

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

LETTER A, p. 35.

Boece and the Story of the Bull's Head.

THE story of the bull's head being presented to the Douglasses at the banquet, as a signal for their death, appears, for the first time, in Hector Boece, p. 363 :—"Gubernator, assentiente Cancellario, * * amotis epulis, *taurinum caput apponi jubet*. Id enim est apud nostrates supplicii capitalis symbolum." Although this extraordinary circumstance is not found in the Auchinleck Chronicle, an almost contemporary authority, yet, had I discovered evidence of the truth of Boece's assertion, that the production of a bull's head was amongst our countrymen a well-known signal for the infliction of a capital punishment, I should have hesitated before I rejected the appearance of this horrid emblem immediately previous to the seizure of the Douglasses. The truth is, however, that the production of such a dish as a bull's head, or, according to the version of the tale given by a great writer,¹ a black bull's head, as an emblem of death, is not to be found in any former period of our history, or in any Celtic tradition of which I am aware. For this last assertion, the non-existence of any Celtic or Highland tradition of date prior to Boece's history, where this emblem is said to have been used, I rest not on my own judgment, for I regret much I am little read in Gaelic antiquities, but on the information of my friends, Mr Gregory, Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries,

¹ Sir Walter Scott's History of Scotland, vol. i. p. 281.

and the Reverend Mr Macgregor Stirling, who are, perhaps, amongst the ablest of our Celtic antiquaries.¹ After the time of Boece, whose work was extremely popular in Scotland, it is by no means improbable that the tale of the bull's head should have been transplanted into Highland traditions. Accordingly I understand, from Mr Stirling, that Sir Duncan Campbell, the seventh laird of Glenurquhay, on an occasion somewhat similar to the murder of the Douglasses, is said to have produced a bull's head at table, which caused his victims to start from the board and escape. Sir Duncan lived in the interval between 1560 and 1631.

LETTER B, p. 36.

George, Earl of Angus.

It is to be regretted that Godscroft, in his History of the House of Douglas and Angus, vol. i. p. 287, instead of his own interminable remarks and digressions, had not given us the whole of the ancient ballad in which some indignant minstrel expressed his abhorrence of the deed. One stanza only is preserved:—

Edinburgh Castle, Town and Tower,
 God grant thou sink for sin,
 And that even for the black dinner
 Earl Douglas gat therein.

The late Lord Hailes, in his Remarks on the History of Scotland, chap. 7, satisfactorily demonstrated “that Archibald, third Earl of Douglas, could not, according to the common opinion, have been a brother of James, second Earl of Douglas, slain at Otterburn, and that he did not succeed to the earldom in right of

¹ Mr Gregory, I am happy to see, is about to publish “A History of the Western Highlands and the Hebrides during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.” Hitherto, all that we know of the history of this most interesting portion of the kingdom, is perplexing, vague, and traditionary. But, from the mass of authentic materials which the industry of the secretary of the antiquaries has collected, a valuable work may at last be expected.

“ Therefore have we, the above-mentioned John, Stephen, and Andrew, by the grace, full powers, and command of our afore-mentioned gracious and beloved lord the king, and others of his towns and subjects, procurators plenipotentiary, (according to the contents of all their procuratories, together with that of his royal gracious majesty, sealed with all their seals, which we have delivered over to the afore-mentioned people of Bremen, and received answer,) negotiated, effected, and made conditions of a friendly treaty, with the honourable burgermeister and counsellors of Bremen, in all power, and in the manner as hereafter is written.

“ Although the afore-mentioned people of Bremen, in strict right, as also on account of the delay which has taken place, and also on account of the great damage which they have suffered in former years from the said kingdom, could not be bound, and were not bound, yet on account of their affection to, and to please the afore-mentioned, our most gracious lord, and his royal grace, and for the sake of peace, and an equitable treaty, the same people of Bremen, to compensate for the expense, wear, and great inconvenience which then was occasioned, have given us, and do presently give a *Butse*,¹ called the *Rose*, with anchors, tackling, and ropes, as she came out of the sea, and thereunto forty *measures* of beer; and therewith shall all attack, damage, and hurt, which they of Bremen and their allies have done to the kingdom of Scotland, and the subjects of the said kingdom, up to the date of this letter, whether the damage may have been done to crews, goods, or ships, and wherever the damage may have been received, be declared to be compensated for, acquitted, and completely forgiven.

“ And, in like manner also, shall all attack, damage, and hurt, which they of Bremen, in these years, have suffered from the kingdom of Scotland, and the subjects of the said kingdom, and particularly that which happened to one of their *coggen*² which was lost in the Frith, and to a *kreyer* lost near Wytkopp, and to a *kreyger*

¹ *Butse*, a particular kind of ship. Herring busses is a term frequently used in the Acts of Parliament.

² *Coggen*, another kind of ship, of some particular build, used for warlike as well as for mercantile purposes. *Kreyer* and *kreyger* can only be explained in the same general way.

