

## SIR GIDEON MURRAY'S OFFER. •

REIGN OF KING JAMES VI.

UPWARDS of twelve miles below the county town of Peebles, on the north bank of the Tweed, are the ruins of Elibank Tower, amid scenery wild and pastoral, surrounded by steep green hills. It appears to have been originally a double tower, with subordinate buildings, ornamented by a terraced garden on the south and west sides. This tower was either built, or repaired and enlarged, by Sir Gideon Murray, third son of Andrew Murray of Blackbarony, the representative of a family of great antiquity in the county of Peebles. Sir Gideon is said to have studied theology in his youth, but having either accidentally or intentionally killed a man named Aitchison, he was impr-

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• Sir Walter Scott's *Border Antiquities*; Sir John Scott's (of Scotstarvet) *Staggering State of Scots Statesmen*; Spottiswoode's *History of the Church and State of Scotland*.

soned in the Castle of Edinburgh. From this fortress he was, however, released by the influence of the lady of Captain James Stewart, afterwards Earl of Arran, who procured for him a remission or pardon.

Sir Gideon relinquished the clerical profession, and became chamberlain to his relative Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch. He was first territorially designed of Glenpole, but in 1594-5 he procured a charter of the lands of Elibank, and after his liberation from the Castle of Edinburgh he retired to the tower of that name, where, with others of the surname of Murray, he engaged in a feud with a branch of the great Border clan of Scott. A curious traditionary story connected with this feud is related by Sir Walter Scott, one of his descendants, who informs us that it is "established in both families, and often jocularly referred to upon the Borders."

"The Scotts and Murrays were ancient enemies, and as the possessions of the former adjoined to those of the latter, or lay contiguous to them on many points, they were at no loss for opportunities of exercising their enmity according to the custom of the Marches. In the seventeenth century the greater part of the property lying upon the river Ettrick belonged to Scott of Harden, who made his principal residence at Oakwood Tower, a Border house of strength still remaining upon that river. William Scott, (afterwards Sir William,) son of the head of this family, undertook an expedition against the Murrays of Elibank, whose property lay a few miles distant. He found his enemy upon their guard, was defeated, and made prisoner in the act of driving off the cattle which he had collected for that purpose. Our hero, Sir Gideon, conducted his prisoner to the Castle, where his lady received him with congratulations upon his victory, and inquiries concerning the fate to which he destined his prisoner. 'The gallows,' answered Sir Gideon, for he is said already to have

acquired the honour of knighthood, 'to the gallows with the invader!' 'Hoot, no,' answered the considerate matron in her vernacular idiom: 'Would you hang the winsome young Laird of Harden when you have three ill-favoured daughters to marry?' 'Right!' answered the Baron, who caught at the idea, 'he shall either marry our daughter, Mickle-mouthed Meg, or strap for it.' Upon this alternative being proposed to the prisoner, he upon the first view of the case stoutly preferred the gibbet to *Mickle-mouthed Meg*, for such was the nickname of the young lady, whose real name was Agnes. But at length, when he was literally led forth to execution, and saw no other chance of escape, he retracted his ungallant resolution, and preferred the typical noose of matrimony to the literal cord of hemp. It may be necessary to add that Mickle-mouthed Meg and her husband were a happy and loving pair, and had a very large family, to each of whom Sir William Scott bequeathed good estates, besides reserving a large one for the eldest.—Sir Gideon appears completely to have reconciled his feud with the clan of Scott by this union."

The sons of Scott of Harden and the lady he was compelled to marry under the singular circumstances above mentioned, were, 1. Sir William Scott of Harden, who carried on the line of the family. 2. Sir Gideon Scott of High Chester, whose son was created Earl of Tarras at his marriage to Agnes Countess of Buccleuch, of which marriage there was no issue. 3. Walter Scott of Reaburn, a family of whom the author of *Waverley* was descended. 4. John Scott, of whom are descended the Scotts of Wooll. Sir Gideon Murray undertook the management of the Baron of Buccleuch's extensive estates, when about 1596 the latter found it necessary to go abroad for some time to avoid the displeasure of James VI., which he had incurred on account of his family connection with Francis Stuart,

Earl of Bothwell. He assisted the Laird of Johnstone, and carried the standard of the clan Scott, in the celebrated conflict between the Maxwells and Johnstones called the battle of Dryfe Sands. Sir Gideon was appointed Treasurer Depute by the interest of the unfortunate Earl of Somerset his kinsman, who was nominated Treasurer, Comptroller, and Collector in Scotland by King James after his accession to the crown of England. "Under this subordinate title," says Sir Walter Scott, "he exercised all the real duties of the office with such punctuality and accuracy, that he not only retrieved the credit of the Exchequer, but was able to supply the expense of repairing the various palaces and castles of Holyrood, Edinburgh Castle, Linlithgow, Stirling, Dunfermline, Falkland, and Dumbarton. He also defrayed all the expenses attending the visit of the King to his native country in 1617, and obtained a high degree of favour with James by doing so. Of this Sir John Scott of Scotstarvet has preserved a remarkable instance—that when Sir Gideon Murray 'went thereafter to the Court of England, there being none in the bedchamber but the King, the said Sir Gideon, and myself, Sir Gideon by chance letting his chevron fall to the ground, the King, although being both stiff and old, stooped down and gave him his glove, saying, 'My predecessor Queen Elizabeth thought she did a favour to any man who was speaking with her when she let her glove fall, that he might take it up and give it her again; but, Sir, you may say a King lifted up your glove.'"

Nevertheless the royal condescension did not prevent Sir Gideon Murray from getting into disgrace, on a charge of "abusing his office to the prejudice of the King. The informer," says Archbishop Spottiswoode, "was James Stewart, styled the Lord Ochiltree, who out of malice carried to the gentleman for the strictness which he had used in calling him to an account for the duties of Orkney

made offer to justify the accusation." Sir Gideon felt this calumny so severely that it caused his death, and he was interred in the Chapel-Royal of Holyroodhouse. His eldest son, Sir Patrick Murray, was created Lord Elibank in 1642.