

The Storied Dust of Lindores.

The Abbey frowned
With massive arches broad and round,
That rose alternate, row on row,
On ponderous columns, short and low.

—*Marmion.*

IT was eventide. Heaven's brilliant eye of day had just gone down behind the lofty bens of the Grampians, and his rosy pinions were trellising the western sky with glorious bands of red and gold. On the hillsides of the richly-pastured Ochils was shed the crimson twilight: it deluged land and water; it flooded the valley of the Tay with its mellow mystic beauty, and fell, one living concentration of lingering splendour, aslant the blue and green waters of the noble river, as, after his rude impetuous career from Highland hills, he rested himself in the fair plains of Gowrie.

On this particular night—towards the end of July 1484—Nature is horribly, apprehensively quiet. All the air holds a solemn stillness, like the stillness—the awful, mysterious calm that heralds the bursting of a tropical storm. A load even seems to lie on the hearts of the canorous merle and thrush, for they are pouring forth their deep-toned modulations haltingly,—there is pity and sorrow in those sweet notes which rise and fall, then rise again and stop so suddenly and warningly.

And the black monks of Lindores, good men, tried and true, the most of them, have deviated from their wonted régime. The compline, the last of the daily devotions, has been said; still the brethren have not retired. To-night expectation is on

tip-toe; to-night one of Scotland's noblest warriors is to join their holy brotherhood.

Lance, shield, and sword relinquished, at his side
A bead-roll,—in his hand a clasped book,
Or staff more harmless than the shepherd's crook,
The war-worn chieftain quits the world—to hide
His thin autumnal locks where Monks abide
In cloistered privacy.

Mark this chieftain well! A captive he comes, compelled by his sovereign to spend the waning years of his lifetime—and a wild rugged lifetime in veriest truth it has been—within the Abbey walls of Lindores. James, Earl of Douglas, the dreaded Black Douglas, is his name. Yes, we repeat, mark him well, for he is turning his back for all time upon the world against which he has so often fretted and fumed, and been so much at wars and variance. The casque he has doffed to don the cowl—the implements of strife laid aside for the staff of peace—feudal rapine and bloodshed forsworn for nocturnals and matins and vespers—beauty and chivalry and power spurned for cleansing fires and a celestial diadem. And in the old monastery, somewhere under the sod of those grass-carpeted aisles, hallowed by the tread of godly man,—somewhere among those time-ravaged and ivy-screened walls, rest the ashes of that ill-starred knight.

Who does not know the story of the Douglas wars? Rising to an enviable eminence in the person of the renowned and chivalrous Good Lord James, Bruce's friend and courageous comrade, the House of Douglas had grown by leaps and bounds. Fondled by Dame Fortune, with monarchs to aid and abet her, they possessed almost a third of Scotland, besides the dukedom of Touraine in France, while thousands of gallant, if sometimes licentious, warriors followed their master to war. In the course of time the Douglasses became a race who would not be said nay—a race with whom a host had always to reckon, and reckon cautiously. But Prosperity is oftentimes the mother of inordinate Pride, and Pride as often goes before a fall. So was it with the Douglasses.

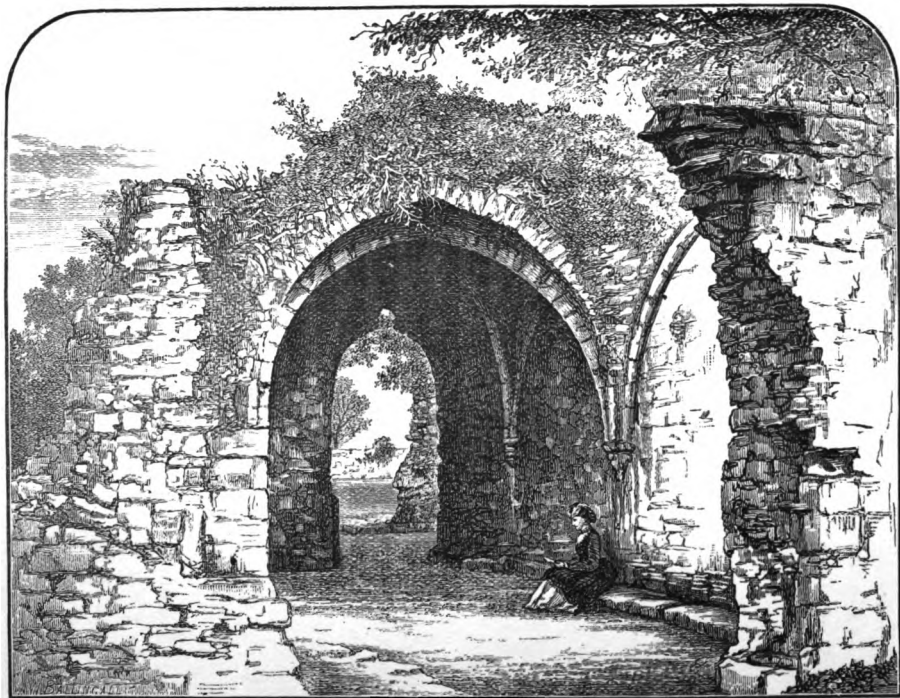
In the reign of James II., the redoubted family attained its highest pitch of pride and power. Brave in titles and riches, surrounded by sycophants and counsellors holding a Douglas knighthood, the Earls played the mimic sovereign and held the regents of the kingdom in the most pernicious contempt. At length it became evident that, unless regal authority were to be dissolved and trampled under foot, the sooner the dangerous and aspiring House was crushed the better it would be for king and state.

The first scene of the Douglas Tragedies was laid with great care and preparation in Edinburgh Castle, whither the young Earl William and his brother David were treacherously decoyed by the chancellor, Crichton. For some days all went merry as a marriage-bell, but meanwhile a storm was brewing. One evening, as the brothers sat at supper with the king, the fatal Black Bull's head, sure signal of speedy death, was set upon the table. The Douglasses sprang to their feet aghast, their fingers on their swords, and rushed towards the door,—armed men were there,—the hapless youths were instantly overpowered, dragged to the back court of the castle, and beheaded. This was the famous Black Dinner of 1440, in detestation of which someone, generations ago, wrote the following anathema :—

Edinburgh Castle, town, and tower,
God grant you sink for sin ;
And that even for the Black Dinner
Earl Douglas got therein !

And James was still but a youth when, at Stirling some twelve years afterwards, he urged a later Earl, cousin of the murdered nobles, to forego the league which he had formed with the Earls of Ross and Crawford ; when, on the knight's refusal, in the heat of passion he drew his dagger, and, exclaiming, ' If you will not break the league, by heaven this shall,' stabbed the disobedient chieftain to the heart. Truly, beyond all shadow of doubt, another awful fall !

But the Douglas faction was not dismembered as the rulers



LINDORES ABBEY.

had, by the foregoing events, determined it should be. Like the fabled seven-headed Hydra of superstitious days, which, when one head was lopped off, received two others in its place, the House grew in the midst of all its difficulties. Four brothers immediately donned their weapons to avenge the fate of the fallen Earl, and once more anarchy and gloom threatened to enfold our country in their relentless coils. A cruel civil war raged for three years to decide whether James Stuart or James Douglas was to govern Scotland.

With an army of 40,000 men, the Earl marched against his sovereign, whom he met near the village of Abercorn. Everything was as he could have wished it, but Douglas was undecided: only a narrow brook separated the two forces, yet he hesitated to join battle with the enemy, and that pause, though it was slight, brought about his ruin. Night intervened, and in the morning the hapless knight found himself, like a stranded vessel, left alone—all alone. Nothing remained for him but flight—his castles were ravaged—his possessions were forfeited—his brothers defeated and slain—and he himself, an exile, took refuge in England, and became a pensioner of Henry VI.

But to such an one as James Douglas, ever longing to look on the pleasant hills and smiling green dales which, in his halcyon days, he was wont to proudly call his own, a life of exile and inactivity must have been extremely galling and irritating. It was, therefore, with the wildest hopes that the banished Earl joined the Duke of Albany in an invasion of Scotland by the west. Here misfortune, cruel-hearted misfortune, again awaited him. On St Mary Magdalene's Day—July 22nd, 1484—the raiders rode into the town of Lochmaben, where a fair was being held. A fierce engagement ensued, for thenadays every country-fellow carried arms, and knew, moreover, how to use them. The fight lasted from noon till night. In the end the Scots asserted their supremacy; the invaders were defeated, Albany only escaping by the swiftness of his horse, while the

Earl, unfortunate ever, weighted with years and arms, bowed down with remorse, and wearied by waging wars with such adversity, was numbered amongst the prisoners.

When brought before the king, Douglas, it is said, turned his back upon him, and, out of a true sense of his guilt, refused to look him in the face. But, notwithstanding this, surely the historian is unduly hard when he avers that he was the first Scotsman who taught the Scottish nobility to value English gold, preferments, and pensions, more than the product of their native soil, the honour of their ancient blood, and the integrity of their formerly untainted souls; insomuch that if Douglas had had a thousand lives united in one, he deserved to die as many deaths. Nay, Abercromby, thou hast overshot the mark this time! King James was merciful, and he was the principal person concerned—he was struck with the chivalric bearing, gravity, and grey hairs of the fortune-forsaken chieftain, and gave commands that he should be lodged in the Abbey of Lindores. “He that may no better be, maun e’en be a monk,” was all that Douglas deigned to say when he heard his doom.

We may not lift the veil to peer behind—nay, ’twould be sacrilege on our part even to speculate on that humble and reverent life spent within the cloisters of the ancient monastery. Ere the soul snapped its worn-out fetters, however, one more scene of that sad eventful life was to be enacted.

The closing years of James III.’s reign were clouded by misfortunes and civil war. In 1488 the insurrection reached a climax when the rebels set up the King’s son in his stead. James in dismay hurried through the country, levying troops from those shires which were still loyal to him. As he journeyed through Fife he bethought himself of the soldier-monk of Lindores, and turned aside to urge, with promises princely and glorious, the aged Chieftain to bestir himself for Scotland’s sake and put himself in the forefront of the Royal troops, so that at mention of that dread name, dreadful as the thunderbolt, the spears of the insurgents might drop harmless from their enervated

grasp. Alack! it was not to be. Douglas's thoughts were by this time elsewhere; and though there still lurked deep down in his bosom a spark of that fiery mood which not even age could altogether cool, he was not to be tempted by the splendour of James's offers. "Your Majesty," he said—and the old monk, wearied of earth, raised himself up as he spoke—"has kept the Douglas, like your treasure, too long under lock and key to be of service to you now."

So James Stuart rode away to his sad fate at Sauchieburn, and James Douglas, scorning all that power and beauty and wealth and the world could bestow—aware, too, that "the paths of glory lead, after all, but to the grave"—remained at Lindores, but not to dwell in soft repose.

Within his cell,
 Round the decaying trunk of human pride,
 At eve, and morn, and midnight's silent hour,
 Do penitential cogitations cling;
 Like ivy, round some ancient elm, they twine,
 In grisly folds and strictures serpentine.

A few months longer he lingered. At last he yielded up his soul, "that transient thing, not utterly unknown," to his Creator; and amid the crumbling walls of the Abbey, joyously hugged by the ivy green, lies his mouldering dust. And as his brethren-monks chanted the requiem over him, may we also reverently whisper, *Requiescat in pace!*—yes, may he rest in peace!

But the Douglas shrine was not the only treasure over which the monks of Lindores kept vigil. Within those sacred walls lies the dust of old-time tragedy. Near the site of the high altar two small stone coffins, the larger of them not a yard long, may be seen, sunk in the green sod, but open to the blue sky, and of course empty now. Tradition, with old Andro of Wyntoun, the chronicler of Lochleven, to aid it, tells a remarkably strange story regarding these coffins—a story dark and monstrous.

According to the old historian, they contained the bodies of the infant children of David I., Earl of Huntingdon and Prince of Scotland, sixth son of Malcolm Caenmohr who, it will be remembered, succeeded the famous or infamous Macbeth. This David it was who founded the Abbey of Lindores, and from his unbounded generosity to the Church some of us know him better, perhaps, by the name of "The Sore Saint." When his father died the crown was seized by his uncle, Donald Bane. Four years altogether did Donald reign. Twice was he driven from authority—once by Duncan, a bastard son of King Malcolm, yet only to be reinstated by Macpendar, the puissant Earl of Mearns. The second time, however, he was ousted from the sovereignty without hope of restoration, and fled to the Western Isles. The inhabitants handed him over to King Edgar, by whose orders he was immediately cast into prison, and, to ensure his working no more havoc with the monarchy, his eyes were picked out and his limbs brutally maimed.

The story does not end here. All the while the imprisoned monarch tastes the bitter fruits of adversity his mind is revolving a fearful, blood-curdling scheme of revenge. And to him who waits, to him who bides his time, what opportunities do come! To Donald the opportunity came. It seems that, as time went by, he began to be looked upon as an imbecile, and was permitted to take a breath of fresh air, when it pleased him, in the courtyard of the palace.

One day he had hobbled out, for he was blind and lame, and was sitting, as was his wont, no doubt brooding over his misfortunes, and treasuring in his inmost heart thoughts dark and too fearsome for utterance, when he heard a little child—David's infant son—flichterin' about in the sunshine and making the courtyard resound with his merry prattle. This was Donald's chance. He called the child to him as if to make of him, and the little fellow, sympathetic perhaps with the old prisoner's infirmities as children most often are, clambered up on his knee and clasped him round the neck, whereupon Donald, with iron

which he had made to fit his nails, stabbed the child's body so fearfully that, after giving one agonising cry, it immediately expired. Its scream brought good Queen Matilda to the spot, who, beholding the murdered babe and the crouching wretch, there and then, says Wyntoun, "for sorrow gave up the ghost," the succession of David's line being only saved by the Cæsarean operation.

Summary punishment was meted out to Donald. He was instantly cast into dungeon—one of those bottle-dungeons so common in those days and from which there was no chance of escape, and kept there, meatless and drinkless, till death ended his tortures. The body of the hapless infant was in the meantime conveyed to Lindores, and entombed in one of those little coffins in front of the altar.

And now, what meant the fate of that infant-boy? It was fraught with terrible misfortunes for Scotland. This it might have meant—no interregnum and the dreadful and disastrous warfare which accompanied it; no need, perhaps, for either a Wallace or a Bruce, however fragrant their remembrance now is; and, above all, no oft-repeated minority of unhappy Stuarts—Heaven bless their memory!—for, had David's son lived, a Stuart may never have sat upon the throne of Scotland.

How closely intermingled are Scottish events and Scottish families! One of Donald's descendants (through Bethok, his daughter), Comyn, was a claimant for the Royal sceptre with Robert the Bruce, whose great-great-grandfather was David, Earl of Huntingdon. To-day the great house of Comyn is represented by Sir William Gordon Cumming of Altyre, in Elgin.

Yet more! these quiet grey walls have more; they hold in thrall the secret of another darksome tragedy. Long ago Scotsmen had a tale to tell which made the listener's blood run cold and chill—to wit, the atrocious murder of the debonair and chivalrous Duke of Rothesay by his inhuman uncle, Albany. Who does not know that lamentable story, how in the spring of 1402, to satisfy Albany's inordinate thirst for unhindered power,

the Prince was waylaid near St Andrews, conducted amidst a drenching rain to the old mar or tower of Falkland, and thrust into the subterranean dungeon there,—how Albany's minion, Sir John Ramornie, with his savage hirelings, Wright and Selkirk, wrought as calculatingly devilish and unparalleled a piece of cruelty as is to be found in the annals of history,—how the misguided youth, the pride, if sometimes the terror, of his country, was allowed to lie and rot in his fetters, without food of any kind, till death released his troubled spirit,—and how the wasted and squalid corpse of the unhappy victim was hastily coffined and more hastily carried over the hills to Lindores Abbey, far away from the resting-place of his ancestors, for the treacherous villains had caused the rumour to be spread abroad that Rothesay had died of an infectious and dread disease ?

Rothesay had married a daughter of the house of Douglas. What thoughts, therefore, must have surged tumultuously through the mind of the soldier-monk when, as he kept his nightly vigils in the Abbey Church, his eye rested now and then on the tomb of the Prince, whose career had been, like his own, a thorny and unprosperous one, and whose descendants, had he lived, would have had the uncooling blood of the Douglasses in their veins ! Among other possibilities, too, there might have been no stern conflicts of Stuarts and Douglasses, and no banished Earl at the quiet old Abbey by the Tay.

Mute now is the voice of monkish labour, and peacefully stand the crumbling arches of the Abbey amid poplars and beeches. Otherwise the scene is the same as of old. The voice of nature is not hushed ; the merle's mellow note, the chirrup of the chaffinch, the heaven-tuned warble of the skylark, the murmur of the brooklet as it seeks its way adown the glen, the swish of the glittering Tay, the breath of the meadow-sweet are still the same—still as sweetly singing their perennial psalm of praise. And who, thinking thus of the hallowed drama of nature, would ever dream that the old Abbey was the shrine of such strange and terrible tragedies in the drama of life ?