

SECTION VI.

SPORTS AND AMUSEMENTS.

IN an enquiry in which I have attempted to give something like a civil history of the country, the sports and amusements of our ancestors form a subject of interesting research ; although here, as on almost all other similar points, we have to lament the extreme scarcity of authentic materials. The chivalrous amusements of Scotland appear to have been the same as in the other feudal countries of Europe. Hunting and hawking, the tourney or play at arms, the reading of romances, the game of chess, masques and feasts, minstrelsy and juggler's tricks, with the licensed wit of the fool, filled up the intervals of leisure which were spared from public or private war.

With regard to hunting, the immense forests with which, as we have already seen, our country was covered during this period, gave every facility for the cultivation of this noble pastime ; and there is ample evidence, that, at a very early period, the chase formed one of the principal recreations of the kings and the barons of Scotland. David the First recounted to Ethelred, Abbot of Rievaulx, an anecdote regarding

Malcolm Canmore his father, which illustrates this in a minute and striking manner. Malcolm had received private information that a plot against his life was laid by one of his courtiers in whom he placed great confidence. The king took no notice of the discovery, but calmly awaited the arrival of the traitor with his vassals and followers at court; and when they came, gave orders for his huntsmen and hounds to prepare for the chase, and be waiting for him on the first dawn of the morning. "And now," says Ethelred, "when Aurora had driven away the night, King Malcolm assembled his chief officers and nobles, with whom he proceeded to take the pastime of the chase in a green plain, which was thickly surrounded by a wood. In the middle of this forest was a gentle eminence, profusely covered with wild flowers, in which the hunters, after the fatigues of the chase, were accustomed to repose and solace themselves. Upon this eminence the king stood; and, according to that law or custom of the chase, which the vulgar call the *trysta*, having allotted certain stations to the different nobles and their dogs, in such a manner that the game should meet death wherever it attempted to make its escape, he dismissed them, but requested the traitor to remain alone with him, whilst the rest departed. When this was done, the king took him aside to a more remote part of the wood, and drawing his sword, informed him that he knew well the whole of his treachery. 'We are alone,' said he, 'and on an equal footing, as becomes brave men; both are

armed, both are mounted; neither of us can receive assistance. You have sought my life: take it, if you are able.”¹ It is hardly necessary to add, that this heroic conduct of the king was followed by the immediate contrition and pardon of his heart-struck vassal. The use of the term *trysta* in this passage, enables us to throw some additional light upon the ancient customs of the chase in Scotland. The law of *trysta*, which Ethelred here alludes to, was one by which the king’s vassals, when he took the pastime of the chase, were bound to attend the royal rendezvous at the ground appointed, with a certain number of hounds; and the phrase yet used in Scotland, to “keep tryst,” seems to be derived from this ancient practice in wood-craft.² In the Highlands at this day, the mode of hunting by a tenkle is very similar to the *trista* held upon this occasion by Malcolm Canmore. David the First appears to have been no less fond of hunting than his father Malcolm. Indeed, we may believe that his intimate connexion with England, previous to his coming to the throne, must have given him an additional love for an amusement which the Normans then followed with an enthusiasm which transformed it from a recreation into a science. Accordingly,

¹ Ethelredus de Genealogia Regum Anglorum, p. 367. Inter x Scriptorum Twysden, vol. i.

² Ducange, voce *Trista*, who quotes Coke, part iv. Institut. p. 306. In a Charter of Edward III. Monast. Anglican. vol. ii. p. 827, we find, “Et sont quieti de Henedpenny, Huckstall, et Tristis.”

when Robert de Brus, previous to the great battle of the Standard, in which David was so cruelly defeated, employed his eloquence to persuade the king, his old friend and brother in arms, to desist from his unjust invasion of England, he not only mentions the mutual perils and labours which they had shared, but especially alludes to the delight which they had experienced in the chase, and the pleasures of hawking and hunting ;¹ and in that beautiful and touching eulogium which Ethelred has left us of the same monarch, who was his friend and patron, we find this testimony alike to his humanity and his love of the chase. “ Often with these eyes have I seen him draw back his foot when it was already in the stirrup, and he was just mounting to follow the diversion of the chase, should the voice of any poor supplicant be heard petitioning for an audience ; the horse was left, the amusement for that day given up, and the king would return into his palace.”²

Whether William the Lion, or Alexander the Second, the immediate successors of David the First, were much addicted to this healthy and heart-stirring exercise we have no ground to determine ; but Alexander the Third certainly kept a falconer, and the sums of money expended in the support of his hawks and dogs, appear in those valuable fragments of the Chamberlain's Accounts of this early reign, which have been

¹ Ethelredus de Bello Standardi, p. 345.

² Fordun a Hearne, vol. iv. p. 940.

