

## THE CHARACTER AND DEATH OF THE SIXTH EARL OF DOUGLAS.

THE period of the minority of James II. was full of the turbulence and anarchy which disfigure so many and large portions of the history of Scotland. The Islesmen made descents on the western mainland, and put multitudes of men and women, old persons and children, to the sword: the clans around Lochlomond spread devastation through many tracts upon the Lowland frontiers; some great families in Renfrewshire and Ayrshire committed assassinations, and threw all the communities around them into commotion; the border rieviers and marauders made bold raids into England, and provoked fierce retaliations; and the very directors of the national affairs—including Crichton and Livingstone, two of the most powerful—had their own feuds, and became centres and sources of strife.

The contemporary Earl of Douglas possessed far more might of patrimony, position, and military retainership than any of the ringleaders of the general mischief, and in fact was almost a match for the throne; but, at the same time, was young and quite peaceable and orderly; yet was accused by enviers and enemies of cherishing unpatriotic and disloyal feelings,—though on no better ground than that some of the distant retainers of his house took advantage of his youth and power to prosecute some rieving and roystering practices of their own; and he therefore seemed a very fit and princely subject to become the scape-goat of the disorders of the nation. He was the sixth Earl of Douglas and the third Duke of Touraine. His father and grandfather had raised the family power to the most formidable height, and had won for it a lofty influence in France as well as at home. The young Earl was only fourteen years of age at his father's death, and lived altogether only two years longer; yet displayed a nobleness of disposition and a loftiness of spirit which terrified his enviers and enemies. He was gentle, meek, and tractable, yet proud, aspiring, and kingly; and, while scorning to share in the cabals and animosities of the statesmen about the court, he scorned also to acknowledge their authority. He maintained a great establishment,—rode ever well accompanied when he appeared in public,—kept several hundreds, or even nearly two thousand, mounted military retainers,—conciliated many new followers by friendship and munificence,—dubbed knights,—preserved all his affairs in singularly good order,—and exhibited throughout all his behaviour at once a spiritedness, a sagacity, and a prudence which were quite surprising in so young a man. His enviers—particularly Chancellor Crichton and Sir Alexander Livingstone—dreaded to think how so magnificent a being might foil and crush them if spared to maturity,—and they resolved to destroy him; and as they could not hope to overcome him by force, they cunningly devised a method to cap-

ture him by craft, and to kill him with some show of justice.

A convention of the estates had been convoked at Edinburgh to consider the distracted state of the country; and a letter was written to the Earl of Douglas, at the instigation of Livingstone, in the name of all the lords of parliament, stating that, out of regard to both himself and his progenitors, they wished much for his presence,—that they could not conveniently get through their business without him and his friends,—that if he had taken offence at anything, they would satisfy him so far as was possible,—that whatever offensive things had been done by him or his friends against the peace of the country, would be forgiven,—that, in consideration of his ancestry and power and youth, they entertained hope of great services from him to the state,—and that, as his progenitors had often by their arms and victories delivered the realm from anarchy and invasion, so they expected him also, in the present crisis of discord, to pacify and establish the country by his counsels and influence.

The young Earl was completely deceived by this missive, —especially by the clause of it which told him that the Convention could not get on without him and his friends; he was too ingenuous to suspect the profound deception which was practised upon him; he did not dream that the inability of the Convention to do without him might be interpreted in a sense the very reverse of what the words naturally bore; and he likewise might be largely influenced, both by an ambition to show off his vast consequence at court, and by the whispered desires of his chief followers to go in quest of state-places and preferments. Nor are all or perhaps many of the lords of parliament to be suspected of participation in the plot against him; for most were very probably the dupes of Livingstone and Crichton,—and may be supposed to have given their assent to the missive, in the conviction that all its statements were in perfect good faith.

The unsuspecting Earl, accompanied by his brother David, who must have been younger than himself, by his special counsellor, Malcolm Fleming of Cumbernauld, and by other friends, set out for Edinburgh, after having sent notice of his intention to do so; and the wily Crichton went out many miles to meet him, and invited him to go aside and pass a day or two in entertainments at his Castle of Crichton, situated about eleven miles south-west of the Metropolis.

“That castle rises on the steep  
 Of the green vale of Tyne;  
 And far beneath, where slow they creep,  
 From pool to eddy, dark and deep,—  
 Where alders moist, and willows weep,—  
 You hear her streams repine.  
 The towers in different ages rose;  
 Their various architecture shows  
 The builders' various hands;  
 A mighty mass, that could oppose,  
 When deadliest hatred fired its foes,  
 The vengeful Douglas bands.”

The Chancellor here entertained the young Earl cheerfully and magnificently, during two days, with every possible demonstration of respect and friendship; and so lovingly did he speak, so deferentially did he behave, so sumptuously did he honour his guest, and so anxious in everything did he seem to please and delight them, that some of Douglas's retainers began to suspect his sincerity, and whispered to their young master admonitions to be on his guard. “But to remove all suspicion, and the more to circumveen him,” says the Historian of the House of Douglas, “Crichton admonished him familiarly, ‘that he would remember the royal dignity of his Prince, and his own duty towards him,—that he would acknowledge him for his lord and sovereign, whom

the condition of his birth, the laws of the country, and the consent of the states had placed at the helm of the commonwealth,—that he would labour to transmit his so great patrimony, acquired by the virtue of his ancestors, and with spending of their blood, to his posterity, even so as he had received it,—that he would be careful to keep the name of Douglas, which was no less illustrious and renowned for their faithfulness, than their deeds of arms, not only from the foul blot of treason, but even from all stain of suspicion or aspersion thereof,—that he himself would abstain, and cause his men to abstain, from wronging the poor people,—that he would put from about him thieves and robbers,—finally, that in time to come, he would set himself to maintain justice,—that if he had offended anything in times past, it might be imputed not to his natural disposition, but to ill counsel, and that infirmity of his youth, penitency would be admitted and accepted as innocency.’ Venomous viper, that could hide so deadly poison under so fair shows! Unworthy tongue, unless to be cut out for example to all ages!”

“O, in this deep and lonely glen,  
So lovely in its solitude,  
Can thoughts of woe the soul o’erflow,  
Or aught on dreams of peace intrude?

O, can the gentle stir of leaves,  
The sleepy note—as of a dream—  
That winds below the green-wood bough,  
The murmur of the lovely stream;—

Can they of grief and sorrow tell?  
They can—and deeds of blood recall;  
For the tree waves o’er black Creichton tower,  
And the stream runs by its silent wall.—

Its cruel chief has doomed to death  
 The youthful lord of Douglasdale ;  
 And there's not a man in all the land  
 That weeps not when he hears the tale."

The young Earl, however, resolutely discredited all insinuations against his host's good faith, and regarded the high hospitalities of Crichton Castle as a pledge of the cordial welcome which he should receive at Edinburgh; and he therefore resumed his journey in the highest spirits and with halcyon hopes. "Being a young nobleman of good inclination," says Pitscottie, "wiser perchance than any other of equal age with him, he would neither give ear to his good-willers and favourers, nor yet was content with them that gave the counsel to turn homeward again, but reproved them highly; wherethrough sundry noblemen, with sad, dreary, and quiet countenance, followed him, and durst not speak any further."

"And Earl Douglas swore a full great oath  
 That he wadna quat that day's journee,  
 And that Embro' streets wad rin wi' bluid  
 Ere he or ony o' his kin should die."

"This noble youth and his brother and a few other principal friends," says Godscroft, "on their arrival in Edinburgh, went directly to the Castle, being led as it were and drawn by a fatal destiny, and so came in the power of their deadly enemies and feigned friends. At the very instant comes the Governor, as was before appointed betwixt them, to play his part of the tragedy, that both he and the Chancellor might be alike embarked in the action, and bear the envy of so ugly a fact, that the weight thereof might not be on one alone; yet to play out their treacherous parts, they welcome him most courteously, set him to dinner with the King at the same

table, feast him royally, entertain him cheerfully, and that for a long time. At last, about the end of dinner, they compass him about with armed men, and cause present a bull's head before him on the board. The bull's head was in those days a token of death, say our histories; but how it hath come in use to be taken and signify, neither do they, nor any else tell us; neither is it to be found, that I remember, anywhere in history, save in this one place; neither can we conjecture what affinity it can have therewith, unless to exprobrate grossness, according to the French, and our own reproaching dull and gross wits, by calling him calves-head (*tête de veau*) but not bull's head. The young nobleman, either understanding the sign as an ordinary thing, or astonished with it as an uncouth thing, upon the sight of the bull's head, offering to rise, was laid hold of by their armed men, in the King's presence, at the King's table, which should have been a sanctuary to him. And so without regard of King, or any duty, and without any further process, without order, assize or jury, without law, no crime objected, he not being convicted at all, a young man of that age, that was not liable to the law in regard of his youth, a nobleman of that place, a worthy young gentleman of such expectation, a guest of that acceptation, one who had reposed upon their credit, who had committed himself to them, a friend in mind, who looked for friendship, to whom all friendship was promised, against duty, law, friendship, faith, honesty, humanity, hospitality, against nature, against human society, against God's law, against man's law, and the law of nature, is cruelly executed and put to death. David Douglas, his younger brother, was also put to death with him, and Malcolm Fleming of Cumbernauld; they were all three beheaded in the back court of the Castle that lieth to the west."

"When Earl Douglas to the Castle came

The courts they were fu' grim to see;

And he liked na the feast as they sat at dine,  
The tables were served sae silentlie.

And full twenty feet fro the table he sprang  
When the grisly bull's head met his e'e;  
But the Crichtouns a' cam' troupin in,  
An' he coudna fight an' wadna fle.

O, when the news to Hermitage came,  
The Douglasses were brim and wood;  
They swore to set Embro' in a bleeze,  
An' slochen't wi' auld Crichtoun's blood."

The King, at the time of this tragedy, was only ten years of age; and it is said that, when he saw the armed men start up against the Earl and his brother to drag them to execution, he wept sorely, and made great lamentation, and entreated the Chancellor, for God's sake, to let them alone,—and that the Chancellor rebuked him sharply, and declared that they were ordered to death, not out of any private hatred, but solely for the good of the realm.