

## The Murder of Rothesay.

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Yes, lay thee down,  
And while thy struggling pulses flutter,  
Bid the grey monk his soul-mass mutter,  
And the deep bell its death tone utter—  
Thy life is gone.

—*Scott.*

**Y**ES, poor, misguided, hapless Rothesay, thou art gone !  
Not the storms of State weighed thee down, nor the  
assassin's dagger smote thee—that verily had been the  
kindest cut of all, nor the swords of thy country's foes, though  
thou wert ever a gallant knight—not these, but the diabolical  
machinations of viperous villains who drained thy noble blood  
while yet it was warm. Ay, Rothesay, thou art gone, but thy  
memory is not !

The tragedy we are about to relate is nearly five hundred years old, yet for all that it is one of those dramatic events in history round which age only seems to warp a charm of ever-greenness, and which, though often rehearsed, never become stale or uninteresting. There are good old stories which don't mind being retold once in a while, and this is one of them. Mark Antony, in his memorable speech over the body of his murdered friend, the mighty Cæsar, bade the Romans who had tears prepare to shed them. So in Scotland, five centuries ago, many were the hearts that bled and many the eyes that were dimmed with tears as the news spread like wildfire throughout the country of the terrible fate which had befallen their gallant prince, the Duke of Rothesay. And to-day, after all that long expanse of time, the sad story pulls at the heart-strings of young

and old as lustily as ever. Still does the cheek blanch, the lip quiver in sympathetic pity, the tear-drop trickle down unheeded every now and then, and the ready tongue falter chokingly between the words, as we read the mournful tale. Kindly follow us as we attempt its recital.

One afternoon long ago a company of horsemen, some of them but rudely caparisoned, were meandering their way along the beautifully wooded valley of the Fifeshire Eden. It was the beginning of the year 1401. Winter had not yet departed, and a snell and blustering wind, which blew with fierce fury along the strath, made the travellers shiver and say unrepeatably coarse things to one another. In the midst of the band, seated on an old broken-down horse, was a person of goodly presence, round whose shoulders a cloak such as the rustics wore thenadays was thrown, ostensibly to protect him from the falling rain and the bitterly cold wind, but in reality to shroud his well-known figure from the gaze of any chance-met peasant who might try to penetrate too eagerly beneath its surface. A half-cast glance told one that the wearer of that cloak, rough and uncouth though it seemed, was a knight of no mean order. His noble mien and dignified carriage bespoke a soul heroic and chivalrous. Just now, however, a brooding sense of dread sat on his pale cheeks and robbed his eyes of their wonted merriment.

On either side of him, and in front and behind, like warders, rode others who, from their apparel and the accoutrements of their horses, appeared to be noblemen. On they hurried through the gathering gloom and the rain which was now descending in torrents. Every one was sullenly silent, for when the prisoner—such he appeared to be—in the centre of the group ventured to express his dissatisfaction of the jaded steed he bestrode, the attendants did not deign to answer him, while their leader in grim humour scornfully retaliated by telling him that beggars should not be choosers, or words to that effect.

At length they entered the dark woods of Falkland, whose glades in after years were to resound with the bell of the wild

buck as it fled from its princely pursuers, and soon after the huge Mar, as the old castle of the Earls of Fife was wont to be called, loomed gloomily in sight. The warders on the walls were on the lookout for them, and as the cavalcade approached the drawbridge fell, torches shed their fitful glare in the courtyard, the poor prisoner passed over the fateful barrier, the great portcullis assumed its former position—David Stuart, Scotland's bi-primal Duke—first in time, as also first in rank—had stepped on that short and narrow path which leads from the prison to the grave. He had spent his last night with the world which he loved so well.

As the unfortunate prince, the heir-apparent to the Scottish throne, divests himself of the russet garments his captors thought wise to clothe him in, let us see what kind of man he is. Most comely to look at, most graceful and winning in his manners—even to enemies, most sweet-tempered and affable, fond of power and pleasure, most generous and benign, most noble and courageous, from top to toe a ciccisbeo or lady's man—such was the debonair Duke of Rothesay.

He was a lovely youth, I guess ;  
 The panther in the wilderness  
 Was not so fair as he.  
 And when he chose to sport or play,  
 No dolphin ever was so gay  
 Upon the tropic sea.

That was in the days gone by, when his mother, Queen Annabella Drummond, a lady of incomparable goodness, sagacity, and firmness, was living ; when the inestimable Walter Traill, Bishop of St Andrews, and the lordly Earl of Douglas ruled the Church and State wisely and successfully. But, as if to aid the schemes of the Wicked One and his mortal menials, these three gifted and able rulers died within a short time of one another, and Church and Court and State were plunged into a horrible maelstrom of uncertainty, disreputableness, extravagance, and dissensions. Into the seething vortex the youthful prince was

unfortunately cast. He had respected his mother, whose constant care had been to put a restraint on the levities of her son. With her death, however, his passions broke loose ; for, though honest and chivalrous to the heart's core, he was excessively bent on amorous pleasures, and gave way to the most unbridled libertinism. It was a sorry change, and everywhere he who had been the pride of Scotland was regarded now as

. . . . . a shameless wight,  
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee ;  
Few earthly things found favour in his sight,  
Save concubines and carnal companie,  
And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.

Nevertheless, while the whole countryside was scandalized and looked on in disgust, there was one man in the State who heard the reports of the prince's wickedness with the greatest complaisance and delight. This was none other than the Duke of Albany, Rothesay's own uncle, a man—rather a monster of humanity—whose vices, ambition, cruelty, craftiness, and cowardice overshadowed any good qualities he may have been heir to. Uncle and nephew were as unlike one another in disposition as they could possibly be ; consequently, there was not much love lost on either side. There is an old Scottish proverb which says that “freen's 'gree best apart.” Well had it been for Rothesay had he never seen his uncle's face, or broad seas rolled between them ! The fates, however, had decreed otherwise.

The cause of Rothesay's imprisonment in the Mar of Falkland ? Ah ! Albany was, as has already been stated, crafty and ambitious, and just as ambition can brook neither law nor obstacle, he aimed at nothing less than the sovereignty of the kingdom. To accomplish this end he resolved on the destruction of the heir-apparent who, despite his waywardness, was promising to be too popular for the taste of his treacherous kinsman. True, there stood another in the way—the young Prince James,

Earl of Carrick, but on account of his youth he did not count for much. So Albany thought; first the fountainhead,—it silted up, it would be an easy task bridging the narrow stream that separated him from the throne. Rothesay must needs be removed; his assassins put it more politely, saying that he was not to be murdered—he was only to cease to live. His father, Robert the Third, was in his dotage, and the Duke of Albany who managed the affairs of the country, not by promoting the public good, but by sharing its spoils with an extravagant nobility that fed itself by its enormities upon the plebeian community, preyed upon the decrepitude of the weak-minded monarch.

Albany panted for the title of king. Nothing short of that would satisfy him; still he had to be careful. “Concealing his rancour, he continued to caress the prince with every appearance of affection, and introduced to his acquaintance some young men, his creatures, of pleasing manners but of debauched principles and irregular lives. Seduced by their example the royal youth was drawn into some irregularities and excesses which the duke represented to the king in the strongest and most glaring light, heightened by all the colourings which art and malice could suggest, what were nothing more than youthful escapades. He pretended an anxiety to prevent him disgracing himself; and to facilitate his reformation, he represented the absolute necessity of confining him, a scheme in which he was so far successful that he extorted from his weak-willed father an unwilling order for his being confined in Falkland Castle, under the immediate care and inspection of his uncle.”

On receipt of the royal mandate Albany rubbed his palms with glee. Everything was playing into his hands, and with serpent-like subtlety he watched the movements of his victim. The bearers of the commission were Sir John Ramornie and Sir William Lindsay, both of whom were bitter enemies of the royal duke—the former because the prince’s nature was of much too generous a mould for such a villainous character, while the

latter was thirsting for revenge for the affront done to his family.

Rothesay had been affianced to his cousin, Euphemia de Lindsay, the lovely sister of Sir William of Rossie,—he had slighted her for Elizabeth Dunbar, daughter of the proud Earl of March, and her again for Marjory Douglas—and the consequence was the deadly enmity of March and Lindsay. The poor fellow had not his sorrows to seek. Fettered to a woman imposed upon him—a woman most unamiable and detestable in his eyes, he was, by his neglect of her, continually at words with his father-in-law, Archibald, Earl of Douglas, surnamed the Grim, a knight of immovable sternness and indomitable pride. He had, moreover, become odious in the sight of his quondam servitor, Sir John Ramornie, a man polished in manners, but with a heart as deep and dark and treacherous as the whirling Charybdis itself.

Fitting executors these, and well they accomplished their fell design! Secrecy, however, was necessary. Rothesay was inveigled into Fife upon the pretence that he should proceed to St Andrews and take possession of the castle for the king, the bishop of that see having but lately died. Between Nydie and Strathtyrum the duke was waylaid by his uncle's agents while on his way thither with a few followers, imprisoned in the very fortress to which he was betaking himself for safety, and then, the place of his confinement having been decided upon, carried, as already stated, to Falkland Mar, where Ramornie was to take in hand "to leir him honest and civill maneris."

Ramornie the Vile relished the infernal work, and he had willing tools in two assassins whom Albany had hired to help him, by name John Wright and John Selkirk—two fiends to whom a gallows fifty cubits high would have been a gentle punishment indeed, nay, to whom the most awful tortures of the Inquisition had been but scanty meed for all their callous inhumanity. It is even averred that they were destined for the gallows, but had been snatched from it to do the bloody deed.

Words cannot picture the unparalleled cruelty of these unmitigated villains ; it makes one's blood boil to think of it.

Into a gloomy dungeon that communicated with the outside world only by a small, narrow staircase which, save to the most inquisitive eyes, was all but indiscernible—into the bowels of the earth where the victim's shrieks and groans and the oppressor's threats and gibes could not be heard, there was the young Prince thrust and left, without food and without water, but with his aching limbs loaded with chains which allowed him no more freedom than to raise himself—left to starve slowly to death. Not a finger was to be laid upon the hapless victim ; not a drop of his blood was to be shed ; no mark of violence was to betray the secret of his death. Life, said John Ramornie Le Diable, was to be extinguished of itself. For want of trimming it with fresh oil, or of screening it from a breath of wind, the quivering light was to die in the socket. To suffer a man to die is not to kill him—that was the scoundrel's policy, and tenaciously and unerringly he stuck to it.

The day after his incarceration it was given out that the prince was taken dangerously ill of an infectious disease, aggravated by his exposure to the rains of the previous night. For obvious reasons only those who were deep in the plot were allowed near the prince's chamber. It were impossible to describe all the horrors of his captivity. Now and again the fiends of hell would break in upon the solitude, and with devilish joy mock and torture the forlorn youth. One day the assassin in whose charge the Duke was mainly left entered the dungeon. "With fiendish glee," writes Sir Walter Scott, "the wretch unfolded a piece of raw hide covering a bundle which he bore under his arm, and, passing the light to and fro before it, showed the unhappy prince a bull's head recently hewn from the trunk, and known in Scotland as the certain signal of death. He placed it at the foot of the lair on which the prince lay. 'Be moderate in your food,' he said ; 'it is like to be long ere thou get'st another meal.'"

Very soon, however, the barbaric stratagem was discovered ; and some women—Rothesay had always been a favourite in the eyes of women—made an ineffectual effort to undo it. For a time a maiden, believed by some to have been the daughter of the governor of the castle, managed to furnish him with thin oatmeal cakes, which she wrapped into the folds of her mantle and, going out under pretence of walking in the garden, passed through a narrow aperture in the wall of the dungeon. But, being discovered, she suffered martyrdom for her philanthropy. Then another woman, a nurse, drew milk from her own breast, and by a long reed conveyed it to the prisoner's mouth. But she, too, was found out, and execution was the reward of her charity. And at last, after, in the depth of despair and agony, devouring whatever his hands could clutch, gnawing even his own flesh, Rothesay crossed that river from the other side of which there is no return. Wyntoun writes :—

A thousand foure hundyr yeris and twa,  
 All before as ye herd done,  
 Our lord the Kingis eldest sone,  
 Suete and vertuous, yong and fair,  
 And his nerast lauchful ayr,  
 Honest, habil, and avenand (*elegant*),  
 Our Lorde, our Frynce, in all plesand,  
 Cunnand into litterature,  
 A seymly persone in stature,  
 Schir Davy, Duke of Rothesay,  
 Of Marche the sevin and twenty day,  
 Yauld his saule till his Creatoure,  
 His corse til hallowit sepulture.  
 In Lundoris his body lies,  
 His spirite intil Paradyis.

The country was electrified by the news of the prince's death. Few there were who would believe the report which Albany caused to be circulated, that Rothesay had died of dysentery ; and so loud and threatening did the murmuring against the Regent become that he found it expedient to demand from his



royal brother a remission or pardon, which, however, does nothing at all, if it does not indeed lay the murder at Albany's own door. Everything points in that direction. Rothesay was buried privately in the Abbey of Lindores, far away from the tombs of his ancestors. King Robert, too, had his own thoughts about the tragedy, but was too much the instrument of unprincipled noblemen to be able to avenge it. To prevent his remaining son, Prince James, from falling into the hands of his nefarious uncle, the King sent him to France.

There is little more to be told. Punishment dogs the heels of guilt as its companion ; and Heaven, who views the acts of king and peasant with the same impartial eye, does not allow such crimes to go unrequited. According to the early chroniclers, Rothesay's death was turned by heaven into a glorious martyrdom, for miracles were wrought for many years in the Church of Lindores where the prince was buried. Nor did the miracles cease until the victim's murder had been avenged. Twenty years afterwards James I., the poet-king, came back to claim his own again, and a terrible retribution fell on the descendants of Albany, when the iniquities of the father were visited upon the children. On Stirling's "sad and fatal mound"—the famous Heading Hill, so often bedewed with noble blood, Murdo, Duke of Albany and Earl of Fife, was beheaded, along with his father-in-law, Duncan, Earl of Lennox, and his two sons, Walter and Alexander Stuart.

Peace to thy dust !

Thy sleep is sound at last ; thy weary head

A couch without a thorn at length has prest ;—

The heart that Death has hush'd no dreams molest ;

No thorns bestrew the couch that Death has spread !

Sound is thy sleep,—and when again it flies,

Thou shalt not fear to see the night depart,

And to another morn unclosethine eyes ;

For to the Judgment then thou shalt not rise

Of erring men—but One who knows the heart,

And tries its reins—and pities as He tries.