

LADIES OF THE COVENANT

LADY MARY JOHNSTON, COUNTESS OF CRAWFORD

LADY MARY JOHNSTON was the eldest daughter of James, Earl of Annandale and Hartfell, by his wife Lady Henrietta Douglas, daughter of William, first Marquis of Douglas, by his second wife, Lady Mary Gordon. She was married at Leith, on the 8th of March, 1670, to William, sixteenth Earl of Crawford, and second Earl of Lindsay, the son of John, Earl of Crawford and Lindsay, of whom some notices have already been given, and brother to the Duchess of Rothes, the subject of the preceding sketch. [*Douglas's Peerage, vol. i., pp. 74, 387.*] Her husband, like his parents, was a nonconformist, and great deference was paid to him by the Presbyterians. On this account he was, throughout the period of the persecution, a marked man; and, from the danger to which he was exposed, he once intended to go abroad, though he never went, but lived in retirement till the Revolution, which brought him deliverance and honour.*

* He was appointed by King William, president of the parliament, a commissioner of the treasury, and one of the commission for settling the government of the church. He was a man of great political sagacity, and the most active agent in effecting the overthrow of prelacy at the Revolution. His correspondence during that eventful period has been printed in the "Melville and Leven Papers." "His letters," says Lord Lindsay, who is not disposed to overrate his merits, "bear the stamp of burning and enthusiastic sincerity, while in point of taste, though abounding in scriptural images, they are unusually graceful and free from cant, and the impression they leave is more favourable to him than might have been expected." - Lord Lindsay's *Lives of the Lindsays*, vol. ii. p. 174.

The early education and family connections of this lady tended to prejudice her mind against the suffering Covenanters. But her marriage into a family distinguished at once for their warm attachment to that persecuted body, and for personal piety, was followed by a great change both upon her personal character and religious sentiments. She became, at one and the same time, a genuine Christian and a true blue Presbyterian. The instrument of effecting this change upon her was Mr. John Welsh, a minister almost unequalled in the times of persecution, for the Christian intrepidity with which he jeopardied his life on the mountains and in the moors of Scotland, in his ardent and indefatigable zeal to proclaim to his fellow-countrymen the unsearchable riches of Christ, and whose intrepid labours of love were blessed by the Spirit of God for turning multitudes from disobedience to the wisdom of the just. In the beginning of the year 1674, - the first three months of which, as we have seen, were called "the Blink," from the little molestation then offered to the ejected ministers in holding conventicles, whether in houses or in the fields, - Welsh went over from Edinburgh to Fife with his wife, where he spent about six weeks in preaching, none presuming either to pursue him from Edinburgh, or to lay hands on him in Fife, not even Sharp, who had his residence in that part of the country, and who of all others most thirsted for his blood. [*None was so busy as Mr. John Welsh, who this spring, [1674,] made a perambulation over Fife, and there, in vacant churches, and sometimes in the fields at Glenvale, at Duraquhair, and other places, gathered sometimes armies together, for which the gentry and people both smarted very sore.*] - Kirkton's *History*, p. 344.] During that period Welsh had large meetings both on the Sabbath day and on week days, at which many of the gentry, attracted by the weight of his character and by his homely but powerful eloquence, were often present; the most of whom seemed to be impressed by the word, and favourably disposed to the work in which he was engaged.

[*Blackadder's Memoirs, MS. copy. The same writer says, "He [Welsh] was attended from place to place with companies of gentlemen and others, with great respect and applause." "The council," says Kirkton, "set a price upon Mr. Welsh's head, and for that he never rode without a guard of horsemen, sometimes more, sometimes less, but seldom exceeding the number of ten horsemen."*] - Kirkton's *History*, p. 380.] It was at this time that Lady Crawford had an opportunity of hearing him preach for the first time, in the neighbourhood of her own residence, Struthers House, [*Struthers, or as it is called in some old papers, Auchter-uther-Struther, was formerly the seat of the Earls of Crawford. It is now in ruins, and stands about two miles south-west from the village of Ceres, Fifeshire. Its towers and battlements gave it a venerable and a sort of warlike appearance; but of this once splendid house there now exist very scanty remains. "The park around the house," says the old Statistical Account of Scotland, "which is enclosed with a stone wall, contains about 200 acres of ground; there are a good many trees in different places of the*

park, particularly some venerable beeches of a very large size." But in the new *Statistical Account of Scotland*, it is said that these "venerable beeches, have died or been cut down."] and his discourse, accompanied by the influences of the divine Spirit, was the means of turning her from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. From that day she became an altered person; the pride of her heart was humbled, so that, like Mary in the Gospel, she sat at Jesus' feet, a teachable disciple, listening to his voice, and in the whole of her subsequent deportment she exhibited the living marks of a child of God. Now, indeed, she had not many years to live, but during the brief course allotted to her on earth, she exemplified in an eminent degree the power of vital godliness. In her character were combined the devotion of the saint and the resolution of the martyr. Previous to her hearing Welsh she attended the curates without scruple, but after that, no arguments and no menaces employed by her relatives could prevail upon her to go and hear them; and she embraced every opportunity within her reach of attending field conventicles. In her the persecuted, the poor, and the suffering found a sympathizing friend. [Mr. John Carstairs in a letter to the Earl of Crawford, dated May 2, 1678, says, "I take it for granted your lordship's excellent lady and sister covet most the relief of Christ's oppressed interests, and that your endeavours therein will be most acceptable and satisfying, as I hope your brother's sweet lady also doeth." - *Wodrow MSS. vol lix., folio, no. 78.*] The vast change she had undergone, her relatives and acquaintances did not fail to observe; and her Christian friends were struck with the rapidity with which she advanced in all the graces of the Spirit, outstripping many who had preceded her in their entrance on the Christian course. Her husband, who loved her with the tenderest affection, was improved in character by the imitation of her virtues, and encomiums upon her worth were extorted even from enemies.

Of this lady, Mr. John Blackadder has preserved an interesting memorial in his *Memoirs*, written by Himself. After narrating Welsh's visit to Fife in the beginning of the year 1674, and referring to the "many memorable effects of the power and wisdom of God, manifested at that time," by the labours of that eminent minister, of which he gives some examples, he says: "Among others, I must notice, to the commendation of the grace of God, that instance concerning Countess Crawford, then called Lady Lindsay, [*Her husband was then only Lord Lindsay. He did not become Earl of Crawford till his father's death, which took place in 1676.*] daughter to the Earl of Annandale, by Duke Hamilton's sister, (whose education was more likely to have alienated her from that way, than to ingratiate it to her), she coming to one of these great meetings at Duraquhair near Cupar, and near to her own house: she by a special cast of God's power, had been induced among others to come forth one of these great Sabbaths at Duraquhair, where it was estimated there were about seven or eight thousand persons present, and much of the power of God appeared to the shaking the consciences, and awakening the hearts of the generality for the time, and leaving a lasting impression on others, among whom this truly honourable lady was one, who declared she was constrained to close with the offer that was made in that great day of the gospel; which was made known to many by manifest fruits of piety, showed forth in all her walk as a Christian and dutiful yoke-fellow to her lord, who also received good impressions of that day's work, and the like from her very report of the Lord's gracious presence and good she found to her soul that day; which the writer hereof also had from herself, with great majesty and seriousness, in presence of her lord, who since hath also been helped to carry as a Christian in the exercise of piety and righteousness, (whereof he hath given a good proof in dispensing his estate, to pay his father's creditors,* having very little to himself,) and stedfast soundness in [*He made his nonentailed property responsible for payment of his father's debts "that," to use his own words, "the memory of so good a man, and so kind a father, might not suffer by the neglect of a son that owed all things to him in gratitude as well as duty." Melville and Leven Papers, p. 259. Mr. John Carstairs, in his Epistle Dedicatory to Durham's Sermons on Isaiah liii., addressed to the Earl of Crawford, also speaks in commendation of his lordship's christian and exemplary conduct, in "choosing rather contentedly and satisfiedly to be (if it so please the Lord, and O that it may not!) the last of that ancient and honourable family, than to be found endeavouring to keep it from sinking by any sinful and unwarrantable course, particularly by defrauding just creditors, (though the debt was not of your lordship's own contracting,) under whatever specious pretexts and advantages of law; whereof many make no bones, who, if they may keep up their superfluities, care not to ruin their friends engaging in suretyship for their debt, and to live on the substance of others." Carstairs adds, "With great satisfaction I notice how much your lordship makes it your business to follow your noble ancestors, in so far as they were 'followers of Christ,' which many great men, even in the christian world, alas! do not much mind, not considering that it is true nobility, where God, is the chief and top of the kin, and where religion is at the bottom; and what renown'd Raleigh saith, '*Hinc dictus nobilis quasi prae aliis virtute notabilis,*' and what another saith, '*Qui ab illustrium majorum splendida virtuta degenerarunt nobilia portenta sunt.*'"] the public cause of reformation, with as much tenderness, and keeping at a distance from all steps of defection, as many of whom more might have been

expected, and that to this day. After the day of this lady's conversion to the Lord, and singular reformation, she could never be induced by all the insinuations and threats of her near and noble relations, to go back again to the prelatie preachers and their assemblies, or to countenance any of the prelates or curates as she had done, but frequented all occasions of preaching at these persecuted meetings she could conveniently win at. She lived and died endeavouring to adorn her profession by a conversation becoming the gospel; even to the stopping the mouths of gainsayers. What is here declared as to this memorable instance and effect of the grace and power of Christ manifested to this lady, I am without fear of any man's disproving, beside many the like to others at these persecuted meetings, called by many in this degenerate generation unlawful conventicles."

[Blackadder's Memoirs, MS. copy; see also Dr. Crichton's printed copy, p. 167.]

Lady Crawford died in the year 1682, in the prime of life. *[She had issue to the Earl three sons, the eldest of whom was John, seventeenth Earl of Crawford, and a daughter. - Douglas's Peerage, vol. i., p.387]* This we learn from the Epistle Dedicatory, prefixed by Mr. John Carstairs to Durham's Sermons on Isaiah liii. It is addressed "Unto all afflicted and cross-bearing serious Christians; and more particularly, to the Right Honourable and Truly Noble Lord William, Earl of Crawford;" and is dated November 15, 1682. After adducing and illustrating a variety of reasons, why the people of God should "sweetly submit themselves to his will in all things, how cross soever to their own inclination," he says, "Let them all, my noble lord, prevail with your lordship in particular, reverently to adore, silently to stoop unto, and sweetly to acquiesce in, the Lord's sovereign, holy, and wise ordering your many and various complicated trials; and more especially his late removing your excellent lady, the desire of your eyes, the Christian and comfortable companion of your youth, by his stroke." In the same Dedication, Carstairs bears testimony to the distinguished piety of this lady, in these words: "I am, my noble lord, the more easily prevailed with, and encouraged to address the dedication of these sermons to your lordship, more particularly when I remember 'the unfeigned faith that first dwelt in your grandmother,' as another Lois; and in your mother, as another Eunice; *[Tim. i.5.]* and more lately in your own choice lady, who, as another beloved Persis, 'laboured much in the Lord,' *[Rom. xvi. 12.]* (and though she had but a very short christian race, in which she was much encouraged by coming into your noble father's family; and her beholding how hard your blessed mother did run and press toward the mark, even when in the last stage, and turning in a manner the last stoop of her christian course; yet it was a very swift one, wherein she did quite outrun many that were in Christ long before her;) all three ladies of honour, almost - if I need to say almost - without parallels in their times, in the serious and diligent exercise of godliness, and patterns worthy to be imitated by others." Carstairs adds, "And [the same unfeigned faith dwells] I trust in your lordship also, yea, and in several others of your elder and younger noble relations; for grace hath such a draught of souls amongst you, as it useth not often to have in societies of so noble extract, 'for not many noble are called.'" The loss of this amiable and pious lady gave a severe shock to the feelings of the earl. Carstairs, who knew the intensity of his grief, addressed himself to the task of administering comfort to his wounded heart. "Let all mutinous thoughts about His dealings with you be silenced with, 'It's the Lord;' let not too much dwelling on the thoughts of your affection, to the filling of your heart still with sorrow, incapacitate you for, nor divert you from, humbly asking the Lord, what he aims at by all these dispensations, what he would have you to learn out of them, what he reproveth and contends for, what he would have you amending your hands in, and what he would have you more weaned, self-denied, and mortified in, and what he would have you a further length and a greater proficient in: He hath told you 'the truth, that these things are expedient for you;' study to find them to be so in your experience. Sure he hath by them written in great, legible, and capital characters, yea even as with a sun-beam, vanity, emptiness, uncertainty, mutability, unsatisfactoriness, and disappointment upon the forehead of all creature comforts, and with a loud voice called your lordship, yet more seriously than ever, to seek after solid soul satisfaction in his own blessed and all-sufficient self." And after observing that "it is the scattering of our expectations and desires of happiness among other objects beside him, that breeds us all our disquiet, anxiety, and vexation;" he adds, "There are some whom he loveth so well, that he cannot (to speak so) find in his heart to see them thus to parcel out their affections, and to dote upon any painted imaginary happiness in creature-comforts; and therefore, in design, he doth either very much blast them as to the expected satisfaction from them; or quite remove them, that by making such a vacuity, he may make way for himself

to fill it, and happily to necessitate the person, humbly, prayerfully, and believingly, to put him to the filling of it. And it is a great vacuity that he, 'who fills heaven and earth,' cannot fill; a little of whose gracious presence, and manifested special love, can go very far to fill up the room that is made void, by the removal of the choicest and most desirable of all earthly comforts and enjoyments. Happy they, who, when they lose a near and dear relation or friend, or any idol they are fond of, are helped of God to make Jesus Christ, as it were, succeed to the same as its heir, by taking that loss as a summons to transfer and settle their whole love on him, the object incomparably most worthy of it, as being 'altogether lovely,' or 'all desires!' Cant. v. 16."

The earl afterwards married for his second wife Lady Henrietta Seton, only daughter of Charles, second Earl of Dunfermline, by his wife Lady Mary Douglas, third daughter of William, Earl of Morton. [*Douglas's Peerage, vol. i., p. 482.*] She was the relict of William, fifth Earl of Wigton, to whom she was married at Dalgety in September, 1670, whom she lost by death on the 8th of April, 1681, and to whom she had issue two sons and a daughter. [*Douglas's Peerage, vol. i., p. 637.*] To the Earl of Crawford she had a son and six daughters.

Like his former countess, this lady was a woman of genuine piety, as well as of Presbyterian principles; and, like other ladies of nobility and honour, she had her own share in the sufferings of those evil times. She first suffered in her two sons by her first husband being taken from her and committed to a teacher to be educated in prelacy or popery; and when she went to Edinburgh to complain to the government, and make application for having them restored to her, her complaint and request were disregarded. In a paper entitled "Grievances for Scotland, 1661 - 1688," the following is included as a grievance: "The threatening to take children from parents to breed them papists, and actually taking my Lord Wigton and his brother. My Lady Crawford, their mother, came over to Edinburgh, in great grief and perplexity, a few weeks before her delivery, but was harshly handled by the chancellor, [*The Earl of Perth*] and on her soliciting the lords of council for recovery of her children out of his hands, no man would open his mouth for her." [*Wodrow MSS., vol. xl., folio, no. 3. In another paper entitled "Grievances for Scotland," this Grievance is thus stated, "The imposing of naughty persons to govern children, as one imposed on my Lord Wigton and his brother, who after betrayed them to the chancellor." - Ibid., vol. xl., folio, no. 7.*] And yet this treatment of her children was in glaring violation of the law. There was indeed at that period a standing law against Presbyterians being employed as chaplains or pedagogues in families, or as teachers in schools, or as professors in colleges, conformity to prelacy being an essential qualification for all such situations; but to abstract children from their parents, and to commit them to teachers for the purpose of their being trained up in prelacy or popery; was warranted by no statute even at that time, when the throne was a throne of iniquity, and when mischief had been so extensively framed by law. After the accession of James VII to the throne, so gloomy were the anticipations of this lady as to the future state of matters in Scotland, that she was very desirous of going abroad. In a letter to a friend, dated September 8, 1685, speaking of the considerations which induced him to leave Scotland, as well of the difficulties in the way, the earl says, "The things that prompt me to go are, first, a passionate desire in a most dutiful, most affectionate, and singularly good wife, who is really disquieted with apprehensions of sad things that are coming on Scotland; now, when I consider the composedness of her temper for ordinary, I have sometimes looked on this restlessness in her spirit to be gone, as a warning from God that I should retire." [*Wodrow's History, vol. iv., p. 513.*]