord, protect us!—the terror of all who chance to come within its reach and range."

"How long, think ye," sneeringly remarked Canon Pye, "shall these ladies remain, thus solitarily, in such perfection?"

"Brother," answered Mrs Parrot, "just so long as they elect their heads and obey correction. But where, prudent prelates, where was your prescience that took on hand to observe chastity—and not only chastity, but also austere life, and labour, and abstinence?"

You know greatness, and ease, and illness  
 To Lechery was mother and mistress."

“By the Rood!” croaked the Benedictine Raven, “thou ravest, thus to censure Riches and Property.” Then, having put forth his replication, he added, “Thy reason, thou slanderer, is not worth one single mite. The princes of the realm themselves are to blame for putting such worthless pastors in the Kirk to govern souls—men who cannot even guide themselves. Dike-loupers, sharpers, hungry gormandizing wolves, I call them. Great pleasure it were to me to hear a bishop preach, or a dean, or a doctor of divinity, or an abbot, or a parson overflowing with philosophy.”

“Alas! alas!” quoth Madame, “they have forgotten how to preach, having been held so long in servitude by Dame Property and her two worthy daughters.”

“Ugh! thou’rt an arrant braggart,” said Friar Gled; “talk of things thou knowest about. Go on with thy confession!”

Then she her shrove, with devout countenance,

To that false Gled which feign’d himself a friar;

And when she had completed her penance,

Full subtly at her he ’gan inquire:

“Choose you,” said he, “which of us Brethren here

Shall have of all your natural gear the cures:

Ye know none be more holy creatures.”

The Gled and the Corby Monk are thereupon appointed her trustees, and they swear to be true to her as they would be to their own mothers. “And what,” whimpered the Pye, “shall mine office be?”

“Thou’lt be overman unto the other two,” replied Mrs Parrot, and then she gave directions for the parting of her possessions. “My gay mantle of green I leave to the night-loving Howlet, my bright crystal eyes to the light-avoiding Bat, and my burnished beak to the gentle Pelican. The one-toned Cuckoo shall receive my music with my angelical voice, and the Goose my eloquence and tongue rhetorical.

Then take and dry my bones, both great and small,  
And close them in a case of ivory fine,  
And them present unto the Phoenix syne,

To burn with her when she her life renews :  
 In Araby find her without delay ;  
 Ye shall know her by her most heavenly hues,—  
 Gold, azure, red, and purple, green, and gray ;  
 Five hundred years is her life to a day.

When I am gone, tarry not, but speed to the Court and present my heart unto my sovereign-king. 'Tis his alone: I wot he will enclose it in a ring. The rest I leave to yourselves to be parted equally among you. Be true to me. Sorely I suspect your consciences be too large !”

“Nay, doubt not,” they answer with one accord, “we take it with the charge.”

“Adieu, Brothers,” quoth the pure Papingo ;  
 “To talking more I have no time to tarry ;  
 But, since my spirit must from my body go,  
 I recommend it to the Queen of Fairy,  
 Eternally into her court to carry,  
 In wilderness, among the woodlands hoar.”  
 She then inclined her head, and spake no more.

Scarce had the murmured *In Manus tuas*—Into thy hands—died away, when the Black Monk began “to rug and rive” at his deceased benefactress. “Brother !” said the Friar, but the Raven pretended not to hear. “Brother !” repeated Greedy Gled, “eat softly. While she is hot, part her evenly among us: take you one half, and reach to me the other.”

“The fiends seize thee !” piped Canon Pye. “Why make ye me a stepchild, and I your brother? Beshrew your hearts, but ye do me wrong !”

“Take these,” said the Friar as he hastily returned to the attack, “the intestines are thy share.” Soon a shower of angel feathers filled the air, and nothing was left except the heart. Catching sight of it amid the hurry-skurry of down and quills, the Magpie cried,

“This pertaineth to the King,  
 Which to his Grace I purpose to present.”  
 “Thou,” quoth the Gled, “shalt fail of thy intent.”

With that the Gled the piece clutched in his claws,  
And fled his way: the lave with all their might,  
To chase the Gled, flew all out of my sight.

This is the powerful story which Sir David Lindsay of the Mount indited to his countrymen some three and a half centuries ago. The narrative is diaphanously clear in its significance,—the poet is *scunnert* at the preposterous licentiousness of the Church and State, and he launches forth all his hatred of the times by flooding the story with streams of swift-flowing, surging, scathing satire. He was, anachronistically speaking, the Bayard of his age—an accomplished knight, “without fear and without reproach.”

