

THE BURNING OF TOWIE CASTLE.

IN the upper part of the valley of the Don, in the Highland district of Aberdeenshire, stands a ruinous quadrangular tower, the remains of an ancient castle, which was the scene of an awful catastrophe, during the political and warlike struggles between the party who contended for the imprisoned Queen Mary and the party who endeavoured to maintain the government in the name of her infant son James VI. Sir Adam Gordon of Auchindoir, the brother of the Marquis of Huntly, then acted as the Marquis's deputy, in his capacity of Lieutenant of the North of Scotland for the Queen; and he committed many acts of oppression on families who were known or suspected to be adverse to the Queen's party; and was particularly incensed against families of the clan of Forbes, and, on one occasion, slew Arthur, the brother of Lord Forbes. Towie Castle, the seat of Alexander Forbes, a very prominent gentleman of the clan, became specially obnoxious to him, and, in November 1751, he sent Captain Ker, with a small body of troops, to summon it in the Queen's name. Its owner was at the time absent; and his lady, whose maiden name was Margaret Campbell, and who was pregnant, and confided too much in her sex and condition, and at the same time had a strong mixture of the virago and the Amazon in her character, not only refused to surrender, but poured on him a torrent of abusive language, and took a deliberate aim at him from the battlement with a musket or other similar weapon, and fired at him. Her shot wounded his knee, and perhaps her words still more wounded his mind; and, in a transport of rage, he ordered his men to set fire to the castle; and so fatal was the result that the lady and her children and all the inmates, amounting altogether to thirty-seven persons, perished in the flames. Sir Adam Gordon never took Ker to task for this horrible atrocity, and was therefore held in

public opinion to be personally accountable for it; and a ballad which was soon after composed upon it, and became very popular, and has still a place in all our good collections of old balladry, treats himself, and not Ker, as the acting hero of the whole base tragedy.

This document gives a minute account of the affair; and, though obviously not authentic in every particular, is well worth attention as an aggregately correct picture of the barbarous spirit of the times. The assailing party were roaming through the country amid the cold and shrill blasts of winter; and approached Towie-Castle, not on account of more enmity against it than against other residences of the Queen's antagonists, but because it was the most convenient for themselves at the moment, as they needed to "draw to a hauld." The lady had just "buskit hersell" and sat down to supper when they surrounded the place; and she ran with all speed to the battlement, to try the effect of speaking them fair, and of operating on them with her tongue. But the leader was not to be so won or repelled; and

‘ As sune as he saw the ladye fair
 And her yetts all lockit fast,
 He fell into a rage of wrath
 And his heart was all aghast.’

He requested her to come down, and made infamous proposals to her. But she replied to him resolutely and disdainfully, and belaboured him with such names as "fause Gordon" and "traitor;" and she, at the same time, jeered and abused one of his chief followers, who had largely shared her bounty, and was a renegade from her service. When the conflagration commenced and the smoke began to be troublesome, her youngest son, who sat on the nurse's knee, entreated her to surrender; but she continued resolute, and told the little sufferer that "come weel, come wae," he must

make up his mind to share with her whatever should happen within the castle. Her daughter, who was "baith jimp and sma," with cherry cheeks and pretty mouth and golden hair and snowy complexion and altogether a beauty, then entreated to be wrapped in a pair of sheets, and "towed ower the wa'," in order that she might attempt some deliverance; and over she was "towed" accordingly,—but was received on the point of the ruffian's spear, and mortally wounded; and then followed compunctions and moralizings and relentings, strong and melting, but all too late. And just as the murdering crew were recovering from these, and getting back into a Satanic complacency with their work, the lord of the castle came in sight in the distant landscape, spurring along in fury, at the head of a body of followers; to whom he cried,

“ Put on, put on, my michtie men,
 As fast as ye can drie;
 For he that's hindmost o' my men,
 Sall ne'er get gude o' me.’

And some they rade, and some they ran,
 Fu' fast out ower the plain;
 But lang, lang, ere he could get up,
 They a' were deid and slain.

But mony were the mudie men,
 Lay gasping on the grene;
 For o' fifty men that Edom* brought,
 There were but fyve gaed hame.

And mony were the mudie men,
 Lay gasping on the grene;
 And mony were the fair ladyes,
 Lay lemanless at hame.

* Sir Adam Gordon.

And round and round the wa's he went,
Their ashes for to view;
At last into the flames he ran,
And bade the world adieu."

An attempt was afterwards made by some of the Forbeses to revenge this dreadful affair by the assassination of its perpetrator, Gordon of Auchindoir, on the streets of Paris. They lay in wait for him at a point where he had to pass on his way to his lodgings from the palace of the Archbishop of Glasgow, who was then ambassador in France; and they fired upon him as he was passing, and wounded him in the thigh. His servants sprang toward them and pursued them; and though unable to capture or overtake them, they picked up the fallen hat of one of them, containing a paper which indicated their place of rendezvous. John Gordon, Lord of Glenluce, and Longormes, the son of Alexander Gordon, Bishop of Galloway, lord of the bed-chamber to the King of France, got instant notice of this, and represented it to the court; and the grand provost of the palace, with his guards, and a posse of the Gordons and their retainers, were immediately sent to apprehend the Forbeses. A scuffle ensued, in the course of which the principal Forbes was slain; but all the rest were captured, and afterwards put judicially to death by breaking upon the wheel.
