

CONFLICT OF BLACK SATURDAY.*

A.D. 1571.

IN the civil war carried on between what were called the *Queen's* and the *King's men*, after the flight of Queen Mary into England, the latter were commanded by the Earl of Morton during the regency of the Earl of Lennox. Morton occupied Leith, and among his other hostile measures

* Bannatyne's Memorialles, printed for the Bannatyne Club; Birrel's Diary; Campbell's History of Leith.

he resolved to intercept all provisions sent to Edinburgh. To accomplish this, he stationed parties of soldiers on the several roads leading from Leith, Newhaven, and the Figget Whins, between Leith and the modern village of Portobello, who brought into Leith all kinds of provisions, which Morton appropriated to the use of his own troops, and detained the carts and horses belonging to the farmers employed in conveying the goods. He also compelled numbers of the neighbouring peasantry to take up arms, and join his forces—an expedient which increased the number of his soldiers, but added nothing to his popularity, as persons whose “thoughts are turned on peace” embark in military strife with the utmost reluctance. Considering himself sufficiently strong to encounter the Queen’s men, Morton marched out his army to Hawkhill, in the immediate vicinity of Lochend, between Restalrig and Leith Links, and commanding a fine view of the city of Edinburgh. Here, by way of defiance to the opposite party, he drew up in battle array.

The Queen’s party, consisting of the Hamiltons and others, commanded by the Earl of Huntly, were at this time strong in Edinburgh; the castle was held for them by the gallant Kirkcaldy of Grange, and some of the most powerful nobility openly declared in favour of the injured Mary. Provoked by Morton’s bravado, Huntly and his followers speedily mustered, and issued out of the city with two field pieces to give him battle. They proceeded to a place called the Quarry Holes, often wittily designated the *Quarrel Holes*, on account of its having been the scene of many turbulent ebullitions, immediately under the north-east of the Calton Hill, and near the site of the present Hillside Crescent on the London Road. This place, which has now disappeared, was an ancient quarry, which had filled with water to a considerable depth, and was a favourite resort with the boys of Edinburgh when they cap-

tured any unfortunate cats, for the purpose of drowning the animals, and pelting them during their struggles with stones. It is less than a mile in a direct line from Hawkhill, now a pleasant *rus in urbe* residence, and the intervening ground has been long laid out in luxuriant fields, intersected by the old road to Leith from the Canongate called the Easter Road.

While the Earl of Morton and his party were drawn up in military array at Hawkhill, and the Earl of Huntly at the Quarry Holes, ready for action, the latter was waited upon by Sir William Drury, the ambassador from Queen Elizabeth, who had been with the King's men in Leith during the previous night. The object of Drury was to propose an amicable adjustment of differences, and that no conflict and loss of life might ensue between men who were not only countrymen and neighbours, but many of them relatives and intimate friends. With all the zeal of a peacemaker he proposed terms of accommodation to Huntly, which were considered so far satisfactory, and were readily accepted, but one important point of honour remained to be settled, and this was who was first to leave the field. On this point both were obstinate, Huntly insisting that Morton should first march off, as he had been the aggressor, and had provoked the appearance of the Queen's friends; while Morton, on the other hand, charged Huntly with various acts of hostility and unnecessary insult. Sir William, resolved that no such trifling punctilio should interrupt the good work which he had almost successfully accomplished, very naturally suggested that both parties should leave the field at the same time, upon a signal given by him—"and that signal," said Sir William, "shall be the throwing up of my hat."

This *ingenious* and *sage* proposal gave universal satisfaction, as both parties do not appear to have been particularly anxious to incur broken heads, and all the other items of Sir William's negotiation were equally acceptable. Hav-

ing adjusted matters with Huntly and the Queen's party, he hastened across the fields to Morton to inform him of the result, and to instruct him particularly respecting the signal of the hat. After a short confabulation with the Earl, Sir William stepped out, as if making for the centre between the opposing parties, that he might give the signal. Before he had proceeded half way between Hawkhill and the Quarry Holes, up went the hat, and away went Huntly and his followers, marching back to the city by the Canongate, without the slightest suspicion of the trick now played them, occasioned either by Sir William's or Morton's treachery, and confiding in the honour of their opponents, whom they had imagined had returned to Leith. No sooner had the Queen's party turned their backs, than Morton's soldiers, who had in reality never moved from their position, at the command of their leader ran across the fields, and assailed with the utmost fury Huntly and his followers, who were retiring with all the imprudent irregularity and confusion which an imaginary security and exultation at having escaped a sanguinary conflict were calculated to produce. The Queen's party, thus suddenly and treacherously attacked, were put to flight, and pursued to the very gates of the city. A considerable slaughter took place, dead and wounded men lying in all directions; and Lord Home, several gentlemen of distinction, seventy-two private individuals, a pair of colours, some horses, and the two field-pieces, were marched into Leith in the afternoon in great triumph.

This affair, which happened on Saturday the 16th of June 1571, was designated the *Battle of Black Saturday*, in reference to the treachery by which it was distinguished, and the slaughter which ensued. It was also ironically termed by the people *Drury's Peace*.

If Sir William Drury was in any manner implicated in this affair, it may be justly imagined that he would have

scarcely ventured to show his face in Edinburgh among the Queen's friends afterwards. Nevertheless he thought proper to do so after the interval of a few days, and he had even the effrontery to recommend new propositions of reconciliation. The leaders of the Queen's party were unwilling to quarrel with Queen Elizabeth at the time, as it might induce her to treat with rigour the unfortunate Mary her prisoner, and to strengthen the hands of their opponents. They cautiously refrained, therefore, from expressing their resentments to Drury respecting his conduct, and declared that they would have nothing more to do with him, while they resolved to be revenged on Morton at the first convenient opportunity. Drury swore that he was entirely innocent of the Black Saturday business, and threw the whole blame on Morton, who, he alleged, was the sole contriver of the villany. But Sir William's declarations were not believed. The Queen's friends were convinced that he was connected with the treachery from several circumstances, and his well known bias in favour of their opponents. They remained unmoved by his assertions to the contrary, and obstinately repeated their determination to hold no farther communication with him. Sir William, finding that he had lost all credit with the Queen's party, was glad to get out of Edinburgh, escorted by a guard to protect him from the fury of the mob.

When Lennox heard of Morton's success, he hastened to Leith with the intention of making that town his residence for some time. There he arranged his establishment, and shortly issued a proclamation, commanding all the country people who acknowledged the Queen's authority to attend him quarterly by turns. He then proceeded to erect new fortifications, besides repairing the old walls. The Regent and Morton were now in Leith, and they soon made it apparent that it was dangerous for both of them to be together. The town became, in fact, a scene of public

disorder, occasioned by the private and violent altercations between these noblemen. Morton, whose influence in the kingdom was very great, though he durst not, after the affair of Black Saturday, venture within Edinburgh, had been hitherto the only adviser of the Regent; but he soon discovered that he was likely to be supplanted by a certain gentleman, called the Laird of Drumquhaizel, with whom he had himself been on intimate terms. This friendship was now changed to mortal hatred, and the few incidents which follow evince the wretched state of the country at the time, as well as the villanous and unprincipled conduct of the individuals concerned. The proud Earl would have fastened a personal quarrel on Drumquhaizel, but the Laird was a man of great courage and bodily strength, and Morton did not think fit to encounter him. He resorted to the dastardly expedient of attempting to assassinate him, and for this purpose he ordered two of his footmen to waylay or watch the Laird, and seize the first favourable opportunity to murder him. Those wretches readily listened to his orders, and promised implicit obedience, swayed by the assurance of a suitable reward, and knowing that their master's influence would secure to them a pardon.

But this infamous project was not conducted so secretly by Morton and his agents as to prevent it coming to the knowledge of Lennox, who was unwilling that the Laird, of whom he entertained a high opinion, should fall a sacrifice to his powerful enemy. Afraid, however, openly to offend Morton, he took no farther notice of the meditated assassination, than by confining Drumquhaizel in the lodgings occupied by himself. Morton, aware of the Regent's motive for this conduct, chose to consider himself grossly affronted, and immediately ordered all his baggage to be packed up, with the intention of leaving the town, and abandoning the cause of the King's party. Lennox was in no condition to lose such a powerful support as Morton;

and as soon as he was informed of what was passing, he sent a servant to that nobleman's lodgings to inform him, as if ignorant of his intentions, that he would shortly be with him to dinner. Morton returned an answer, that he was sorry he could not have the honour of his Lordship's company, his business being so very pressing as to oblige him to depart from the town without even taking leave of him. Lennox was surprised and irritated at this intimation, and, starting passionately from his chair, he exclaimed—"Then, by God's holy name, he shall eat his dinner with me." He proceeded to Morton's residence, and with some difficulty prevailed with him to return. Drumquhaizel was banished from the Regent's court, as nothing else would satisfy Morton. Nor was this the only concession which Lennox was compelled to make to the haughty Earl. Morton had formed an improper connection with the wife of one Captain Cullen, who had been taken prisoner on Black Saturday, and on whose behalf his wife had proceeded to Leith, where the said Captain was confined. Afraid of being annoyed by the Captain, Morton actually insisted that he should be put to death. Lennox was obliged to comply with this monstrous and wicked request; and the unfortunate gentleman was hanged on account of some pretended offences charged against him. For these favours Morton brought over the Earl of Argyle and Lord Boyd to the Regent's party.

Such were some of the *doings* of the Earl of Morton, and, after perusing them, one can hardly pity his subsequent fate.