

CHAP. VI.

JAMES THE SIXTH.

1600.

 CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

<i>England.</i> Elizabeth.		<i>France.</i> Henry IV.		<i>Germany.</i> Rudolph II.		<i>Spain.</i> Philip III.		<i>Portugal.</i> Philip III.		<i>Pope.</i> Clement VIII.
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IN the course of these labours we are now arrived at an extraordinary plot, of which the history, after all the light shed upon it by recent research, is still, in some points, obscure and contradictory. This is the Gowrie Conspiracy. Its author, or, as some have not scrupled to assert, its victim, was the grandson of that Patrick Lord Ruthven, who, as we have seen, acted a chief part in the atrocious murder of Riccio, and died in exile soon after that event.¹ It was the second son of this nobleman, William, fourth Lord Ruthven, who, after sharing the guilt and banishment of his father for his accession to the same plot, was restored by the Regent Morton, and returned to Scotland to engage in new conspiracies. It was his threats, and the menaces of the fierce Lindsay, that were said to have extorted from the miserable captive of Lochleven the demission of her crown. His services were

¹ *Supra*, vol. vii. p. 35.

rewarded by an earldom ; and from the fertile brain and unscrupulous principles of the new earl proceeded the plot for the seizure of the King, known by the name of the Raid of Ruthven. He was pardoned ; became again suspected ; threw himself into another enterprise against the Government, with Mar and Angus ; was detected, found guilty, and suffered on the scaffold. Of his treason there was no doubt ; but his conviction, as we have seen,¹ was procured by a disgraceful expedient, which roused the utmost indignation of his friends. This happened in 1584 ; and, for two years after, the imperious government of Arran directed, or rather compelled, the royal wrath into the severest measures against the house of Ruthven. But the destruction of Arran's power permitted the King's temper, generally gentle and forgiving, to have influence ; and, in 1586, the earldom was restored to James, the eldest son of the house, who, dying soon after, transmitted it to John, the third earl, the author of the Gowrie Conspiracy.

Young Gowrie, at the time of his father's execution, could have been scarcely eight years' old ;² and in the wreck of his house, he, his unhappy mother, and her other children, received an asylum in the North. Here, amidst the savage solitudes of Athol, the country of her son-in-law,³ the widowed Countess brought up her children, brooded over her wrongs, and taught her sons the story of their father's

¹ *Supra*, vol. viii. p. 192.

² MS. St. P. Off., List of the Scottish Nobility, 1592. In 1592 Gowrie was fifteen years old.

³ The Earl of Athol had married the sister of Gowrie, MS. St. P. Off.

murder, as his execution was accounted by his party. From such lessons, they seem early to have drunk in that deep passion for revenge, which, in those dark days, was so universally felt, that it may be regarded almost as the pulse of feudal life; a passion which, sometimes at a quicker, sometimes at a slower pace, but yet with strong and abiding force, carried on its victims to the consummation of their purpose. Meanwhile the royal pity had awoke: the family was restored to its honours; and the young earl, having been committed to the care of Rollock the learned Principal of the University of Edinburgh, received an excellent education. But the return for all this, on the part both of his mother and himself, was ingratitude and new intrigues. When, in 1593, Bothwell at Holyrood audaciously broke in upon his sovereign, and for a short season obtained possession of his person, it was the Countesses of Gowrie and Athol, the mother and sister of Gowrie, who were his most active assistants; and in 1594, when the same desperate baron, in conjunction with Athol, Ochiltree, and the Kirk, organized a second plot, the name of the young Earl of Gowrie appeared in the "*Band*" which united the conspirators.¹ He was thus early bred up in intrigue; but the King either did not, or would not, discover his guilt: and Gowrie, having received the royal license to complete his education abroad,² passed through England into Italy, studied for five years at the University of Padua, and there is said

¹ See above p. 102, and St. P. Off. MS., Scott. Corr., April, 1594. Band for Protection of Religion, MS.

² MS. Letter, St. P. Off., 22d August, 1594, Sir R. Bowes to Burghley.

to have so highly distinguished himself, that he became Rector of that famous seminary.¹ The young earl was now only one-and-twenty;² of an athletic person, and noble presence; excellent in all his exercises; an accomplished swordsman; and so ripe a scholar, that there was scarcely any art or faculty which he had not mastered. Amongst his studies Necromancy, or Natural Magic, was a favourite pursuit; and his tutor, Rhynd, detected him, when at Padua, wearing cabalistic characters concealed upon his person, which were then sometimes used as spells against diabolic, or recipients of angelic influence.³ He was an enthusiastic chemist; and, in common with many eminent men of that age, a dabbler in judicial astrology, and a believer in the great arcanum. It is curious that this propensity to magic and visionary pursuits was hereditary in the Ruthven family. His grandfather, the murderer of Riccio, had given Queen Mary a magic ring, as a preservative against poison. His father, the leader in the Raid of Ruthven, when in Italy, had his fortunes foretold by a wizard; and the son, when some of his friends had killed an adder in the braes of Strathbran, lamented their haste, and told them he would have diverted them by making it dance to the tune of some cabalistic words which he had learnt in Italy from a great necromancer and divine.

¹ Calderwood, MS. Hist., Brit. Mus., Ayscough, 4739, p. 1386, states this positively: but I have not found his authority.

² MS. St. P. Off., drawn up for Cecil in 1592. State of the Scottish nobility.

³ Rhynd's Declaration in Pitcairn's Crim. Trials, vol. ii. pp. 219, 220.

