

HISTORY
OF
SCOTLAND.

CHAP. I.

JAMES THE SECOND.

CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

King of England.

Henry VI.

King of France.

Charles VII.

Popes.

Eugene IV.
Nicholas V.
Calixtus III.
Pius II.

THE assassination of James the First, and the succeeding minority of his son, a boy of only six years of age, was, if not a triumph to the majority of the Scottish nobility, at least an event eminently favourable to their power and pretensions. His murderers, it is true, whether from the sudden execration which involuntarily bursts out against a deed of so dark and sanguinary a character, or from the personal revenge of the queen-mother, were punished with speedy and immitigable severity. Yet, when the first sentiments of horror and amazement were abated, and the Scottish aristocracy began to regard the consequences likely to arise from the sudden destruction which had overtaken the king in the midst of his schemes for the abridgement of their own exorbitant power, it is

impossible that they should not have contemplated the event of his death with secret satisfaction. The sentiments so boldly avowed by Grahame in the midst of his tortures, that the day was near at hand when they would bless his memory for having rid them of a tyrant, must have forcibly recurred to their minds; and when they regarded the fate of the Earl of March, so summarily and cruelly stript of his immense possessions, and contemplated the magnitude of James's plans, and the stern firmness with which, in so short a reign, he had carried them into effect, we can readily believe that the recovery of the privileges which they had lost, and the erection of some strong and permanent barriers, which should be a defence for their rights against all future encroachments of the crown, would be the great objects to which, under the minority of his successor, they would direct their attention.

It happened also, unfortunately for Scotland, that such a scheme for the resumption of individual power by the feudal nobility, in other words, for the return of anarchy and disorder throughout the country, was but too likely to prove successful. The improvements introduced by James the First; the judicial machinery for the more perfect and speedy administration of justice; the laws for the protection of the lower orders against the insolence of the great; the provisions for the admission of the representatives of the commercial classes into parliament, and for the abridgement of the military strength of the great feudal lords—were rather in the state of prospective changes, than of measures whose salutary effects had

been tried by time, and to which the nation had become attached by long usage. These improvements had been all carried into effect within the short space of fourteen years ; they still bore upon them the hateful gloss of novelty and innovation ; and, no longer supported by the firmness and the wisdom of the monarch with whom they originated, they could present but a feeble resistance to the attacks and to the ridicule of the numerous and powerful classes whose privileges they so materially abridged, and with whose ambition and aggrandizement their continuance was completely incompatible. The prospect of recovering, during a long minority, the estates and the feudal perquisites which had been resumed or cut down by James the First ; the near view of successful venality which constantly accompanied the possession of the great offices under an infant sovereign ; and the facility, in the execution of such schemes, which every feudal government offered to any faction who were powerful or fortunate enough to possess themselves of the person of the king, rendered the period upon which we now enter one of great excitement amongst the Scottish nobles. The greater chiefs amongst them adopted every means to increase their personal strength and importance, recruiting the ranks of their armed vassals and followers, and placing persons of tried fidelity in their castles and strongholds ; the lesser barons attached themselves to the more powerful by those leagues or bands which bound them by the strictest ties to work the will of their lord ; and both classes set themselves attentively to watch the

course of events, and to take immediate advantage of those sudden changes and emergencies which were so likely to arise in a country thrown into the utmost dismay and confusion by the murder of the sovereign.

But although such appear to have been the low and interested feelings of the greater proportion of the nobility, we are not to suppose that the support of the crown, and the cause of order and good government, were utterly abandoned. They still retained many friends in the dignified clergy, as well as among those learned and able churchmen from whose ranks the legal officers of the crown, and the diplomatic agents who transacted all foreign missions and alliances, were generally selected; and they could undoubtedly reckon upon the attachment of the mercantile and commercial classes, now gradually rising into importance, and upon the affectionate support of the great body of the lower orders, in so far as they were left untrammelled by the fetters of their feudal servitude.

Whilst such were the sentiments which animated the various bodies in the state upon the murder of the king, it may easily be supposed that terror was the first feeling which arose in the bosom of the queen-mother. Utterly uncertain as to the ramifications of the conspiracy, and trembling lest the same vengeance which had fallen upon the father should pursue the son, she instantly fled with the young prince to Edinburgh; nor did she esteem herself secure till she had retreated with her charge within the castle. The command of this fortress, rendered now a place of

