

CHAP. VI.

JAMES THE SIXTH.

1600.

 CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

<i>England.</i> Elizabeth.		<i>France.</i> Henry IV.		<i>Germany.</i> Rudolph II.		<i>Spain.</i> Philip III.		<i>Portugal.</i> Philip III.		<i>Pope.</i> Clement VIII.
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IN the course of these labours we are now arrived at an extraordinary plot, of which the history, after all the light shed upon it by recent research, is still, in some points, obscure and contradictory. This is the Gowrie Conspiracy. Its author, or, as some have not scrupled to assert, its victim, was the grandson of that Patrick Lord Ruthven, who, as we have seen, acted a chief part in the atrocious murder of Riccio, and died in exile soon after that event.¹ It was the second son of this nobleman, William, fourth Lord Ruthven, who, after sharing the guilt and banishment of his father for his accession to the same plot, was restored by the Regent Morton, and returned to Scotland to engage in new conspiracies. It was his threats, and the menaces of the fierce Lindsay, that were said to have extorted from the miserable captive of Lochleven the demission of her crown. His services were

¹ *Supra*, vol. vii. p. 35.

rewarded by an earldom ; and from the fertile brain and unscrupulous principles of the new earl proceeded the plot for the seizure of the King, known by the name of the Raid of Ruthven. He was pardoned ; became again suspected ; threw himself into another enterprise against the Government, with Mar and Angus ; was detected, found guilty, and suffered on the scaffold. Of his treason there was no doubt ; but his conviction, as we have seen,¹ was procured by a disgraceful expedient, which roused the utmost indignation of his friends. This happened in 1584 ; and, for two years after, the imperious government of Arran directed, or rather compelled, the royal wrath into the severest measures against the house of Ruthven. But the destruction of Arran's power permitted the King's temper, generally gentle and forgiving, to have influence ; and, in 1586, the earldom was restored to James, the eldest son of the house, who, dying soon after, transmitted it to John, the third earl, the author of the Gowrie Conspiracy.

Young Gowrie, at the time of his father's execution, could have been scarcely eight years' old ;² and in the wreck of his house, he, his unhappy mother, and her other children, received an asylum in the North. Here, amidst the savage solitudes of Athol, the country of her son-in-law,³ the widowed Countess brought up her children, brooded over her wrongs, and taught her sons the story of their father's

¹ *Supra*, vol. viii. p. 192.

² MS. St. P. Off., List of the Scottish Nobility, 1592. In 1592 Gowrie was fifteen years old.

³ The Earl of Athol had married the sister of Gowrie, MS. St. P. Off.

murder, as his execution was accounted by his party. From such lessons, they seem early to have drunk in that deep passion for revenge, which, in those dark days, was so universally felt, that it may be regarded almost as the pulse of feudal life; a passion which, sometimes at a quicker, sometimes at a slower pace, but yet with strong and abiding force, carried on its victims to the consummation of their purpose. Meanwhile the royal pity had awoke: the family was restored to its honours; and the young earl, having been committed to the care of Rollock the learned Principal of the University of Edinburgh, received an excellent education. But the return for all this, on the part both of his mother and himself, was ingratitude and new intrigues. When, in 1593, Bothwell at Holyrood audaciously broke in upon his sovereign, and for a short season obtained possession of his person, it was the Countesses of Gowrie and Athol, the mother and sister of Gowrie, who were his most active assistants; and in 1594, when the same desperate baron, in conjunction with Athol, Ochiltree, and the Kirk, organized a second plot, the name of the young Earl of Gowrie appeared in the "*Band*" which united the conspirators.¹ He was thus early bred up in intrigue; but the King either did not, or would not, discover his guilt: and Gowrie, having received the royal license to complete his education abroad,² passed through England into Italy, studied for five years at the University of Padua, and there is said

¹ See above p. 102, and St. P. Off. MS., Scott. Corr., April, 1594. Band for Protection of Religion, MS.

² MS. Letter, St. P. Off., 22d August, 1594, Sir R. Bowes to Burghley.

to have so highly distinguished himself, that he became Rector of that famous seminary.¹ The young earl was now only one-and-twenty;² of an athletic person, and noble presence; excellent in all his exercises; an accomplished swordsman; and so ripe a scholar, that there was scarcely any art or faculty which he had not mastered. Amongst his studies Necromancy, or Natural Magic, was a favourite pursuit; and his tutor, Rhynd, detected him, when at Padua, wearing cabalistic characters concealed upon his person, which were then sometimes used as spells against diabolic, or recipients of angelic influence.³ He was an enthusiastic chemist; and, in common with many eminent men of that age, a dabbler in judicial astrology, and a believer in the great arcanum. It is curious that this propensity to magic and visionary pursuits was hereditary in the Ruthven family. His grandfather, the murderer of Riccio, had given Queen Mary a magic ring, as a preservative against poison. His father, the leader in the Raid of Ruthven, when in Italy, had his fortunes foretold by a wizard; and the son, when some of his friends had killed an adder in the braes of Strathbran, lamented their haste, and told them he would have diverted them by making it dance to the tune of some cabalistic words which he had learnt in Italy from a great necromancer and divine.

¹ Calderwood, MS. Hist., Brit. Mus., Ayscough, 4739, p. 1386, states this positively: but I have not found his authority.

² MS. St. P. Off., drawn up for Cecil in 1592. State of the Scottish nobility.

³ Rhynd's Declaration in Pitcairn's Crim. Trials, vol. ii. pp. 219, 220.

During his residence at Padua, Gowrie addressed to the King a letter full of gratitude and affection.¹ He kept up, also, a correspondence with his old tutor Rollock; and, in 1595, sent a long epistle to Malcolm, the minister of the kirk at Perth, expressing the most devoted attachment to Presbyterian principles, and written in that strange, pedantic, puritanic style which then characterized the correspondence of the most zealous of that party.² The young earl described in this letter, with high exultation and approval, an insane attack made by a fanatical English Protestant upon a Catholic procession, in which he seized the sacred Host, and trampled it under foot; and concluded by expressions of deep regret that his absence from Scotland did not permit him to set forth God's glory in his native country; trusting, as he added, to make up for all this on his return.

This return took place in 1599, through Switzerland; and on arriving at Geneva, he became an inmate for three months in the house of the famous Reformer Beza, who cherished him as the son of a father whom his party regarded as a martyr to the Protestant faith. From Geneva he travelled to Paris, where he was received with high distinction at the French Court, and by Elizabeth's Ambassador, Sir Henry Nevil; who admitted him into his confidence, held private conferences with him "on the alterations feared in Scotland, (to use Nevil's own

¹ Pitcairn's Crim. Trials, vol. ii. p. 330.

² It has been printed by Mr Pitcairn, in the second volume of his valuable work, the Criminal Trials, pp. 330, 331.

words,) found him to be exceedingly well affected to the cause of religion, devoted to Elizabeth's service, and, in short, a nobleman of whom, for his good judgment, zeal, and ability, exceeding good use might be made on his return."¹ Bothwell, his old friend and associate, was also at this time in Paris. On leaving France, Gowrie, carrying warm letters of recommendation from Nevil, proceeded to the English Court; where Elizabeth received him with flattering distinction, and kept him for two months; admitting him to her confidence, holding with him great conference² on the state of Scotland, which was then threatening and alarming; and it is said by one author, appointing a guard to watch over his safety. It was then no unfrequent occurrence for the incipient intriguer, or conspirator, to be seized or kidnapped by the stratagem of his opponents; and, if true, this circumstance certainly shows how highly the English Queen regarded his safety, and what value she set upon his future services. During this stay in England he became familiar with Sir Robert Cecil, at this moment the most confidential minister of Elizabeth; with the great Lord Wyloughby, one of the honestest and ablest servants of the Queen;³ and with many others of the leading men about Court.

At the time of Gowrie's arrival in England, (3d

¹ Sir Henry Nevil to Secretary Cecil, 27th Feb., 1599. Winwood's Memorials, vol. i. p. 156.

² MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Sir John Carey to Cecil, 29th May, 1600.

³ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., James Hudson to Cecil, 3d April, 1600. Also, Ibid., B.C., Wyloughby to Cecil, 11th Aug., 1600.

April, 1600,) Elizabeth was deeply incensed with the proceedings of the Scottish King, and his reported intrigues with the Catholics of her own kingdom, and with the Courts of Spain and Rome, on the subject of his title. He had resolved, and made no secret of his resolution, to vindicate his right to the Crown of England by arms, if it were necessary; and he had roused the resentment and alarm of the party of the Kirk to the highest pitch, by the court which he paid to the Catholics, both at home and on the continent. A letter written to Cecil by Colvil, about six months before this, described these intrigues and preparations in strong terms.

Colvil, it must be remembered, was the confidant of the notorious Bothwell, and an old friend and fellow-conspirator of Gowrie's father. It was certain, so said Colvil in this letter, that two envoys had come to the Scottish King from the Pope. They had brought high offers: a promise of a hundred thousand crowns at present, and an engagement to pay down two millions the moment he published liberty of conscience, and declared war with England. Twenty thousand Catholics were said to be ready to join the King the moment he crossed the Border. There was not one Catholic Prince in Europe who would not support his claim; and his Holiness not only regarded him as the most learned and religious Prince of his time, but would willingly follow his advice in restoring to the universal church its purity and discipline.¹

¹ MS. St. P. Off., Advertisements from Scotland, 18th August, 1599, enclosed in a letter from Colvil, dated 21st Aug., 1599.

In another letter, written some time before this, and dated 17th August, 1599, Colvil speaks to Cecil of the ominous tranquillity of the Scottish Court; which, he says, he had often remarked to be never so quiet as when some "snake-stone was hatching"; adding, "*Quand le Mechant dort, le Diable le berche.*" He assured Cecil, that the King was highly enraged and excited against the party of the Kirk. The ministers were led by Bruce and Andrew Melvil; their ranks included Cassillis, Lindsay, Morton, and Blantyre; and he added, with a significancy which this statesman could be at no loss to understand, that if they received any secret encouragement from England, they were devising to send for Gowrie and Argyll, both of whom were then abroad.¹

This letter was written towards the end of August, 1599, when Gowrie was probably on his route to England; and in the interval between this and his arrival at the Court of Elizabeth, the estrangement between the Queen of England and the King of Scots had become more embittered. Nicolson, the English Envoy at the Scottish Court, was full of alarm at James' almost open hostility. In one of his letters to Cecil, written in the end of April, 1600, when Gowrie was at the English Court, and, as we have just seen, admitted to the confidence of this minister and his royal mistress, he described the King as indulging in expressions of the utmost discontent and anger on the subject of the intended peace between England and

¹ MS. St. P. Off., Advertisements from Scotland, 18th August, 1599, enclosed in a letter from Colvil, dated 21st Aug., 1599.

Spain. Elizabeth (such were James' words) had long resisted every amicable application made to her on the point of his title ; and now he heard one day she was about to marry the Lady Arabella to the brother of the Emperor Mathias ; the next, that she had sent for young Beauchamp to Court ; the next, that in consequence of her peace with Spain, a priest had openly addressed the Infanta, as the destined restorer of the Catholics in England.¹ Of all this, James added, the Queen refused him any explanation. She treated him with coldness and suspicion ; and it became him to look to his just rights, and provide for the future.

Such things were said even openly by the King of Scots ; but in the secrecy of his cabinet, James used far stronger language. He there insisted, that before Elizabeth's death, which considering her advanced age and broken health, could not be far distant, he must be ready armed, his exchequer well supplied, and the friends on whom he could place reliance, assembled on the spot with their full strength. To compass all this, he had spared no exertion. England swarmed with his spies ; and the "daily creeping in of Englishmen" to the Scottish Court, was a matter which perpetually roused the suspicions of Cecil, and cut his royal mistress to the quick. At this very moment, when Gowrie was in such confidential intercourse with that Princess and her ministers, the Scottish King had received information which made him stand especially on his guard. It was reported that a plot was then being organized

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 24th Dec., 1599.

by the faction in the interest of England, to compel the King into a more pacific policy, and arrest his warlike preparations against that realm;¹ that Colvil, Archibald Douglas, and Douglas the Laird of Spot, all of them old employés of Cecil, were the chief conspirators in England; and that they were casting about to draw home the Earl of Gowrie, then at the Court of Elizabeth, and on whom they reckoned as a great accession to their strength.² Bothwell, too, the arch-traitor, whom of all men the King hated and dreaded most, had been at Paris at the same time with Gowrie: their former intimacy rendered it almost impossible they should not have met; and it was now strongly reported, that this desperate man had stolen into Scotland, and had been thrice seen recently in Liddesdale.³

Such was the state of parties; such the mutual heart-burning jealousy, intrigues, and preparations between the two sovereigns, when Gowrie, after two months' residence in England, left the Court of Elizabeth and returned to his native country. The facts hitherto given are all capable of proof: their effects upon the character of Gowrie, and how far they influenced or serve to explain his subsequent extraordinary proceedings, can only be conjectural. Yet it appears that they go far to explain something of the mystery which hitherto has surrounded the

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 20th April, 1600.

² Id. Ibid.

³ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., B.C., Guevara to Lord Wylloughby, 23d April, 1600.

origin of this plot; and that here we have one of those cases where, from the elements on which we form our opinion, conjecture may come indefinitely near to certainty. Gowrie was young: and on youth what must have been worked by the flattery of a Queen, and so great a Queen as Elizabeth! He was ambitious and proud; and when he found that his friends were anxious to place him at the head of the English faction, and in opposition to the hostile projects of the King, was it likely he should decline that pre-eminence? He was a devoted and enthusiastic Puritan, and hated prelacy. Was such a mind likely to refuse the opportunity that now offered, to reëstablish the Presbyterian ascendancy, to reinstate his old friends the ministers on the ground from which they had been driven, and to destroy, if possible, that Catholic faith, which, in his judgment, was idolatrous and damnable? He was animated by a keen desire to revenge his father's death on the monarch who had brought him to the scaffold; and was it probable that when, in the secret conferences which took place with Nevil, Cecil, and Elizabeth, the hostile plans and dangerous intrigues of the King of Scotland were discussed, the Raid of Ruthven should have been forgotten; or that the nefarious project, so repeatedly hazarded, so often crowned with success, to seize the King's person, and administer the government under his pretended sanction, would not present itself? To grasp the supreme power, and have his revenge into the bargain: were such offers unlikely to be held out by so unscrupulous a minister as Cecil? Was

it probable that, if held out, they would be refused by Gowrie? But leaving such speculations, let us proceed.

The young earl arrived in Scotland, after his long absence, about the 20th of May; and some little circumstances accompanied his return, which, after his miserable fate, were remembered and much dwelt on. He entered the capital surrounded by an unusually brilliant cavalcade of noblemen and gentlemen, the friends and dependants of his house, and amid the shouts of immense crowds who welcomed his return. On hearing of it, the King shook his head, and observed, that as many shouted when his father lost his head at Stirling. Whether this was said in the presence of the young earl, is not added by Calderwood, who gives the anecdote; but it was noticed, and we may be pretty sure would reach his ear. When he kissed hands, and took his place in the Court circle, his fine presence, handsome countenance, and graceful manners, struck every one. He soon became a special favourite of the Queen and her ladies, one of whom was his sister, Lady Beatrix Ruthven; and to the King his learning and scholarship made him equally acceptable. He had lived in the society of the most eminent foreign scholars, philosophers, and divines; but he was equally accomplished in all knightly sports, and could discuss the merits of a hawk or hound as enthusiastically as any subject in the circle of the sciences. This was much to James' content; and as the monarch sat at breakfast, he would often keep Gowrie leaning on the back of his chair, and talk to him with that voluble, un-

dignified familiarity which marked the royal conversation. He rallied the young nobleman, also, on his long stay at the English Court; and, as Sir John Carey wrote to Cecil, assailed him with many "fleytes¹ and pretty taunts," on the high honours paid him by Elizabeth, his frequent great conferences with the Queen, her offer to bribe him with gold, and the sumptuousness of his reception and entertainment. He marvelled, too, with good-humoured irony, that his old friends, the ministers of the Kirk, had not ridden out to meet him and form part of his triumphant cavalcade;² and, half between joke and earnest, contrived to show him that he had watched all his movements, and was perfectly aware of his confidential intercourse with Nevil, Cecil, and Elizabeth herself.

All this Gowrie took, or seemed to take, in good part.³ He had certainly, he said, been honourably entertained, and very graciously received by the Queen of England; but this, he believed, was for the King his master's sake; and so he had accepted it. As for gold, he had been offered none: nor did he need it. He had enough of his own.⁴ It was in one of those familiar conversations on a strange subject, that an allusion escaped the King, which was afterwards remembered. Queen Anne was at this time great with child, and probably did not take sufficient care

¹ "Fleytes," scolds.

² MS. Letter, St. P. Off., B.C., Sir John Carey to Cecil, 29th May, 1600.

³ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 2d May, 1600.

⁴ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., B.C., Sir John Carey to Sir R. Cecil, 29th May, 1600.

of herself; but be this as it may, James consulted Gowrie, who had studied at Padua, then the highest medical school in Europe, on the most common causes of miscarriage. He mentioned several, but insisted on fright or sudden terror as the most dangerous; upon which the King, bursting into a fit of loud and scornful laughter, exclaimed, "Had that been true, my Lord, I should never have been sitting here to ask the question. Remember the slaughter of Seignor Davie, wherein thy grandsire was the chief actor:" a reckless, cruel thrust, which the young nobleman must have felt like an adder's sting: for not only his grandfather but his father were present at that bloody deed.¹

On another occasion, soon after his arrival, a ruffle was nearly taking place in the long gallery at Holyrood, between the servants of Colonel William Stewart and some of the gentlemen of Gowrie's suite. It was this Stewart who had seized his father at Dundee, and dragged him to his trial and death; and all dreaded a bloody encounter. But Gowrie, to their surprise, beat down the weapons of his followers; and giving place with a contemptuous jesture to Stewart, permitted him to walk first into the presence-chamber. On being remonstrated with, his brief and proud reply was a Latin proverb, "*Aquila non captat muscas.*" It is the remark of an old chronicler, that he here covertly alluded to his intended revenge against the King.² It is cer-

¹ Calderwood, MS. Hist., Brit. Mus., Sloan, 4739, fol. 1389.

² Anonymous MS. Hist. of Scotland, quoted in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii., p. 297.

tain, at least, that it betrayed a determination on Gowrie's part, to fly at the highest quarry.

On his first arrival at Court, about the middle of May 1600, he found the King's mind still concentrated upon that one subject which had so long filled his thoughts, and which he had determined to bring shortly before a Convention of his nobility, barons, and burghs. This was the necessity of making preparation for an event now currently talked of: the death of Elizabeth. To this end James had summoned a Convention of the three Estates to meet on the 20th of June. He had resolved to levy a tax upon the country, to pay his Ambassadors to foreign parts; and to have such a force in readiness as should overawe his enemies, and give confidence to his supporters. On these proposed measures parties were so divided, and such violent storms were apprehended, that the wisest, as Nicolson wrote to Cecil, wished themselves out of the country; and Gowrie, by the advice of his friends, after a brief stay at Court, retired to his own estates, "to be a beholder of the issue of these many suspicions."¹ Soon after this, a violent interview took place between the King and the English resident, Nicolson, in which James complained that Elizabeth had treated him with the utmost haughtiness and want of confidence on the subject of the Spanish peace. She blamed him, he said, for matters of which he was wholly innocent, and showed more kindness to a foreign Duke and the Infanta than to him. It was openly bragged by one of her

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 27th May, 1600.

subjects, that Bothwell was to be let loose, to come in again and brave it. She had seized a parcel of muskets, which he had declared upon his honour had been purchased for the use of his household, as if she dreaded they should be turned against herself.¹ All this, which was daily reported to Elizabeth and Cecil, increased the unfriendly feelings between the two Courts, and convinced the English minister that something decided must be done, to check that bold, and almost hostile attitude in which James seemed now determined to insist upon his rights to the English throne.

At last the important day of the Convention of the three Estates arrived; the nobility, including Gowrie amongst the rest, assembled; the barons and burghs attended; and the King, after having, in many private interviews, endeavoured to gain over the leading men to his own views, brought his proposals before the public meeting of the three Estates, in a studied harangue. To his extreme indignation and astonishment, he failed to convince them of the necessity of taxing themselves to raise the sum he required. The majority of the nobility and the prelates who had been privately canvassed by James, and talked over by the Earl of Mar, were compliant enough; but the barons and the burghs stoutly resisted. The King adjourned the Convention from Monday till Tuesday, employing the interval in threats, entreaties, and remonstrances; but on this day they were as stubborn as before. Another and longer adjournment, and another

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 29th May, 1600.

meeting took place. It not only found them in the same indomitable humour, but some of the higher barons began to waver. The Lord President Seton, in reply to the assertion of the royal claimant, that he must have an army ready on the Queen's death, to maintain his title, argued against the utter folly of attempting to seize that ancient crown by conquest. For such a purpose, he observed, who could say what exact sum might be required? and if the sum were named, who was so insane as to expect that Scotland could raise it? If about to build a palace, they might have a plan and an estimate; if to raise an army of so many thousand men, some certainty might be had of the funds required: but who would venture to fix the sum necessary for the conquest of England? and if fixed, who could be so mad as to believe that the poor country of Scotland could raise it, when it was notorious that sundry towns in England and the Low Countries could advance more money than all Scotland together?¹ Mr Edward Bruce argued for the King's views; and insisted that every true Scotsman, if he regarded the honour of his Prince and country, ought to contribute to the sum now required. Let them not imagine, said he, that a refusal would be unaccompanied with danger. Whoever usurped England after Elizabeth's death would have an eye to Scotland; and if they now suffered their King to be defeated of his right, they might chance to find themselves defeated of their country.

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 22d June, 1600. Ibid., same to same, 29th June, 1600.

This argument somewhat softened James, who had started up in a violent passion and accused the President Seton of perverting his meaning. But nothing could move the barons and burghs. They reiterated their plea of poverty; declared, that when the time came, they would furnish their monarch as fair an army as ever good subjects levied for their Prince; and in the meanwhile, instead of forty thousand crowns, would give him forty thousand pounds Scots, on the condition that they should never again be taxed in his time; and that what they did give should go to his own wants, and not to his hungry courtiers. The King spurned at this diminished and conditional offer, and insisted that it should be put to the vote whether it had not been agreed in a former Convention at St Johnston, that a hundred thousand crowns should be advanced him by a thousand persons.

On this new question the young Earl of Gowrie now spoke for the first time; and heading the opposition of the barons and the burghs, exposed the King to the disgrace of a second defeat.¹ He had, he said, been long absent from the country, and had no personal knowledge of what had taken place at St Johnston; but he contended that the present offer of the burghs and barons, to give forty thousand pounds to the King, and their promise to raise money for an army when it was required, was quite as good, nay, almost a better proposal, than that so strongly insisted on by James. Why, then, should his Majesty take such deep umbrage at it? Surely, he continued, it

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 29th June, 1600.

must be evident, that this demand of the King will bring dishonour upon all parties: it is dishonourable for a Prince to ask more than his subjects have to give, and suffer the ignominy of a refusal; it is dishonourable for a people that their poverty should be laid bare to the world, and that all men should see and know they could give so little to their Prince.¹

This speech of Gowrie, and the daring way in which so young a man threw himself into the ranks of the faction opposed to the King, astonished the Assembly. "Alas!" said Sir David Murray, a courtier, who stood near, "yonder is an unhappy man: his enemies are but seeking an occasion for his death; and now he has given it."² But if others wondered, the King, to use an expression of Nicolson's to Cecil, absolutely *raged*, and dismissed the Assembly with a tumultuous burst of fierce and undignified invective; mingling his abuse of the barons and burghs with praises of his nobility, whom he assured of his friendship and favour in all their affairs. "As for you, my masters," he exclaimed, turning with flashing eyes to the burghers, "your matters, too, may chance to come in my way; and, be assured, I shall remember this day, and be even with you. It was I who gave you a vote in Parliament; I who made you a fourth Estate: and it will be well for such as you to remember that I can summon a Parliament at my pleasure, and pull you down as easily as I have built you up."³ This insulting speech roused one of the oldest of the barons, the

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 29th June, 1600.

² MS. Calderwood, Ayscough, 4739, fol. 1389.

³ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 29th June, 1600.

Laird of Easter Wemyss, who boldly told the King that he misconstrued their meaning; and forgot how much he owed them, and what great sums they had given him in his necessities. "We have done your Majesty," said he, "as good offices for *our* Estate; and we, your Majesty's burghs and barons, are as worthy your thanks as the proudest earl, or lord, or prelate here. Our callings may be inferior, but our devotedness is as great; and so your Majesty will find it when the proper time arrives. As for our places in Parliament and Convention, we have bought our seats; we have paid your Majesty for them; and we cannot, with justice, be deprived of them. But the throne is surrounded by flatterers who propagate falsehoods against us: let us be confronted with our accusers, and we engage to prove them liars."¹

With this haughty defence on the part of the lesser barons and burghs, and with the deepest feelings of displeasure against them and Gowrie, on the part of the King, the Convention separated; and James had to digest, not only the disgrace of a refusal, but the universal satisfaction which, if we may believe Nicolson, it occasioned in the country. He was not diverted from his purpose, however; for, not ten days after, Sir Robert Cecil, who was familiar with all that had taken place at the Convention, was informed by one of his correspondents, that James' preparations against England continued, and that he intended not to tarry till Elizabeth's death. This news was written partly in cipher, on a slip of paper sent to

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 29th June, 1600.

Cecil, indorsed with the caution, "*To read, and burn.*" It contained this passage:—"Nicolson tells me he understands, by one who never abused him, that the King is, by all means, seeking a party, and hath a party in England; and by party or faction, if he can have commodity by either, * * intends not to tarry upon her Majesty's death, but take time so soon as without peril he can."¹

It is probably from this moment that we may date the actual rise of the Gowrie conspiracy. Elizabeth and James were, as we have just seen, on the very worst terms with each other. Gowrie, by every feeling of education, interest, and revenge, was attached to England and its Queen; and his conduct in the Convention had now thrown him into mortal opposition with the King of Scots. James was intriguing with the Queen's subjects in England. It was suspected he had fomented the rebellion in Ireland; and all this at a moment when the Queen was most likely to resent it deeply; for she had lately been roused and irritated by the insane projects of Essex. Although aged, Elizabeth was still unbroken in health; yet James must be watching for her death, and openly admonishing his subjects to make preparations for taking possession of her crown. This Gowrie knew; and he reckoned on the support of England in anything he undertook against the King. He could build, too, with certainty on the favourable opinion of the lesser barons, and the influential body of the burghs. They had

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., 9th July, 1600. Secret information sent in the Letter, indorsed, *To read and burn.*

already made their stand against the King; in the convention Gowrie had joined them; and they understood each other. On the Kirk he could rely with still more certainty: he was the darling hope of the Presbyterian party, the son of their martyr; the youthful Daniel, who had kept his first faith entire in the bosom of idolatry, and in the very headquarters of Antichrist. Could he doubt that, in any attempt to stay the headlong haste with which their unhappy King seemed to be throwing himself into the arms of the Catholic party, he would fail to have the whole force of the Kirk upon his side? All this was encouraging; and when, in addition to these inducements, he contemplated the rich reward awaiting his success, if he made himself master of the King's person; the gratification of his ambition, power, place, fame, above all, revenge; was it likely that a man of Gowrie's temperament would resist them all? Besides, he had enemies: his death and ruin, if we may believe one who must have had good cause of knowledge, were already resolved on;¹ and if he did not become the assailant, it was a narrow chance but he might prove the victim. If, on the other hand, he could but strike the blow, his popularity and high connexions promised him many friends, on whose concurrence he could safely reckon.

But how was the blow to be struck? Here was the whole difficulty and danger; and here, young as he was, Gowrie appears to have devised a plot unlike any hitherto known in his country's history, although fertile in conspiracies: more Italian than Scottish; crafty,

¹ See p. 325.

rather than openly courageous ; and, from its very originality, not, perhaps, unlikely to have succeeded, had the parts assigned to the conspirators been differently cast. His design appears to have been to decoy the King, by some plausible tale, into his castle of Gowrie, on the Tay ; to separate him from his suite, and compel him, by threats of instant death, to suffer himself to be carried aboard a boat which should be waiting on the river for the purpose. This was the first act in the projected plot : in the second, the vessel was to push instantly out to sea ; and the royal prisoner was to be conveyed, in a few hours, to an impregnable little fortalice which overhung the German Ocean, and where, if well victualled, a garrison of twenty men could, for months, have defied a royal army. To communicate with England, and administer the government in the royal name, but under the dictation of Gowrie and his faction, would then be easy. It had been repeatedly done before in the history of the country, and very recently in the Raid of Ruthven ; why then should it not be done again ?

In all this projected scheme there was some rashness ; something smacking of youth, audacity, and revenge ; but there was also some sagacity. Since the days of the conspiracy against Riccio, down to the Raid of Ruthven, most of the plots which chequer and stain the history of the country had failed, from admitting too many into their secret. A band or covenant had been drawn up ; a correspondence opened with England ; the Envoy at the Scottish Court had been admitted to the secret ; the Kirk

consulted; the pulse of the burghs and barons felt; and so many points presented for suspicion to work on, and treachery to be rewarded, that success was unlikely, and discovery almost inevitable. That Gowrie had observed this, and had deeply studied the subject of "Conspiracies against Princes" under Machiavel, the most acute of masters, we know from a curious anecdote preserved by Spottiswood. A short time before his unhappy death, a friend found him in the library, with a volume of the great Florentine in his hand. On inquiring the subject of his studies: showing him the book, he observed that it was a collection of the most famous conspiracies against princes. "A perilous subject," was the reply. "Yes," said the young conspirator; "perilous: because most of such plots have been foolishly contrived, and have embraced too many in the secret. He who goes about such a business, should beware of putting any man on his counsel."¹

Under this idea, Gowrie admitted to his secret as few associates as possible; and his accomplices were men on whom he had the most implicit reliance. They appear to have been only four in number: his brother, Alexander Ruthven, commonly called the Master of Ruthven, who held an office in the King's chamber; Robert Logan of Restalrig, a Border baron, distantly connected with the Gowrie family; a third person of rank and consequence, but whose name is still a mystery; and, lastly, an old ruffian

¹ Spottiswood, History, p. 460. Hailes' Notes on the Gowrie Conspiracy.

follower of Logan's, called Laird Bower. Logan was a man already known to Sir Robert Cecil; who, on making some inquiries regarding him in 1599, received from the celebrated Lord Wylloughby, then Governor of Berwick, this brief character of the Scottish Border baron:—"There is such a Laird of Lesteligg, as you write of: a main loose man; a great favourer of thieves reputed; yet a man of a good clan, as they here term it; and a good fellow."¹ The character here given of Logan was far too favourable: for there is no doubt that he was a desperate, reckless, and unprincipled villain, although a person of a good house, and true to his friends, according to the principles of that Border code under which he had been bred. He had run through a large estate in every kind of dissipation and excess, was a mocker at religion, had been a constant follower of the notorious Bothwell, and was now drowned in debt; yet, bad as he was, Laird Bower, his brother-conspirator, his chamberlain, or household man, as he termed him, appears to have been a shade blacker. It was to this old Borderer that the perilous task was committed, of carrying the letters which passed between Logan and Gowrie. Bower had received his nurture and education in the service of David Hume of Manderston, commonly called "Davie the Devil;" and in this Satanic school had become a more debauched and daring ruffian than his master; who described him, in writing to Gowrie, as a worthy fellow, who

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., B.C., Lord Wylloughby to Cecil, 1st January, 1598-9. The name is sometimes written Lestelrig, sometimes Restalrig.

would not spare to ride to *Hell's yett* to pleasure him.¹ Of the character of the other unknown conspirator, nothing can be said, as his name remains yet a shadow. But if we may trust to popular report, Alexander, the Master of Ruthven, was a young man of the highest promise; amiable, accomplished, gentle almost to a fault, and a universal favourite at Court; yet, strange as it may appear, the execution of that part of the plot requiring the utmost sternness, promptitude, and decision, was committed to this youth. He it was on whom his brother laid the task of decoying the King into Gowrie House, and forcing him into the boat; whilst Gowrie himself undertook to amuse or intimidate the suite; and Logan was to have his house of Fastcastle ready to receive the royal prisoner.

Both these mansions, Gowrie House and Fastcastle, were, from their construction and situation, singularly-well calculated for the attempt against the King. The first was a large baronial mansion, of quadrangular shape, built in the town of Perth, and on the border of the Tay, the river washing the garden; and fortified by a wall which ran along the bank, and was flanked by two strong towers. Its apartments were numerous; arranged, as was usual in those times, *en suite*, and so as to communicate with each other; and amongst them was a long gallery, which extended along one side of the square, and communicated, by a door at the end, with a chamber which, in its turn, led to a small circular

¹ Logan to Gowrie, in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. p. 285.

room constructed in the interior of a turret. This gallery, and the other apartments, were accessible by a broad oaken staircase; but the turret, or round room, could be reached also by a back spiral turn-pike: so that a person who had entered it through the gallery, might escape, or could be conveyed away without again traversing the principal staircase.

Fastcastle, the residence or den of Logan, was the very opposite of Gowrie House; being a single square and massive feudal tower, standing on the brink of a steep and almost perpendicular black rock, which rose to the height of two hundred feet above the German Ocean. From the sea, it was completely inaccessible, unless to those who knew the secret of its steps cut in the rock, and could unlock the iron bolts and doors which defended them; and on the land side, the isthmus on which it stood was connected with the mainland by so narrow a neck, that any attempt to force its little drawbridge was hopeless. The distance from Gowrie House to Fastcastle, by sea, was about seventy miles; from Fastcastle to the English Border, about twenty-five miles.

It is now time to introduce the reader to the most interesting part of this strange story: the letters of the conspirators themselves. It appears from these documents, which were not discovered until many years after the deep tragedy in which the conspiracy concluded, that early in the month of July 1600, Gowrie wrote to Logan appointing a secret meeting, to confer "*on the purpose he knew of.*" This letter

is not now in existence ; but it was brief, alluding to what had passed before between them, and stating that Logan's absence in Lothian had prevented Gowrie from coming to see him at Fastcastle.¹ On the 18th July, 1600, Logan addressed a letter, which still remains, to the unknown conspirator already mentioned. It was in these terms:—

“ RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR,—My duty with service remembered. Please you understand, my Lord of Go. and some others, his Lordship's friends and well-willers, who tender his Lordship's better preferment, are upon the resolution you know, for the revenge of that cause ; and his Lordship has written to me anent that purpose ; whereto I will accord, in case you will stand to and bear a part : and before ye resolve, meet me and Mr A. R. [Alexander Ruthven] in the Canon-gate on Tuesday the next week ; and be as wary as ye can. Indeed, M. A. R. spoke with me four or five days' since ; and I have promised his Lordship an answer within ten days at farthest.

“ As for the purpose, how M. A. R. [Mr Alexander Ruthven] and I have set down the course, it will be ane very easy done turn, and not far by² that form, with the like stratagem, whereof we had conference in Cap.h. But in case you and M. A. R. forgather,³ because he is somewhat *consety*,⁴ for God's sake be very wary with his reckless *toys of Padua* : for he told

¹ Examinations of George Sprot, printed in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. p. 272.

² By ; different from.

³ Forgather ; meet.

⁴ *Consety* ; flighty.

me one of the strangest tales of a nobleman of Padua that ever I heard in my life, resembling the like purpose." * * * After assuring him that he might place implicit faith in Laird Bower, the bearer of the letter, Logan again thus alluded to the plot:—

“Always to our purpose, I think it best for our plat¹ that we meet all at my house of Fastcastle: for I have concluded with M. A. R. how I think it shall be meetest to be convoyed quietest in a boat by sea; at which time, upon sure advertisement, I shall have the place very quiet and well provided.

“And as I receive your answer, I will post this bearer to my Lord. And therefore I pray you, as you love your own life, as it is not a matter of mowise,² be circumspect in all things, and take no fear but all shall be well.” * * * *

Logan then went on to warn his friend not to reveal anything of the plot either to Gowrie's old tutor, Mr William Rhynd, or to his brother Lord Home, before “the turn were done.” He thus concluded:—

“When you have read, send this letter back again with the bearer, that I may see it burnt myself; for so is the fashion in such errands; and, if you please, write your answer on the back hereof, in case ye will take my word for the credit of the bearer. And use all expedition; for the turn wald not³ be long delayed. Ye know the King's hunting will be shortly; and then shall be the best time, as M. A. R. has assured me that my Lord has resolved to enterprise that matter.”⁴

¹ Plat; plot, scheme.

² Mowise; *mows*—mummery.

³ Wald not; cannot.

⁴ Pitcairn, Criminal Trials, vol. ii. pp. 282, 283.

This letter of Logan's was dated from Fastcastle, 18th July; and on the same day he sent the following letter, connected with the conspiracy, to Laird Bower, from his house in the Canongate of Edinburgh, informing him of a second letter "concerning the purpose, which he had received from Gowrie."

"LAIRD BOWER,—I pray you hast you fast to me about the errand I told you, and we shall confer at length of all things. I have received a new letter from my Lord of Go., concerning the purpose that M. A., his Lordship's brother, spake to me before; and I perceive I may have advantage of Dirlton in case his other matter take effect, as we hope it shall. Always, I beseech you, be at me the morn¹ at even; for I have assured his Lordship's servant that I shall send you over the water within three days, with a full resolution of all my will anent² all purposes. As I shall indeed recommend you and your trustiness to his Lordship, as ye shall find an honest recompense for your pains in the end. I care not for all the land I have in this kingdom, in case I get a grip³ at Dirlton: for I esteem it the pleasantest dwelling in Scotland. For God's cause, keep all things very secret, that my Lord, my brother, get no knowledge of our purposes; for I [wald] rather be eirdit⁴ quick."⁵

Between the 18th of July, the date of both these letters, and the 27th of the same month, the con-

¹ The morn; to-morrow.

² Anent; touching.

³ Grip; hold.

⁴ Eirdit quick; buried alive.

⁵ Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. p. 283.

spirators appear to have met; and the manner in which the attempt was to be made was arranged. It only remained to fix the precise day. This appears from the following letter of Logan, sent to the unknown conspirator, from his house in the Canon-gate, on the 27th of July:—

“RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR,—All my hartly duty with humble service remembered. Since I have taken on hand to enterprise with my Lo. of Go., [Lord of Gowrie,] your special and only best beloved, as we have set down the plat already, I will request you that ye will be very circumspect and wise, that no man get an advantage of us. I doubt not but ye know the peril to be both life, land, and honour, in case the matter be not wisely used. And, for my own part, I shall have a special respect to my promise that I have made to his Lo., and M. A., his Lo. brother, although the scaffold were set up. If I cannot win to Falkland the first night, I shall be timely in St Johnston on the morn. Indeed, I lip-pened¹ for my Lo. himself, or else M. A., his Lo. brother, at my house of Fastcastle, as I wrote to them both. Always I repose on your advertisement of the precise day with credit to the bearer; for howbeit he be but a silly, auld, gleid² carle, I will answer for him that he shall be very true.

“I pray you, Sir, read, and either burn or send again with the bearer; for I dare hazard my life, and all I have else in the world, on his message, I

¹ Looked for; expected.

² Gleid; squinting.

have such proof of his constant truth. So commits you to Christ's holy protection." ¹

Two days after this, on the 29th July, and only a week before the attempt and fatal catastrophe, Logan sent Laird Bower with the following letter to Gowrie. I give it all, as every word of its contents is of importance.

"MY Lo.,—My most humble duty, &c. At the receipt of your Lo. letter I am so comforted, especially at your Lo. purpose communicated to me therein, that I can neither utter my joy, nor find myself able how to encounter your Lo. with due thanks. Indeed, my Lord, at my being last in the town, M. A., your Lo. brother, imparted somewhat of your Lordship's intention anent that matter unto me; and if I had not been busied about some turns of my own, I thought to have come over to S. Jo.² and spoken with your Lo. Yet always, my Lo., I beseech your Lo., both for the safety of your honour, credit, and, more than that, your life, my life, and the lives of many others, who may, perhaps, innocently smart for that turn afterwards, in case it be revealed by any; and, likewise, the utter wrecking of our lands and houses, and extirpating of our names; look that we be all as sure as your Lo.; and I myself shall be for my own part; and then I doubt not, but, with God's grace, we shall bring our matter to a fine,³ which shall bring contentment to us all that ever wished for the revenge of the Maschevalent⁴ massacring of our dearest friends.

¹ Pitcairn, vol. ii, p. 284.

² St Johnston, or Perth.

³ End.

⁴ Machiavelian.

“I doubt not but M. A., your Lo. brother, has informed your Lo. what course I laid down to bring all your Lo. associates to my house of Fastcastle by sea, where I should have all materials in readiness for their safe receiving a-land, and into my house, making, as it were, but a matter of pastime in a boat on the sea, in this fair summer tide; and none other strangers to haunt my house while¹ we had concluded on the laying of our platt, which is already devised by Mr Alexander and me. And I would wish that your Lordship would either come or send M. A. to me; and thereafter I should meet your Lo. in Leith, or quietly in Restalrig, where we should have prepared a fine *hattit kit*,² with sugar, confits, and wine, and thereafter confer on matters: and the sooner we brought our purpose to pass, it were the better, before harvest. Let not M. W. R., [Mr Wm. Rhynd,] your old pedagogue, ken³ of your coming; but rather would I, if I dare be so bold to entreat your Lo. once to come and see my own house, where I have kept my Lo. Bo. [Lord Bothwell] in his greatest extremities, say the K. and his Council what they would. And in case God grant us a happy success in this errand, I hope both to have your Lo. and his Lo., with many others of your lovers and his, at a good dinner before I die. Always, I hope, that the King’s buck-hunting at Falkland this year shall prepare some dainty cheer for us against that dinner the next year. *Hoc jocosè*, to animate your Lo. at this

¹ While; until.

² A Scottish dish, composed of coagulated milk, and eaten with rich cream and sugar.

³ Know.

time; but afterwards we shall have better occasion to make merry.

“I protest, my Lo., before God, I wish nothing with a better heart, nor¹ to achieve to that which your Lo. would fain attain unto: and my continual prayer shall tend to that effect; and with the large spending of my lands, goods, yea, the hazard of my life shall not affright me from that; although the scaffold were already set up, before I should falsify my promise to your Lo., and persuade your Lo. thereof. I trow your Lo. has a proof of my constancy ere now.

“But, my Lo., whereas your Lo. desires, in my letter, that I crave my Lo., my brother's mind, anent this matter; I alluterly² dissent from that, that he should ever be a councillor thereto: for, in good faith, he will never help his friend, nor harm his foe. Your Lo. may confide more in this old man, the bearer hereof, my man Laird Bower, nor in my brother; for I lippen my life, and all I have else, in his hands: and I trow he would not spare to ride to Hell's yett³ to pleasure me; and he is not beguiled of my part to him. Always, my Lo., when your Lo. has read my letter, deliver it to the bearer again, that I may see it burnt with my ain een,⁴ as I have sent your Lo. letter to your Lo. again; for so is the fashion I grant. And I pray your Lo., rest fully persuaded of me, and of all that I have promised; for I am resolved, howbeit I were to die the morn,⁵

¹ Nor; than.

² Utterly; entirely.

³ Hell's gate.

⁴ Own eyes.

⁵ Although I were to die to-morrow.

I man¹ entreat your Lo. to exped² Bower, and give him strait direction, on pain of his life, that he take never a wink of sleep until he see me again, or else he will utterly undo us. I have already sent another letter to the gentleman your Lo. kens,³ as the bearer will inform your Lo. of his answer and forwardness with your Lo.; and I shall show your Lo. farther, at meeting, when and where your Lo. shall think meetest. To which time, and ever, commits your Lo. to the protection of Almighty God.—From Gunnisgreen, the 29th of July, 1600.

“Your Lo. own sworn and bound man to obey and serve, with efald⁴ and ever ready service, to his utter power, to his life’s end. RESTALRIG.

“Prays your Lo. hold me excused for my unseemly letter, quilk is not so well written as mister⁵ were; for I durst not let ony⁶ of my writers ken of it, but took two sundry idle days to it myself.

“I will never forget the good sport that M. A., your Lo. brother, told me of a nobleman of Padua; it comes so oft to my memory; and, indeed, it is a *paras teur*⁷ to this purpose we have in hand.”⁸

Two days after the date of this letter to Gowrie, on the 31st of July, Logan, being still at his house of Gun’s Green, wrote the following letter to the unknown conspirator:—

“RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR,—My hartly duty re-

¹ Must. ² Hasten. ³ Knows. ⁴ True.

⁵ Need were. ⁶ Any. ⁷ Apropos; in point.

⁸ Pitcairn’s Crim. Trials, vol. ii., pp. 284, 286.

membered. Ye know I told you, at our last meeting in the Canongate, that M. A. R., my Lord of Gowrie's brother, had spoken with me anent the matter of our conclusion; and, for my own part, I shall not be hindmost. And sensyne¹ I gat a letter fra his Lordship's self for that same purpose; and upon the receipt thereof, understanding his Lordship's frankness and forwardness in it, God kens² if my heart was not lifted ten stegess.³ I posted this same bearer till his Lordship, to whom you may concredit all your heart in that as well as I; for an⁴ it were my very soul, I durst make him messenger thereof, I have sic⁵ experience of his truth in many other things. He is a silly, auld, gleid⁶ carle,⁷ but wondrous honest. And as he has reported to me his Lordship's answer, I think all matters shall be concluded at my house of Fastcastle; for I, and M. A. R., concluded that you should come with him and his Lordship, and only ane other man with you, being but only four in company, intil⁸ one of the great fishing-boats by sea to my house, where ye shall land as safely as on Leith shore; and the house, agane⁹ his Lordship's coming, to be quiet: and when you are about half a mile from shore, to gar set forth a waff.¹⁰ But, for God's sake, let neither any knowledge come to my Lord my brother's ears, nor yet to M. W. R., my Lordship's auld pedagog; for my brother is 'kittle to shoe be-

¹ Since then. ² Knows. ³ Stages, degrees. ⁴ If. ⁵ Such.

⁶ Old, squinting. ⁷ *Carle*, a man past 50 years of age. ⁸ In.

⁹ Agane. The house to be kept quiet, awaiting his lordship's coming.

¹⁰ To cause set forth a signal.

hind,'¹ and dare not enterprise for fear: and the other will dissuade us from our purpose with reasons of religion, which I can never abide.

“I think there is none of a noble heart, or carries a stomach worth a penny, but they would be glad to see a contented revenge of Grey Steil's death.² And the sooner the better, or else we may be marred and frustrated; and, therefore, pray his Lordship be quick. And bid M. A. remember the sport he told me of Padua; for I think with myself that the cogitation on that should stimulate his Lordship. And for God's cause, use all your courses *cum discrecione*. Fail not, Sir, to send back again this letter; for M. A. learnt me that fashion, that I may see it destroyed myself. So, till your coming, and ever, commits you heartily to Christ's holy protection.—From Gunnisgreen, the last of July, 1600.”

These letters explain themselves. Their import cannot be mistaken; their authenticity has never been questioned; they still exist;³ and although they do not open up all the particulars of the intended attempt, they establish the reality of the Gowrie conspiracy beyond the possibility of a doubt. The first proves that the Master of Ruthven and Logan had set down the course or plot for the preferment of Gowrie and the revenge of his father's death; that the conspirators were to meet at Fastcastle; and that they had fixed “the King's hunting” as the most favourable time

¹ Difficult to shoe behind; not to be trusted.

² Grey Steil, a popular name of Gowrie's father, taken from an old romance, called “Grey-Steil.”

³ In the General Register House, Edinburgh.

for their attempt. Logan, it is seen from the same letter, did not think his brother, Lord Home, or Gowrie's old tutor, Mr William Rhynd, by any means safe persons to be intrusted with the secret of the conspiracy. In the second letter to Bower, we have a glance at the rich bribe by which Gowrie had secured the assistance of Logan, the estate of Dirlton; and in the third, his resolution to keep his promise "although the scaffold were set up," with his expectation to have speedy intimation sent him of the precise day when the attempt was to be made, and his presence required at St Johnston. Logan's letter to Gowrie is still more minute. It contains the determination to revenge the Machiavelian massacre of their dearest friends; the intended rendezvous of the associates at Fastcastle, who, under the mask of a pleasure party by sea, were to be conveyed into that stronghold; the previous secret conference to be held at Restalrig over their "*hattit kit and wine*;" the good cheer and happy success which the King's buck-hunting was to bring them; the solemn and earnest injunctions of secrecy,—life and lands, name and fame, hanging on the issue; the allusion to the strange tale of Padua, so similar to their present purpose, that it seems to have haunted the "consety" or high-wrought imagination of Mr Alexander Ruthven; the necessity of destroying their letters: all this is contained in Logan's letter to Gowrie himself; and in his last letter to the unknown conspirator, we have the direction how the signal is to be given at sea to those who were to be on the lookout from Fastcastle; the exultation and joy at

Gowrie's frankness and forwardness; the last consultation appointed to be at Fastcastle; Logan's candid character of himself, as utterly unable to abide all arguments from religion; his exhortations to be speedy, and his anticipation of a glorious revenge for the death of "Grey Steil," the affectionate *sobriquet* or nickname of the late Earl of Gowrie. All this is so clearly established by the correspondence, and so completely proves the existence of Gowrie's plot for the surprise of the King, and the meeting of the conspirators at Fastcastle, that he who doubts must be too desperate in his scepticism to be reached by any evidence whatever. But we must proceed.

This last letter of Logan's was written on Thursday, the 31st July; and all that passed in the secret conclave of the conspirators, during the three succeeding days, till the night of Monday the fourth of August, is a blank. On that night Gowrie called his chamberlain, Andrew Henderson, into his bed-chamber, and commanded him to be ready to ride on the morrow early with his brother, the Master, to Falkland, and to bring back with speed any letter, or message, which he might receive from him.¹

The morning of Tuesday, the 5th of August, found the King and his nobles in the great park at Falkland, ready to mount on horseback, and proceed to their sport. It was still early, between six and seven o'clock: all was bustle and preparation; and the King

¹ Henderson's Declaration, Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. p. 175.

stood beside the stables surrounded by his hounds and huntsmen, when Alexander Ruthven, Gowrie's younger brother, came up, and, with a low courtesy, kneeling and uncovering, craved a moment's private audience on matter of the utmost moment. His expression was perturbed, his manner hurried; and the King, expecting a communication of importance, walked aside with him. Ruthven then declared, that he, the evening before, had met a suspicious-looking fellow without the walls of St Johnston, with his face muffled in a cloak; and, perceiving him to be terrified and astonished when questioned, he had seized him, and, on searching, had found a large pot-full of gold pieces under his cloak. This treasure, with the man who carried it, he had secured, he said, in a small chamber in Gowrie House; and he now begged the King to ride with him to Perth on the instant, and make sure of it for himself, as he had not even revealed the discovery to his brother the Earl. James at first disclaimed having any right to money thus found; but when the Master, to one of his questions, stated that it seemed foreign gold, the vision of crowns of the sun and Spanish priests rose to the royal suspicion; and he was about to despatch some servant of his own, to ride instantly with a warrant to the Provost, and seize the treasure, when Ruthven strongly protested against it; declaring that if either the magistrates or Gowrie got their fingers on the gold, it might chance that very few pieces would ever come into his Majesty's purse; and that all that he implored, in recompense for his fidelity, was that the

King would ride with him to Perth, see the treasure, and judge with his own eyes.

The Court was now on horseback; the morning wearing on; the baying of the hounds, and cheering of the huntsmen, told that the game was found; and the King, impatiently putting an end to the interview, promised Ruthven an answer after he had killed the buck. James then galloped off; but the story haunted him; and on the first check, he sent for Ruthven, who lingered near at hand, and whispered to him, that he had resolved, the moment the chase was over, to accompany him to Perth. The young man instantly despatched Andrew Henderson, the chamberlain, who, in obedience to Gowrie's orders the night before, had, with Andrew Ruthven, accompanied him to Falkland; bidding him gallop to Perth, and tell Gowrie that the King would be there within a brief space, and slenderly attended.

When the chase was ended, which lasted till near eleven, the King surprised his courtiers by telling them he meant to ride immediately to St Johnston, to speak with the Earl of Gowrie; and without giving himself or his nobles time to send for fresh horses, or waiting, as was usual, for the "*curry* of the deer,"¹ he rode off with Ruthven at so furious a pace, that he was some miles on the road before Lennox, or any of his suite, overtook him. All this time Ruthven had been agitated and restless; now pressing the King to finish the chase; now urging him not to wait for fresh horses; now insisting that neither Lennox, Mar, nor any number of his nobles should

¹ French, *curer*; to cleanse; the ripping up and cleansing the deer.

follow him, as it might spoil all ; and this to such a degree that James, as he pushed on, began to suspect and hesitate, and calling Lennox aside, told him the strange errand he was riding on ; asking him if Ruthven, his brother-in-law, had ever shown any symptoms of derangement. The Duke pronounced the story utterly improbable ; but affirmed he had never seen anything like madness in Ruthven. “ At all events,” said James, “ do not you, Lennox, fail to follow me into the room where this fellow and his treasure is.” This private conference was not unobserved by Ruthven. He had a short time before despatched his other servant, Andrew Ruthven, to ride forward with a second message to Perth, and now coming up close to the King, implored him to make none living acquainted with their purpose, till he had himself seen the fellow and the treasure. It seems to have been at this moment that Sir Thomas Erskine, who had overtaken the King on the road, privately asked Lennox how it came that Ruthven had got the King’s ear, and carried off his Majesty from his sport ; to which Lennox jocularly answered, “ Peace man ; we shall all be turned into gold.”¹ The whole party then rode forward ; and on coming within a mile of Perth, Ruthven, telling the King he must give warning to his brother, galloped on before.

We must now for a moment turn to Gowrie, whom Henderson, on his arrival at Gowrie House, found, with two friends, in his chamber. He instantly left them, and inquired, secretly and earnestly, what word he had brought from his brother : had he sent a letter ; how

¹ Lloyd’s Worthies, p. 783.

had the King taken with the Master; who were with his Majesty at the hunting, many or few; what noblemen, what names? To these hurried questions Henderson answered by giving the message sent by young Ruthven: that the King would be with him incontinent, and he must prepare dinner. He added, that James had received the Master kindly, and laid his hand on his shoulder when he did his courtesy: that his Majesty had sundry of his own suite with him, and some Englishmen; and that the only nobleman he noticed was my Lord Duke. This was at ten o'clock.¹ Henderson then went to his own house, pulled off his boots, and returned to Gowrie House about eleven, when the earl commanded him to put on his "*secret*,"² and plate sleeves," as he would require his assistance to seize a Highlandman in the Shoe Gate. At half-past twelve Gowrie took his dinner, having, as his guests, three friends of the neighbourhood; and as they sat at table, Andrew Ruthven, the Master's second messenger, entered the room, and whispered to the earl. Soon after came the Master himself, upon which Gowrie and his friends rose; and now for the first time openly alluding to the royal visit, he assembled his servants, and walked to the Inch or meadow near the town, where he met the King.

James' train did not exceed twelve or fifteen persons, including Lennox, Mar, Sir Thomas Erskine, John Ramsay his page, Dr Hugh Herries, Lords Lindores and Inchaffray, with a few others. They

¹ Henderson's Declaration, Pitcairn's Crim. Trials, vol. ii. p. 176.

² A secret shirt of mail worn under the clothes.

wore their green hunting-dresses, and were wholly without armour; a horn slung over their shoulder, and a sword or deer-knife at their girdle, being all they carried. Gowrie's servants and followers amounted nearly to fourscore; but many of these must have been townsmen and lookers on. On coming to Gowrie House the King called for a drink, and was somewhat annoyed at having to wait long for his welcome cup, and more than an hour for his dinner. During this interval Alexander Ruthven sent for the key of the long room, called the Gallery Chamber, which immediately adjoined the cabinet where the King dined. At the end of this gallery was another apartment, which opened into a circular room, formed in the interior of a turret; and this room, it is important to observe, could be entered, not only by the door at the end of the gallery, but by another door communicating with a back stair or turnpike, called the Black Turnpike. Soon after the King had sat down to dinner, Gowrie, who waited upon him, sent for Henderson, and taking him aside secretly, bade him go to his brother in the gallery. He obeyed; found Mr Alexander there, and almost instantly after was joined by the Earl himself, who commanded him to remain where he was, and obey the Master's orders.¹ Henderson was now fully armed, all except the head: he had noted that the tale about seizing a Highland thief in the Shoe Gate was a false pretence; and beginning to suspect some treason, asked, in an agitated tone, "What they were about to do with him?"

¹ Henderson's Declaration, Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 177.

The only reply of Gowrie and the Master was to point to the little chamber, make him enter the door, and lock him up.

All this occupied but a few minutes, and Gowrie then returned to the King, who was sitting at his dessert; whilst the Duke and the rest of his suite were dining in the next room. They had nearly finished their repast, when James, in a bantering manner, accused Gowrie of having been so long in foreign parts as to have forgotten his Scottish courtesies. "Wherefore, my Lord," said he, "since ye have neglected to drink either to me or my nobles, who are your guests, I must drink to you my own welcome. Take this cup, and pledge them the *King's scoll*¹ in my name." Gowrie, accordingly, calling for wine, joined the Duke and his fellows, who were getting up from table; and at this instant Alexander Ruthven seizing the moment when the King was alone, whispered him that now was the time to go. James, rising up, bade him call Sir Thomas Erskine; but he evaded the message, and Erskine never received it. Lennox, too, remembering the King's injunctions, spoke of following his majesty; but Gowrie prevented him, saying, his Highness had retired on a quiet errand, and would not be disturbed;² after which, he opened the door leading to his pleasure-ground, and with Lennox, Lindores, and some others, passed into the garden. Thus really cut off from assistance, but believing that he would be followed by Lennox or Erskine, James

¹ The King's scoll; the King's health.

² Lennox's Declaration, Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 172.

now followed Ruthven up a stair, and through a suite of various chambers, all of them opening into each other, the Master locking every door as they passed; and observing, with a smile, that now they had the fellow sure enough. At last they entered the small round room already mentioned. On the wall hung a picture with a curtain before it; beside it stood a man in armour; and as the King started back in alarm, Ruthven locked the door, put on his hat, drew the dagger from the side of the armed man, and tearing the curtain from the picture, showed the well-known features of the late Earl of Gowrie, his father. “Whose face is that?” said he, advancing the dagger with one hand to the King’s breast, and pointing with the other to the picture. “Who murdered my father? Is not thy conscience burdened by his innocent blood? Thou art now my prisoner, and must be content to follow our will, and to be used as we list. Seek not to escape; utter but a cry, (James was now looking at the window, and beginning to speak;) make but a motion to open the window, and this dagger is in thy heart.” The King although alarmed by this fierce address, and the suddenness of the danger, did not lose his presence of mind: and as Henderson was evidently no willing accomplice, he took courage to remonstrate with the Master; reminded him of the dear friendship he had borne him; and “as for your father’s death,” said he, “I had no hand in it: it was my Council’s doing; and should ye now take my life, what preferment will it bring you? Have I not both sons and daughters? You can never be King of Scot-

land; and I have many good subjects who will revenge my death?" Ruthven seemed struck with this, and swore he neither wanted his blood nor his life. "What racks¹ it then," said the King, "that you should not take off your hat in your Prince's presence?" Upon this Ruthven uncovered, and James resumed. "What crave ye, an ye seek not my life?"—"But a promise, Sir," was the reply. "What promise?"—"Sir," said Ruthven, "my brother will tell you." "Go, fetch him, then," rejoined the King; and to induce him to obey, he gave his oath, that till his return he would neither cry out nor open the window. Ruthven consented; commanded Henderson to keep the King at his peril; and left the room, locking the door behind him.

James now, for a moment, had time to breathe; and turning to Henderson, he asked him how he came there. The unhappy man declared he had been shut in like a dog. Would Gowrie do him any mischief? Henderson answered he should die first. "Open the window, then," said James; and scarce had this been done, or rather when it was being done, Ruthven broke into the room again, and swearing there was no remedy, ran in upon the King, seized him by the wrists, and attempted to bind him with a garter or silk cord which he had in his hands. James, by a strong effort, threw himself loose, exclaiming, he was a free Prince, and would never be bound; and Henderson at this moment wrenching away the cord, the King "leapt free," and had almost reached the win-

¹ What racks; what forbids.

dow, when Ruthven again seized him by the throat with one hand, and thrust the other into his mouth to prevent him giving the alarm. But James now rendered desperate, and exerting his utmost strength, dragged his assailant to the window, and throwing his head half out, though Ruthven's hand was still on his throat, cried out, "Treason! help! Earl of Mar, I am murdered!" Ruthven then dragged him back into the chamber, upbraiding Henderson as a cowardly villain, who would bring death upon them all, and attempted to draw his sword, which James prevented by grasping his right hand.¹ Henderson during this, unlocked the door of the room, and then stood trembling and panic-struck, whilst a desperate wrestle continued between the King and Ruthven.

Leaving James in this struggle for life, we must turn for an instant to Gowrie, who had led Lennox and the other courtiers into the garden. Whilst there, Cranston, one of his attendants, ran up, and informed them that the King had left the castle by the back way, and was riding over the Inch, upon which Gowrie called to horse; and he, Lennox, and the rest, hurrying down the great staircase, and shouting for their horses, some one asked the porter in the court-yard, if the King had passed. He declared he had not; and insisted in his denial, although his master abused him as a lying varlet. Gowrie, upon this, ran back into the house, observing to Mar, he would ascertain the truth; and returning within a few minutes, assured them that the King had really

¹ Henderson's Declaration in Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 178.

gone forth, and must now have reached the South Inch. Scarcely, however, was this falsehood uttered, when it was confuted; for, at this moment, James' loud cry of treason and murder was heard; and, looking up, they saw the King's face at the window of the turret, the features red and flushed with exertion, and a hand on his throat.¹ All was now horror and confusion. Sir Thomas Erskine collared Gowrie, exclaiming, "Traitor, thou shalt die! This is thy work!" but was felled to the ground by Andrew Ruthven, whilst Gowrie asserted his innocence. Lennox's first impulse was to save the King; and he, Mar, and some others, rushed up the great staircase to the hall; but finding the door locked, began to batter it with a ladder which lay hard by.² John Ramsay, one of the royal suite, was more fortunate. He remembered the back entry; and running swiftly up the turnpike stair to the top, dashed open the door of the round chamber with his foot, and found himself in the presence of the King and Ruthven, who were wrestling in the middle of the chamber. James, with Ruthven's head under his arm, had thrown him down almost on his knees, whilst the Master still grasped the King's throat.³ Ramsay was hampered by a hawk, a favourite bird of James', which he held on his wrist; but throwing her off, and drawing his whinger,⁴ he made an inef-

¹ Lennox's Declaration, Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 173. Christie's Declaration, Ibid. p. 187.

² Id. Ibid., Lindores' Declaration, Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 181.

³ Ramsay's Declaration, Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 183.

⁴ Whinger; a hunting-knife.

fectual blow at Ruthven; the King calling out to strike low, as the traitor had on a pyne doublet.¹ Ramsay then stabbed him twice in the lower part of the body. The King making a strong effort, pushed him backwards through the door, down the stairs; and, at this moment, Sir Thomas Erskine and Dr Herries rushing up the turnpike, and encountering the unhappy youth, bleeding, and staggering upon the steps, despatched him with their swords. As he lay in his last agony, he turned his face to them, and said, feebly, "Alas! I had not the wyte o't."²

All this passed so rapidly, that Ramsay had only time to catch a glance of a figure in armour, standing near the King, but motionless. When he next looked, it had disappeared. This seeming apparition was Henderson, still trembling, and in amazement, from the scene he had witnessed; but who, seeing the door open, glided down the turnpike, and, as it turned out, fled instantly from the house; passing, in his flight, over the Master's dead body.³ At this moment, as Erskine and Ramsay were congratulating the King, a new tumult was heard at the end of the gallery; and they had scarcely time to hurry James into the adjoining chamber, when Gowrie himself, furious from passion, and armed with a rapier in each hand, rushed along the gallery, followed by seven of his servants, with drawn swords. His vengeance had

¹ Pyne doublet; a concealed shirt of mail worn under the clothes.

² I had not the blame of it.

³ Henderson's Declaration, Ramsay's Declaration, and Sir Thomas Erskine's Declaration, all printed in Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 175-184 inclusive.

been roused to the utmost pitch, by his having stumbled over the bleeding body of his brother; and swearing a dreadful oath that the traitors who had murdered him should die, he threw himself desperately upon Erskine and his companions, who were all wounded in the first onset, and fought at great odds, there being eight to four.¹ Yet the victory was not long doubtful; for, some one calling out that the King was slain, Gowrie, as if paralysed with horror, dropt the points of his weapons, and Ramsay, throwing himself within his guard, passed his sword through his body, and slew him on the spot. The servants, seeing their master fall, gave way, and were driven out of the gallery; and Lennox, Mar, and the rest, who were still thundering with their hammers on the outside of the great door, having made themselves known to the King and his friends within, were joyfully admitted. So effectually, however, had Ruthven secured this door, that it was only by passing a hammer through one of the shattered boards, and with it forcibly wrenching off the lock, that their entrance was effected. The first thing that met their eyes was the dead body of Gowrie lying on the floor, and the King standing unharmed beside it, although still breathless from the recent struggle, and disordered in his dress. At this moment, Graham of Balgone, one of the gentlemen who had accompanied the King from Falkland,

¹ Thomas' Robertson's Declaration, Pitcairn, vol. ii. p. 196; also, *Ibid.*, 197, Ramsay's Declaration, *Ibid.*, 183, 184; and Sir Thomas Erskine's Declaration, *Ibid.*, p. 182; William Robertson's Declaration, *Ibid.*, p. 197.

found a silk garter lying amongst the bent, or rough grass with which the floor of the round chamber was covered; and James immediately recognised it as the same with which Ruthven had attempted to bind his hands.¹ The King then knelt down, and, surrounded by his nobles, who were all on their knees, devoutly thanked God for his deliverance; and prayed that the life which had been thus signally preserved, might be devoted to the welfare of his people.

Scarcely, however, had they risen from their act of gratitude, when a new danger began to threaten them. The city bell was heard ringing, mingled with shouts and cries of vengeance, from an immense mob who beset the outside of Gowrie House, and threatened to blow it up, and bury them in the ruins. Andrew Ruthven and Violet Ruthven, two near relatives of the family of Gowrie, had been busy in rousing the citizens; and, running wildly through the streets, vented curses and maledictions on "the bloody butchers" who had murdered their young Provost and his brother. Nor did many spare to threaten the King himself; crying out, "Come down, come down, thou son of Seignor Davie! thou hast slain a better man than thyself. Come down, green coats, thieves and traitors! limmers that have slain these innocents. May God let never nane o' you have such plants of your ain!"² Amid this hubbub, and storm of lamentation and vengeance, James ordered the magistrates to be admitted into the house; and

¹ Grahame's Declaration, Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. p. 184; also, p. 217.

² Ibid., vol. ii. pp. 197, 198, 199.

having informed them of all that had happened, commanded them to silence the alarum-bell, and quiet the people on their peril; which they at last with difficulty effected. He then ordered them to take care of the dead bodies; and on searching Gowrie's person, there was found in the pocket of his doublet, a little parchment bag full of "magical characters and words of enchantment," which his tutor, Rhynd, recognised as the same he had discovered him wearing at Padua.¹ A belief in sorcery was, as is well known, universal in these days; and such superstitious credit did both King and people give to the little bag of cabalistic words, that they insisted that no blood had issued from the wound till the spell was removed from the body, after which it gushed out profusely.

James now took horse, and, although it was already eight in the evening, rode to Falkland amid crowds of his subjects, who poured in from all quarters to testify their joy at his escape. Next day, the news having been brought to Edinburgh, nothing could exceed the enthusiastic demonstrations of the city; and the same scene was repeated, with still louder and more affectionate welcome, when the King, after a brief retirement at Falkland, passed over the Forth, and entered his capital. The Cross was hung with tapestry; the whole city, led by the judges and magistrates, met him on the sands at Leith; and

¹ Declaration of Rhynd, Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. pp. 218, 219, 220.

from thence he rode in triumph, and amid an immense congregation of all classes of his people, to the Cross, where Mr Patrick Galloway preached to the multitude, gave the story of the treason, and described the miraculous escape of the monarch. His sermon still remains, an extraordinary specimen of the pulpit eloquence of the times.¹

¹ Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. ii. p. 248.