

CHAPTER IV

ATAVISM

Showing how misfortunes are often hereditary, and relating the death of the Beggar Earl of Menteith

It is said that the evil that men do lives after them, and this saying may be extended to the follies of mankind. It is quite likely that had William, the seventh Earl of Menteith, attended to business at home, stringing up McGregors and McFarlanes when occasion offered, and refrained from going to Court to seek for titles, that his grandson William, the eighth and last Earl of Menteith, would not have passed through the thirty years purgatory of poverty that he endured. Certain it is that the house of Menteith with him fell into complete decadence. He does not seem to have been a foolish man, at least not more foolish than many other noblemen of his or of our own time. Wicked he certainly was not, for has not Holy Writ itself informed us that the wicked commonly flourish like green bay-trees? From first to last

evil fortune, debts, ill health and ill assorted wives, made his life a misery.

In 1661 he succeeded to the title. Like a wise Scotch nobleman he determined to travel "furth of Scotland" at once. This seems to have been the one prudent resolution of his life. Fate, however, laid him by the heels fast with the ague in London at the "Signe of the Blacke Swan" in the Strand. Thus the Earl never swam in a gondola, visited Rome, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, or any of the capitals where noble youth of the period were wont to repair to improve their minds and to perfect themselves in fencing. Not that the district of Menteith has not produced some notable swordsmen, "tall fellows of their hands," as Dugald Ciar Mohr, Rob Roy, Henry Cunningham of Boquhan, and Captain McLachlan of Auchentroig, who fought at Minden, are there to testify. A tradition lingers that Andrea de Ferrara once made swords at Auchray. The afore-said Andrea is reputed to have plied his trade in so many parts of Scotland that he must either have been in constant motion, which would soon have rendered his industry precarious, or he must have lived about a hundred years, or his residences have become as migratory as the birthplaces of Homer or Mr. Gladstone.

Failing in his object of foreign travel, the Earl seems to have addressed himself to the illusory

pursuit of the money owing to his family by the Crown. A good "ganging plea" has been the ruin of many a Scotch proprietor, but a ganging plea against the Crown is an unusual opportunity even for a nobleman. The Earl availed himself of it to the full. As in the country where he was born he must have had plenty of the Bible, it is almost a wonder he did not remember the allusions to the promises of princes which it contains.

In 1661 we find him at the Court of Whitehall asking for the "ffifty thousande pounds [whether sterling or Scottish is not stated] due untoe your petitioner's grandfather. And your petitioner shall ever pray." Perhaps is praying still. What faith it must have required to have petitioned the ever-blessed Charles by the grace of God! In 1663 he married his sister Elizabeth to Sir William Graham of Gartmore.

In 1677 he writes to David, second Earl of Wemyss, that he was "warpt in a laberinth of almost a never-ending trouble." His orthography also seems to have been a little "warpt" even for the times in which he wrote. The trouble was undoubted, for it appears he was "on everie syde perplext by to pressing creditors, and in con-seene this term of Martinmas they wil get no monyes, tho' they should tak my life." Life is the last thing a creditor ever wishes to take. The Earl need have been under no apprehension. Then

came marriage, often as bad as creditors or worse. However, death is said to relieve a man of both. About this time he married one Anna Hewes, who, as the author of the "Red Book of Menteith" observes, was probably an English lady. From her he was divorced. But his creditors had taken him for better or for worse, and again we find him complaining against their "unreasonableness." His second wife was Katherine Bruce, daughter of Bruce of Blairhall. She could not stand the croaking of the frogs in the lake under the Castle of Talla, and betook herself to Edinburgh. The droning of the bagpipes in the hall and the croaking of the frogs under her bedroom window might have been a valid plea or pleas for Anna Hewes to take herself from the company of her sweet lord. For Katherine Bruce, however, the case stands differently, and as a Scottish gentlewoman she ought to have been proof against all kinds of national music.

In those days few things strike one more vividly than the fact that lawyers and a "wee bit writing" were the very essence of the people's lives. Scotland has always been the home of lawyers, and the people only took their necks from underneath the yoke of the priests and friars to place them just as fairly under that of the ministers and attorneys. Still, in these degenerate days, a man would not deliberately enter into a duly signed and witnessed contract with his own wife,

as the Earl did, and set forth that "he shall have full freedom and libertie to goe about his affairs to Edinburgh, or any place elsewhere theranent." A latchkey would be cheaper.

This omnipresence of the scrivener and his intrusion into daily life was not confined to Scotland. During the conquest of America not a ship sailed or expedition started into the wilderness without its lawyer, and that in the face of an edict by Charles V. that neither solicitors nor advocates (*procuradores ó abogados*) shall pass to the Indies. In 1541 Francisco de Orellana, in a boat with forty-seven companions, descending the then unnavigated Amazon, gives up his command, is elected again by his forty-seven followers, with different powers, writes down the same in a ragged bit of paper, in a contemporary legal hand signs it, and the forty-seven soldiers also sign, in various styles of characters, resembling crossbow arrow-heads, lance points, and other hands of write peculiar to the age. The document reposes at Seville in the archives of the Indies.*

Luckily to-day men do not make contracts with their wives as to their personal liberty, though, no doubt, we shall return to that as things progress.

"Riding the Parliament" was one of the chief recreations of a self-respecting Scottish nobleman

* It has been recently published by Don José Medina, at the cost of the Duke of Tsaerclaes de Tilly.

of the seventeenth century, a custom as honoured in the observance as the breach. Surely if a man chances to be a peer, one of the duties of his condition is to appear in public, that is, if he be a personable peer. Stuck upon a horse in cotton velvet-gown, with an ermine hood and coronet, the mob could tell who was and who was not a gentleman. To-day, when the possession of an Albert chain decides the question, the examination almost approaches that undergone by thieves and politicians at a police court. The Earl of Menteith was one of those who never shrank from any public duty, however painful.

So in 1687 I find him writing to the Marquis of Montrose, asking him to get some earl's robes for him, as "our aine was destroyed in the Einglish tyme." Many and manifold have been the outrages on Scotland by our ancient enemies of England. In times gone by they hanged us and they harried us, they quartered and they drew us. In more modern days they have usurped our kilts, and forced their speech upon us, making the modern Scottish jargon a sort of linsey-woolsey of a thing got betwixt Whitechapel and Cowcaddens. Never, though, as far as I have read, except on this occasion, did they palter with the garments of a belted earl. In after times they abolished the Scottish Parliament, and in their dastardly attempt to prevent a Scottish nobleman attending I see but

the precursor to their subsequent villainy. Sourgent was the earl that on the same day he writes again to the Marquis, "to provide and get the lene from some earle, their robs, fite mantle, and vellvat coates, and all things that belongs to Parliament robs. I will heave four footmen in livra. Last tyme when I reid the Parliament I carried the scepter and I had the lene of the decesed Erle of Lothian's robes, but perhaps this Erle will reid himself."* There is something pathetic in the way the poverty-stricken and disillusioned man recalls how, in happier days, he bore the sceptre. How the deceased Earl of Lothian was to ride even to a Parliament passes the mind of man to imagine; not that a dead rider is a thing unknown.

Once between Villaguay and Nogoyá, in Entre-Rios, the writer of this brief chronicle came, in a little clearing of the great forest of Montiel, on two brothers, one living and one dead, jogging at the "trotecito" on their horses. The living brother, a fine young Gaucho, upright and swaying with his horse, like only a Gaucho, the dead one just as upright, tied in his saddle to two sticks. The object of the journey to bury the deceased in consecrated ground at Gualeguay. Vayan con Dios Caballeros.

Horses were another cross in the life of the unlucky eighth Earl of Menteith. In the same

* "Red Book of Menteith," from papers in Gartmore and Buchanan Charter-chests.

letter in which he asks for "the robs," he asks for the loan of "a peaceable horse." The horrors of attending Parliament must have been intensified when a man's horse was not peaceable. Of all the costumes for riding an unquiet horse in, a peer's robes must have been the most ill-advised. Again, in 1678, the Earl writes excusing himself for not going to Perth to attend a militia meeting from want of a horse. "Though I was leader for one horse within the parish of Aberfoyle, and although I gott never my localitie for the horse, butt was given to others, yet notwithstanding for all that, I will sett my horse to the rendivouse." Clear composition is not necessary to a peer, but we would like to know what the above meant to the Earl, and why he never "gott a localitie" for the horse.

In 1688 the Earl writes to the Marquis of Montrose, informing him that he has apprehended some men engaged in harbouring the murderers of Archbishop Sharpe, and narrowly missed laying hands on Balfour and Hackston of Rathillet. His zeal for the Government was reported to the King, who promised (as per usual) to remember him on "a fitt occasioun."

Parliament never ceased from troubling the Earl, as it now does the nation, for the minister of the Port of Menteith signs a certificate as to his unfitness to attend in the year 1689.

The chief thought as death approaches an unfortunate man is generally how to entail the property which has cursed his life upon some innocent successor. Earl William was no exception to the rule. In 1688 he writes to his "uncle," Sir James Graham, as to the marriage of the daughter of Sir James with some one on whom the earldom could be conferred. A smart captain of horse, and a most personable man, as his picture at Glamis Castle testifies, "myne own cousing, the Laird of Claverus," first occurred to him. He, writes the Earl, "is a person exceeding weell accomplished as any I know with natur gifts . . . and hes a free extent of good payable rent near by Dundee."

If "natur gifts" are to be a handsome man and a fine horseman, certainly Claverhouse was well endowed; and as to "payable rent," it is exceedingly likely that few tenants would have cared to get into arrears with such a landlord. Sir James, however (no doubt a whey-faced Whig), refused the alliance.

The young lady married a Captain Rawdon, son of an unknown baronet, Sir George Rawdon, and lost the opportunity of being the wife of the most brilliant Scotchman of the age.

In reading the letters of Claverhouse to the Earl, one is almost tempted to believe that there may be some truth in the aphorism, "le style c'est

l'homme," so very like they are to what one imagines the writer. "Assure yourself," he says in one, "if ever there be baricades in Glescw* again, you shall not want a call, and my Lord I bespeak an employment with you, which is to be your lieutenant generall, and I will assure you we will make the world talk of us." It is probable, indeed, the world would have talked, but only of the "lieutenant generall." By the letters Claverhouse seems to have been at least as good a diplomatist as he was a soldier. The way in which he flatters the poor old Earl in his letters from the Court, shows he could have made his fortune had he chosen to be as dishonest as most men of his time, or of our own.

The marriage with Claverhouse having fallen through, and another projected match with the Marquis of Montrose having been a failure, despair seems to have settled on the unlucky Earl. The earldom he wished to leave to the Marquis of Montrose, but the King objected, and Claverhouse tried hard to get the Earl to leave the title to him; but death was soon to set him free from all of them.

In 1694 he died, after a life of struggling with debts and troubles and misfortunes from his birth. His personal estate went to his nephew, Sir John Graham of Gartmore, but it proved chiefly a heritage of debts. So in misfortune expired the

* Glescw for Glasgow is quite a Cavalier's spelling.

earldom of Menteith, one of the most illustrious titles of Scotland.

Round certain names there seems a halo of ill-luck. Often it makes the owners of the names more sympathetic to us, as a golden nimbus in a picture by the Ferrara school often redeems the angular features of an early Italian saint. At other times, especially when joined with poverty, it makes the victim almost ridiculous. Justice, divine or human, always presses hardest on the unfortunate, and the Earls of Menteith seem to have been criminal enough in some way known to Providence. Courage they had as an inheritance of race, and often showed it, but to little or no account. Ability was shown by several of them, but it availed them nothing. Possessions and titles were showered upon them, but they neither profited by nor kept them. Little by little all their broad acres made themselves wings, till at the last, of all the earldoms of Menteith, Airth, and Stratherne, only the little island in the reedy pine-girt lake was left, and there, in the grey peel-tower facing to Ben Dhearg, the last Earl died. Even his burial-place is not well known, though in his will he gave directions to "my nevoy" Sir John Graham "to cause ane exquisite and cunning meason erect two statues of fyne hewen stone for anself and for me deerest spouse Dame Catherine Bruce."

The statues were never erected, or, if erected, have mouldered away like the Earl; or, may be, some Presbyterian has taken them for saints, and being angry that poor mortals should have any to pray for us, has made away with them.

A lower depth of misery had to be touched by one who called himself Earl of Menteith. In 1744, when the peers of Scotland were proceeding to engage in the degrading ceremony of stamping a Scottish nobleman as inferior to a peer of England by election, the name Menteith was answered to by a thin, cadaverous-looking youth, who informed the assembled mummers that he was the Earl of Menteith by right of birth and of descent, and was at present studying medicine in Edinburgh. From that moment till his death, although warned to desist by the House of Lords, he never dropped his claim.

For a year or two he regularly attended at all elections of a Scottish peer, but at last seemed to have become disgusted, perhaps at the whole undignified proceeding, and used to retire from Edinburgh before the day of the election. Gradually he sank into obscurity, and little by little into mendicancy, and at last sustained himself by begging from house to house, under the title of the "Beggan Earl."

In 1747 he published a pamphlet, now become most rare and hard to meet with, entitled, "The

Fatal Consequences of Discord, or a Political Address to the Noble and Rich Families of Great Britain." In the title of the tract are contained several propositions, such as, "That there can be no true unity without true religion and virtue," a proposition excellent in itself and difficult to controvert, and which places its enunciator on about the same intellectual footing as the member of the "National Convention" in Paris during the "Terror" who rose to demand "l'arrestation des coquins et des lâches."

Ever since honest men have mixed in matters political they have always seen at once that "true unity is impossible without religion and virtue," but, unfortunately, the difficulty as yet has been the want of any one to arrest "les coquins et les lâches."

The pamphleteer also sets forth "that the multiplicity of laws is as great a sign of the corruption of a State as the diversity of medicines is of the distemper of the body." Had not the pamphlet been dedicated to the Prince of Wales, "our only hope of a Protestant succession," I had almost come to the conclusion the writer had been an Anarchist.

After much of Alexander (he of Macedon), of Philip, Aristippus, and the proper quotation on Government by Aristotle, he concludes by saying: "May virtue then flourish in this island and appear

to the Englishmen [no word of Scotland] to be somewhat more than a little pork with a variety of sauce." The end is rather enigmatical, for virtue seems to be flourishing enough, even in England, where sauces never vary. And as to pork, virtue is not so fickle as to dissever it from apple-sauce.

"The whole by the Right Honble. Earl of Menteith, Stratherne, and Airth, Lord Kilpont and Baron Gartmore." As the last title never existed, it shows the writer of the pamphlet was not entirely without imagination.

Pamphleteering does not seem to have raised his fortunes, for by degrees even his beggar's wallet seems to have grown empty, and last scene of all, some neighbours near Bonhill, in Dumbar-tonshire, came on the body of the Beggar Earl by the roadside.

So, like a cadger's pony, passed away one who without doubt had in his veins the blood of a king of Scotland, and whose ancestors had been the proudest in the land. Perhaps the Beggar Earl, in his poverty and wanderings, was not much more unhappy than his ancestors, bowed down with all the cares of State. One wonders, seeing who he was, he did not join Charles Edward Stewart and march to Derby. At least he could have suffered on Tower Hill, and shown a Beggar Earl could meet his fate as bravely as the most duly coroneted.

Considering that his family had all been great upholders of the Stewarts, the "Protestant succession" and the Beggar Earl seem strangely ill assorted. What could it matter to him if they mumbled a mass, or dinged the very "harricles" out of the bible, and garred the stour flee about the Chapel Royal, after the fashion of Geneva. Still, all the thousand ills which wait on poverty, and take away its dignity and pathos, oftentimes rendering it ridiculous; the miseries of a wandering beggar's life, the hope deferred, the insolence of fools, and the last night by the roadside dyke in Bonhill parish may have been as keen a martyrdom to bear as the shorter and sharper, though more glorious one, he might have met on Tower Hill.