

THE MURDER OF RIZZIO.

THE murder of David Rizzio or Riccio, the secretary and favourite of Mary Queen of Scots, occurred on the evening of the 3d of March, 1565. The motives which led to it, the political considerations mixed up with them, and some of the precurrent and concomitant circumstances, are obscure and have been the subjects of much controversy; but the fact itself,

in all its main incidents, is one of the clearest and best known in Scottish history.

“ It was an eve of raw and surly mood,
 And in a turret-chamber high of ancient Holyrood
 Sat Mary, listening to the rain, and sighing with the winds,
 That seem'd to suit the stormy state of men's uncertain minds.
 The touch of care had blanch'd her cheek—her smile was
 sadder now,
 The weight of royalty had press'd too heavy on her brow;
 And traitors to her councils came, and rebels to the field;
 The Stuart sceptre well she sway'd, but the sword she could
 not wield.
 She thought of all her blighted hopes—the dreams of youth's
 brief day,
 And summoned Rizzio with his lute, and bade the minstrel play
 The songs she loved in early years—the songs of gay Navarre,
 The songs perchance that erst were sung by gallant Chatelar:
 They half beguiled her of her cares, they soothed her into
 smiles,
 They won her thoughts from bigot zeal, and fierce domestic
 broils:—
 But hark! the tramp of armed men! the Douglas' battle cry,
 They come—they come—and lo! the scowl of Ruthven's
 hollow eye!
 And swords are drawn, and daggers gleam, and tears and
 words are vain,
 The ruffian's steel is in his heart—the faithful Rizzio's slain!
 Then Mary Stuart brushed aside the tears that trickling fell;
 ‘ Now for my father's arms!’ she said; ‘ my woman's heart
 farewell!’ ”

So many narratives of this horrible murder have been written that small apology exists for adding to their number; and we have undertaken to handle the subject mainly for the

sake of introducing some extracts from the original "Relation" of Lord Ruthven himself,—in many respects the most interesting of all the narratives, either contemporary or modern,—especially for the awful calmness of its tone and iron effrontery of its manner,—one of the most singular auto-historiettes of the shedding of human blood which ever was penned. Ruthven was one of the principal actors in the tragedy; and not only did he think that he was doing perfectly right, serving both God and man, amidst the excitement and fanaticism of the actual occurrence, but, at a subsequent period, when he might have had time to reflect, and when powerful odium had extensively arisen among the public against the perpetrators of this deed, he continued to regard it as a commendable affair, worthy of honourable mention, substantially a piece of useful public service,—and he fully engrossed that opinion of it in his narrative.

About seven o'clock, or as soon as the twilight had ceased, the Earls of Morton and Lindsay, with 150 armed men bearing torches, took possession of the courtyard of Holyrood, seized the gates of the palace, and appointed guards to keep out all persons except their own friends. The Queen, at that moment was supping in a closet off her bed-chamber, attended by Rizzio, the Countess of Argyle, and two or three persons of the royal household; and she was then in the seventh month of pregnancy. Darnley, the Queen's husband, ascended from his own chamber below by a secret turnpike, to the Queen's closet, threw up the arras which concealed the entrance so that Ruthven and the other conspirators might see where to follow, and seated himself beside the Queen, putting his arm round her in the manner of fondness. About a minute after, Ruthven abruptly entered, clad in complete armour, and wearing a cadaverous and dismal appearance from the effects of a recent illness; and immediately behind him came others, with torches and weapons and clamour. Some words passed between Ruthven and the Queen; Rizzio, on finding himself

denounced, clung to Mary, and cried out, in his broken language, "Giustizia, giustizia, suave ma vie, Madame, sauve ma vie;" the conspirators attempted to tear him away, and stabbed at him even where he clung; the table was overturned, the lights were knocked over, and everything tossed into uproar; and the conspirators at last dragged their victim away to the outer chamber, and there stabbed him so hotly and ferociously as to wound one another in their haste, and to inflict upon him no fewer than fifty-six wounds, and to draw from him a little pool of blood, which the exhibitors of Holyrood palace down to the present day pretend to have left an indelible stain upon the floor; and, by way of suitable finish, some one of the assassins had got possession of Darnley's dagger, and left it sticking in Rizzio's body, as a significant and emphatic notification of the prominent part which Darnley's jealousy had acted in the conspiracy.

"The said Lord Ruthven," narrates the principal stabber respecting his own share in the transaction, "passed in through the King's chamber, and up through the privy way to the Queen's chamber, as the King had learned him; and he found the Queen's Majesty sitting at her supper at the middes of a little table, the Lady Argyle sitting at one end, and Davie at the head of the table with his cap on his head. The said Lord Ruthven, at his coming in said to the Queen's Majesty, — 'It would please your Majesty to let yonder man Davie come forth of your presence, for he hath been overlong here.' Her Majesty answered, — 'What offence hath he made?' The said lord replied again, that he had made great offence to her Majestie's honour, the King her husband, the nobility, and commonweal of the realm. 'And how?' said she. 'It will please your Majesty,' said the said lord, 'he hath offended your Majestie's honour, which I dare not be so bold to speak of.'" And then, according to the continuation of his narrative, he proceeded to lecture her in a style of coarseness and indelicacy which the politeness of the present age would think

too rude from the lips of a policeman to an outcast from society.

After the murder had been completed in the chamber, Ruthven went back to the closet, whether with his dagger sheathed or still reeking in his hand is not stated, and enacted a scene of cool effrontery which has few parallels in the history of assassination. "The said lord being so feebled with his sickness and weary of his travel," that is, the trouble of assisting to murder Rizzio, "that he desired her Majesty's pardon to sit down upon a coffer, and called for a drink for God's sake. So a Frenchman brought him a cup of wine; and after that he had drunken, the Queen's Majesty began to rail against the said lord. 'Is this your sickness, Lord Ruthven?' The said lord answered, 'God forbid that your Majesty had such a sickness; for I had rather give all the moveable goods that I have.' Then said her Majesty, if she died, or her bairn or commonweal perished, she should leave the revenge thereof to her friends, to revenge the same upon the said Lord Ruthven and his posterity; for she had the King of Spain her great friend, the Emperor likewise, and the King of France her good brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, and her uncles in France, besides the Pope's Holiness, with many other princes in Italy. The said Lord answered, that these noble princes were over great to meddle with such a poor man as he was, being her Majesty's own subject. And when her Majesty said, that if either she, her bairn, or the commonweal perished, the said Lord Ruthven should have the weight thereof, the said lord answered, that if either of the three perished, her Majesty's self, or her particular counsel, should have the weight thereof, and should be accused as well before God as the world." Some curious exchanges of courtesy now took place:—"And because there was some enmity unreconciled betwixt the Earls of Huntly and Bothwell, and the Earls of Argyle and Murray, and their colleagues, the said lords promised in their names, that it should be mend-

ed at the sight of two or three of the nobility; they doing such like to them; whereupon the said Earls of Huntly and Bothwell gave the Lord Ruthven their hands, and received his for the other part; and after they had drunken, the said Lord Ruthven took his leave of them."

These scenes and others of a similar kind occurred while the body of the murdered man continued to lie on the spot where it had fallen. Lord Ruthven's account of its removal is one of the most graphic passages in his narrative, and shows him to have been far from destitute of literary polish. "The gates being locked," says he, "and the Queen's Majesty walking in her chamber, the said Lord Ruthven took air upon the lower gate and at the privy passages. And at the King's command, in the meantime, Davie was hurled down the steps of the stairs from the place where he was slain, and brought to the porter's lodge; where the porter's servant taking off his clothes, said, 'This hath been his destiny; for upon this chest was his first bed since he entered this place, and now here he lieth again, a very ingrate and misknowing knave!' The King's whiniard was found sticking in Davie's side, after he was dead; but always the Queen enquired of the King where his whiniard was; who answered that he wit not with, 'Well,' said she, 'it will be known afterwards.'"

The conspirators kept the Queen a prisoner in her apartment, and adopted measures to prevent all communication between her and the city. But four of her friends within the palace contrived to escape, and gave intelligence of her condition to the city magistrates; and the result was afterwards stated by herself, in the following terms, in a letter to the Archbishop of Glasgow:—"The provost and town of Edinburgh having understood this tumult in our palace, caused ring their common bell, came to us in great number, and desired to have seen our presence, intercommuned with us, and to have known our welfare; to whom we was not permitted to give answer, being extremely boasted by their

lords, who in our place declared, if we desired to have spoken them, they would cut us in collops, and cast us over the walls." Darnley addressed the citizens from the window in her stead, and assured them that she was in safety, and commanded them on their allegiance to go home; so that they instantly withdrew, and all hope of rescue from the power of the conspirators seemed extinct.

Mary, however, effected a private reconciliation with Darnley, talked him off from his alliance with the other conspirators, and affected to believe that he had taken no part in the plot for murdering Rizzio and entralling her; and they two escaped through a wine-cellar, mounted fleet horses, and, accompanied only by Arthur Erskine, fled to Dunbar. The news of their flight spread like wild-fire, and was followed promptly and terribly by the spontaneous muster of an army to support them. The conspirators were now in an awkward plight; and a royal proclamation was speedily issued, requiring their attendance, "under pain of rebellion, and putting them to the horn, and eschetting and inbringing of all their moveable goods." Ruthven's wrath was kindled against this document, and he says regarding it, "The whilk like order is not used in no realm christened; nor is it the law of Scotland of old, but new copen in, and invented by them that understood no law nor yet good practice." And he remarks that such severity for the slaying of a person like Rizzio "would pity a godly heart;" and pathetically declares his innocence of any act or intention offensive to the Queen beyond the mere killing of the Italian menial. "And," he adds, "where her Majesty allegeth that night that Davie was slain, some held pistolets to her Majesty's breast, some stroke whiniards so near her craig that she felt the coldness of the iron, with many other such like sayings, which we take God to record was never meant nor done; for the said Davie received never a stroke in her Majesty's presence, nor was not

stricken till he was at the farthest door of her Majesty's utter chamber."

The upshot of the whole affair, as is well known, was that, for a time, Mary got promptly and completely the upper hand,—that she advanced at the head of a considerable army to the capital, and struck such terror into her antagonists that all the principal ones precipitately fled,—and that she soon and dreadfully let fall the chief weight of her vengeance on Darnley.