

CHAP. II.

JAMES THE SIXTH.

1590—1593.

CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

<i>England.</i>	<i>France.</i>	<i>Germany.</i>	<i>Spain.</i>	<i>Portugal.</i>	<i>Popes.</i>
Elizabeth.	Henry III. Henry IV.	Rudolph II.	Philip II.	Philip II.	Sixtus V. Urban VII. Gregory XIV. Innocent IX. Clement VIII.

THE period which James passed in Denmark was one of unusual and extraordinary tranquillity in Scotland. Previous to his departure, the King had exerted himself to conciliate Elizabeth, and many circumstances in his conduct had concurred to please this Princess. His cordial coöperation against the Spanish King,—the readiness with which he had furnished her with a body of auxiliaries, commanded by the Laird of Wemyss,—his spirit and success in putting down the rebellion of the Catholic earls, and his sending out of his dominions a body of Spanish soldiers and mariners, whose vessels (part of the once formidable Armada) had been wrecked and stranded on the northern shores of Scotland,¹—all this had

¹ “To the number of 660 men, of whom 400 were serviceable, and the rest sick, miserable wretches.”—They were shipped from

been exceedingly agreeable to the Queen of England; and she repaid it by preserving the most friendly relations during the absence of the King. Nor was the peace of the country, in this brief and happy interval, broken by the usual sanguinary baronial feuds; although, as the result fully showed, they were silenced, not eradicated. Huntly, Errol, Crawford, Maxwell, and the great body of the Roman Catholic party, had too recently experienced the weight of the royal vengeance to think of active hostility for some time; and the judicious division of power between the Duke of Lennox, Lord Hamilton, and the Earl of Bothwell, balanced by the authority committed to Angus and Athol, Mar and Morton, with other great barons, produced the best effects, and put all upon their honour and good conduct. The Kirk, too, was in a state of tranquillity—rejoicing in the recent detection and discomfiture of Roman Catholic intrigue, looking forward in calm exultation to the utter extermination of prelatical principles, and anticipating no distant triumph to what it believed to be the truth.

On the return of the King, therefore, all at first appeared tranquil; but it needed no deep discernment to detect the existence of many latent causes of disturbance. The great struggle between the principles of the Reformation and the ancient faith was lulled only, not concluded.¹ The minor, but

Leith, 25th July, 1589. MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Ashby to Burghley, 28th July, 1589. Also, *Ibid.*, same to Walsingham, 22d July, 1589.

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Sir R. Bowes to Burghley, 16th

sometimes not less bitter contest between Prelacy and Presbyterianism, was merely suspended for a time. Amongst the nobles, the right of private war, the ties of manrent, the abuses of baronial jurisdictions, the existence of blood-feuds, which often from trifling quarrels depopulated whole districts and counties; and in the Isles, and remoter provinces of the north, the lawless and fierce habits of the petty chieftains and pirate adventurers, who assumed the state and independence of sea kings,—all these circumstances combined to threaten the public tranquillity, and to convince the King that the sky so clear on his arrival might soon be black with its wonted tempests.

Amid these elements of political strife and nascent revolution, two men were to be seen evidently destined, from their power and political position, to take the chief lead in State affairs. Both were well aware of the easy and indolent temper of the King; both had resolved to engross to themselves the supreme power in the Government: and for some years, the history of the country is little else than the conflicts of their intrigue and ambition. These were, Maitland of Thirlestane the Chancellor, James' favourite and prime minister, who had accompanied his royal master to Denmark; and Francis Stewart Earl of Bothwell, the King's near relative, and, perhaps, the most daring, powerful, and unprincipled of all the higher nobles. Maitland, born of an ancient family,

May, 1590. The Roman Catholic faction were called the "Confederates of the Brig of Dee."

but only the second son of a simple knight, (the blind poet Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington,) belonged to the body of the lesser barons; but he was connected with some of the greatest houses in the land. He had risen by his commanding talents to the highest legal office in the kingdom; and he was strong in the friendship of his Prince, and the respect of the Kirk and the great body of the middle classes—the rich burghers, merchants, and artisans. During his absence in Denmark with his royal master, they had held many grave consultations on the broken, disjointed, and miserable state of his kingdom. The extreme poverty of the Crown, the insolence and intolerable oppressions of the higher barons, who, strong in their hereditary power, dictated to the monarch on all the affairs of his Government, thrust themselves uncalled-for into his Councils, attended or absented themselves from Court at their pleasure, and derided alike the command of their Prince or the decisions of the laws;—all this was pointed out by the Chancellor to the King, and the absolute necessity of some speedy and efficient reformation insisted on. It was time, he said, that the monarch, who was now in the prime of his years and vigour, allied by marriage to a powerful Prince, the heir of a mighty kingdom, and able, from his position, to take a leading part in European politics, should no longer be bearded by every baron who chose to consider himself as a born councillor of the realm. It was time that those illegal coalitions of the nobles, whose object it had so often been to seize

