



DOUNE CASTLE.

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FROM the earliest times, the gentle knoll which rises where the waters of the burn of Ardoch mingle with those of the Teith seems to have been crowned with a fortress. Its situation of security strengthened for its lords—the Earls of Menteith—their tenure and their rule of the wild lands that stretched westwards from its walls. From this famous and uncertain line these possessions passed by the marriage of Margaret, Countess of Menteith, with Robert, first Duke of Albany. This resolute noble, clearly outlined for us by Scott in “The Fair Maid of Perth,” ruled Scotland for his own interests in the reign of his gentle brother, Robert III., and maintained with a somewhat less certain grasp his supremacy over the rough Scottish barons during the imprisonment in England of the Poet King, James I. Murdoch, second Duke of Albany, succeeded on the death of his father, in 1419, to his powers as Regent, and to him tradition ascribes the building of Doune Castle, though it is manifest that much of the pile, as it at present stands, is of later date.

When James I., tardily set free from English captivity, returned with his late-won Queen, “the fairest and the freshest youngè flower,” to take up the task of “making the key keep the castle and the bracken bush the cow,” it was at his cousin, Murdoch, that he first struck in his efforts to break the power of the nobles, whose relentless feuds made the Scotland of the time a place of wailing and a desert. An unvarying tradition records that Murdoch was beheaded on the Heading Hill of Stirling, that thence he might see, as he passed to death, the towers of his own Castle of Doune. The estates of Murdoch were confiscated, and the Castle of Doune became an appanage of the Crown. In the reigns of James II., James III., and James IV., it served as a dower-house for the Queen Consort. Mary of Gueldres, Margaret of Denmark, and Margaret Tudor—successive Queens of Scotland—resided for longer or shorter periods in the Castle, whose proximity to Stirling and pleasant situation made it a very desirable residence. Thus the pomp and pride of royalty were frequent in the courts whose silence now is so seldom broken, and a not too daring fancy may question from which window the Knight of Snowdoun looked forth ere the merry train trooped out upon that chase with which the “Lady of the Lake” so finely opens.

The Castle reverted in 1528 to the line of its old possessors, when Margaret, "Queene of Scotland, coniunct fear of the landis and lordschip of Menteith," granted it to James Stewart, great-grandson of Duke Murdoch, "because we have gret confidens and traist in the said James, oure servitour." The benefits of this queenly confidence were inherited by Sir James Stewart of Doune, who was accused as accessory to the murder of Rizzio. A Queen Mary's Room is as certain to be found in every Scottish Castle as a white horse in a picture by Wouverman, and Doune Castle no more than others lacks this appanage of romance. How that unfortunate Queen would have been received if she had visited Doune is somewhat uncertain, as, though we find the Castle besieged, and in three days taken, by the Regent Lennox in 1570, Sir James Stewart was raised to the peerage under the title of Lord Doune by King James VI. His son married, in 1580, the Lady Elizabeth, the daughter of "the Good Regent," and thereby gained the higher title of Earl of Moray. It was the venerating care of their descendant, the fourteenth Earl of Moray, that assured to future times the preservation of a pile whose annals touch at so many points the history of the nation. But the Lady Elizabeth, who had in youth wept over a murdered father, saw her wedded life ended in gloom in 1592, when her husband, whose handsome face won for him the name of "The Bonnie Earl o' Moray," was murdered by the Earl of Huntly at Donibristle. The old ballad which laments his fate closes thus—

" O lang, lang will his lady
 Look owre the Castle Doune,
 Ere she see the Earl o' Moray
 Come sounding thro' the toun."

James VI. himself was suspected of being jealous of the Earl, and with James, whom general opinion regards as hesitating and uncertain, the desire blossomed ever rapidly into the deed. Thus we find him imprisoning in the Castle of Doune, the Provost and Magistrates of Montrose, who had dared to choose as Provost some other than the person named in the King's mandate. It was at Doune Castle again that, in the same reign, Archibald, Earl of Argyle, was commissioned to offer terms of pardon to the wild Macgregors after the horrors of Glenfruin, terms which required, under pain of death, the abandonment of the name of Macgregor. Doune's last concern with the campaigns of armies was in the Highland rising of 1745. The Castle was garrisoned for Prince Charlie by Macgregors, Macdonalds, and Stewarts of Appin, and was of considerable strategical importance, as it commanded the Bridge of Teith, and so kept free the route to the Fords of Frew, by which the Highlanders crossed the Forth. More interesting to all perhaps now, is the recollection

that Sir Walter Scott makes Doune Castle the place of detention of Edward Waverley, while that impetuous youth still hesitated to don the white cockade. Sir Walter, when on visits to Cambusmore, often climbed "the bannered towers of Doune," and speaks thus in the notes to Waverley:—"This noble ruin is dear to my recollection from associations which have been long and painfully broken." The flag of the Stewarts floated over Doune during "the rush to Derby," and the Castle became, on the return of the clansmen, the prison of the captives taken in the defeat inflicted on General Hawley at Falkirk. Among the prisoners was John Home, author of the once famous tragedy of "Douglas," who, with some other students of the University of Edinburgh, had joined the Hanoverian forces. But these stragglers from academic calm lay not long in ward, for they made a rope of their blankets—true, it broke, but the rope always *does* break in a romantic story—and lowered themselves down the walls. One, an Englishman named Barrow, fell from the rope, dislocated one of his ankles, broke several ribs, and undoubtedly sadly hampered the retreat to the safe side of the Forth. If Home had expanded his Doune Castle adventures into a drama or romance, the world would now be more pleased, though thereby Norval had remained unrevealed upon the Grampian hills.

But the days of the romance of Doune are ended; even its Trysts, from which Scott sent forth his Highland Drover, are among forgotten things, and the pulsings of city life pass near its Castle walls. Yet to those who care to climb Lord Kilpont's stair, or to mount aloft to the rugged battlements, romance seems never remote, nor a misguiding dream. For from Uam Var that leads the eye to climb Ben Ledi, or from the smiling Teith that hurries towards the rock of Stirling, blue in the distance, or from the moor and meadow that the hills of Menteith, and the loftier peaks beyond, engirdle as with a rampart, there come memories of the past that make the future; and the shadows of the future are flecked with the brightness of the past.

