

HISTORY
OF
SCOTLAND.

CHAP. I.

JAMES THE SIXTH.

1586-7—1589.

CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

<i>England.</i> Elizabeth.		<i>France.</i> Henry III. Henry IV.		<i>Germany.</i> Rudolph II.		<i>Spain.</i> Philip II.		<i>Portugal.</i> Philip II.		<i>Pope.</i> Sixtus V.
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THE conduct of Elizabeth on the death of the Queen of Scots was marked by much dissimulation and injustice. After having signed the warrant for her execution, commanded it to be carried to the Seals, and positively interdicted Davison, to whom she delivered it, from any further communication with her till it was obeyed, she suddenly turned fiercely round upon him and her Council, and cast on them the whole guilt of Mary's blood. In a moment she denied, or pretended to forget, everything which she had done. She had declared to Sir Robert Melvil, that she would not spare his royal mistress' life for one hour; now she swore vehemently that she never intended to take it. She had assured Davison,

with a great oath, that she meant the execution to go forward; now she loudly protested that she had commanded him to keep the warrant till he received further orders. She had laboured anxiously with Paulet to have Mary secretly made away with; and now she did not scruple to call God to witness, under awful obtestations, that her determined resolution had been all along to save her life.¹ And her subsequent conduct was perfectly in character with all this. On the day after the execution, Lord Shrewsbury wrote from Fotheringay to the Court, which was then at Greenwich. Next morning, at nine, his letters were brought to the palace by his son Henry Talbot, and the news became public. Soon after, the bells of the city, and the blazing of bonfires, proclaimed the happiness of the people.² It was impossible that these demonstrations should have escaped the notice of Elizabeth; and we know from Davison, every word of whose "Apology" carries truth and conviction with it, that the Queen that same night was made aware of Mary's execution;³ but she took no notice, and kept an obstinate silence. Apparently none of her ministers dared to allude to the event; and when after four days the news was at last forced upon her, she broke into a hypocritical

¹ *Supra*, Vol. VIII. p. 383. Life of Thomas Egerton, Lord Chancellor, p. 119. Chasteauneuf to Henry III., 28th February, 1587. Also, MS. Minutes of Carey's Message. Warrender MSS.

² Life of Egerton, pp. 117, 119. Letter of Chasteauneuf to Henry III., 28th February, 1587. It ought to be remembered that Chasteauneuf uses the new style.

³ Sir Harris Nicolas' Life of Davison, p. 268.

passion of astonishment, tears, and indignation. She upbraided her councillors with having purposely deceived her,¹ chased Burghley from her presence, and committed Secretary Davison to the Tower. It was in vain that this upright and able, but most unfortunate of men pleaded, with all the energy of truth, the commands of his Sovereign for everything that he had done. She knew he had no witnesses of their conversation; charged him with falsehood and disobedience; compelled Burghley, who must have been well assured of his innocence, to draw up a severe memorial against him; had him tried before the Star Chamber; degraded him from his office of Secretary; inflicted on him a fine which amounted to absolute ruin; and never afterwards admitted him to the least enjoyment of her favour.²

All this was in keeping with the subtlety and disregard of truth which sometimes marked Elizabeth's proceedings, when she had any great object to gain. It was part of a premeditated plan by which she hoped to mislead Europe, and convince its States that she was really guiltless of Mary's blood: but ultimately it had no effect on the Continent; and it was too palpably fictitious to be successful for a moment in Scotland, where the facts were well known. In that country, the news of Mary's execution was received with a universal burst of indigna-

¹ Wright, *Life and Times of Elizabeth*, vol. ii. p. 332. Wolley to Leicester, Sunday, 1586. This Sunday was the 12th February.

² Nicolas' *Life of Davison*, pp. 82, 83; and Appendix, pp. 235, 236, 260, 263.

tion, and open threats of revenge. But the English wardens, Lord Scrope and Sir John Foster, were provided against immediate attack; and the season of the year, which was seed-time, rendered it difficult for the Scots to assemble in any force.¹

It was Mr Roger Ashton, a gentleman of James' bed-chamber, whom he had sent to London some time before this, that brought the King the first certain intelligence of his mother's death. Ashton arrived in Edinburgh about the seventh day after the execution; and Lord Scrope, who had despatched a spy to watch James' motions, wrote in alarm to Walsingham, that the monarch was grievously offended, and had sworn that so foul an act of tyranny and injustice should not pass unrevenged.² The feelings, however, of this Prince were neither deep nor lasting. Even at this sad moment, selfishness and the assurance of undivided sovereignty neutralized his resentment; and he suffered some expressions of satisfaction to escape him, which his chief minister, Secretary Maitland, did not choose should reach any but the most confidential ears.³ Meantime, as Ashton's information was secret, James took no public notice of it, but sent in haste for Lord Maxwell, Ker of

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off. B.C., Sir John Foster to Walsingham, 26th February, 1586-7. Also MS. Letter, St. P. Off. B.C., Scrope to Walsingham, 14th February, 1586-7.

² Lord Scrope to Walsingham. Queen Elizabeth and her Times, vol. ii. p. 333, 21st February, 1586-7. Also St. P. Off. B.C., Sir H. Woddrington to Walsingham, 25th February, 1586-7.

³ MS. Calderwood. Brit. Mus., Ayscough, 4738, fol. 974.

