

CHAP. III.

JAMES THE FIRST.

 CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

King of England.
Henry VI.

| *King of France.*
Charles VII.

| *Popes.*
Martin V.
Eugene IV.

IN James the First, Scotland was at length destined to receive a sovereign of no common character and endowments. We have seen, that when a boy of fourteen, he was seized by the English, and from that time till his return in 1424, twenty years of his life, embracing the period of all others the most important and decisive in the formation of future character, had been passed in captivity. If unjust in his detention, Henry the Fourth appears to have been anxious to compensate for his infringement of the law of nations by the care which he bestowed upon the education of the youthful monarch. He was instructed in all the warlike exercises, and in the high-bred observances and polished manners of the school of chivalry; he was generously provided with masters in the various arts and sciences, and as it was the era of the revival of learning in England, the age especially of the rise of poetic literature, in Chaucer and Gower, his mind and imagination became deeply

infected with a passion for those elegant pursuits. But James, during his long captivity, enjoyed far higher advantages. He was able to study the arts of government, to make his observations on the mode of administering justice in England, and to extract wisdom and experience from a personal acquaintance with the disputes between the sovereign and his nobility, whilst in the friendship and confidence with which he appears to have been uniformly treated by Henry the Fifth, who made him the partner of his campaigns in France, he became acquainted with the politics of both countries, received his education in the art of war from one of the greatest captains whom it has produced ; and, from his not being personally engaged, had leisure to avail himself to the utmost of the opportunities which his peculiar situation presented. There were other changes also, which were then gradually beginning to manifest themselves in the political condition of the two countries, which, to his acute and discerning mind, must necessarily have presented a subject of thought and speculation—I mean the repeated risings of the commons against the intolerable tyranny of the feudal nobility, and the increased wealth and consequence of the middle classes of the state, events which, in the moral history of those times, are of deep interest and importance, and of which the future monarch of Scotland was a personal observer. The school, therefore, in which James was educated seems to have been eminently qualified to produce a wise and excellent king, and the history of his reign corroborates this observation.

On entering his kingdom, James proceeded to Edinburgh, where he held the festival of Easter; and on the twenty-first of May he and his queen were solemnly crowned in the abbey church of Scone. According to an ancient hereditary right, the king was placed in the royal seat by the late governor, Murdoch Duke of Albany and Earl of Fife, whilst Henry Wardlaw, Bishop of St Andrews, the same faithful prelate to whom the charge of his early education had been committed, anointed his royal master, and placed the crown upon his head, amid a splendid assembly of the nobility and clergy, and the shouts and rejoicings of the people. The king then proceeded to bestow the honour of knighthood upon Alexander Stewart the younger, son of the Duke of Albany; upon the Earls of March, Angus, and Crawford; William Hay of Errol, Constable of Scotland, John Scrymgeour, Constable of Dundee, Alexander Seton of Gordon, and eighteen others of the principal nobility and barons;¹ after which he convoked his parliament on the 26th of May, and proceeded to the arduous task of enquiring into the abuses of the government, and adopting decided measures for their reformation.

Hitherto James had been but imperfectly informed regarding the extent to which the government of Albany and his feeble successor had promoted, or permitted, the grossest injustice and the most unli-

¹ Extracta ex Chronicis Scotiae, MS. fol. 269, 270. Fordun a Goodal, vol. ii. p. 474.

censed speculation. He had probably suspected that the picture had been exaggerated; and with that deep and deliberate policy which constituted a striking part of his character, he resolved to conduct his investigations in person, before he gave the slightest hint of his ultimate intentions. It is said, indeed, that when he first entered the kingdom, the dreadful description given by one of his nobles of the unbridled licentiousness and contempt of the laws which every where prevailed, threw him for a moment off his guard. "Let God but grant me life," cried he, with a loud voice, "and there shall not be a spot in my dominions where the key shall not keep the castle, and the furze-bush the cow, though I myself should lead the life of a dog to accomplish it!"² This, however, was probably spoken in confidence, for the object of the king was to inform himself of the exact condition of his dominions without exciting alarm, or raising a suspicion which might foster opposition and induce concealment. The very persons who sat in this parliament, and through whose assistance the investigation must be conducted, were themselves the most atrocious defaulters; an imprudent word escaping him, and much more a sudden imprisonment or a hasty, perhaps an unsuccessful, attempt at impeachment, would have been the signal for the nobles to fly to their estates and shut themselves up in their feudal castles, where they could have defied every effort of the king to apprehend them; and in this way all his

² Fordun a Goodal, vol. ii. p. 511.

