

THE EXECUTION OF LADY JANE DOUGLAS.

LADY JANE DOUGLAS was the daughter of George, Master of Angus—the grand-daughter of the great Earl of Angus, commonly called Bell the-Cat,—the niece of Archibald Douglas, the well-known butt of James V.'s enmity,—and the sister of the sixth Earl of Angus, Chancellor of Scotland, who suffered forfeiture under James V., and lived long in exile at the court of England. She married John, sixth Lord Glamis, who died on the 12th of December, 1527,—and bore to him a son, who became the seventh Lord Glamis; and soon after her first husband's death, she married Archibald Campbell, the second son of the second Earl of Argyle.

When her brother, the Earl of Angus, and another brother, and her uncle Archibald Douglas fell under the wrath of James V., and were proclaimed by him as rebels and traitors whom no persons might sanction with their intercourse or assist with food, raiment, or shelter, she braved the King's denunciation, and afforded them all the aid in her power, and in consequence became a sharer in the fiery hatred which he had sworn to cherish toward all the Douglas race. The King and his minions appear to have hunted up several pre-

texts for prosecuting her, and to have been constantly and keenly on the outlook for some feasible reason to imprison and kill her; but they did not succeed for years, till they became aided by one of the most profligate and atrocious outbursts of private revenge which anywhere disfigure the records of authentic history. In December, 1528, she was summoned along with others to answer before parliament for an alleged assisting of the Earl of Angus in an insurrectionary design against the King's person; but seems not to have been prosecuted, in consequence of a total want of evidence. In July 1531, or perhaps earlier in that year, she suffered a forfeiture of goods for "intercommuning with our souerane lordis rebellis or for ony other crymes." In January 1531-2, she was bound in surety to appear at the next assize of Forfar for the pretended crime of destroying her first husband's life *per intoxicationem*, which probably signified by means of drugs, philtres, charms, or enchanted potions.

"This shifting of the ground, in relation to the charge of crime against her," remarks Mr. Pitcairn, "seems to have proceeded from the repeated refusal of the barons to come forward as assisors or jurors on her trial, and from the fear on the part of the public prosecutor, that the case would break down for want of legal and satisfactory proof of her being guilty of any treason. Such suspicious circumstances naturally lead us to infer that her real crime was the political offence of her being a true-hearted Douglas, and as such a contumacious despiser of the royal tyranny, which would attempt to force her to deny succour to her oppressed brothers and uncle, and other 'rebels.' As Lord Glamis died Dec. 12, 1527, it is highly improbable that all legal proceedings would be allowed by the advisers of the Crown to be totally suspended for nearly four years against one who was, at any rate, obnoxious to the King. There were never wanting enough of officious spies about the Scottish court to ferret out the truth of even the shadow of suspicion of

crime against those who were unhappy enough to lie under its ban ; and had there been any just ground of accusation, Lady Glamis's career would have at once been cut short."

Various subsequent attempts were made to bring this ill-used lady under the anathema of the law ; and failed either from the repugnance of gentlemen to act as jurors against her, or from the glaringly false and malicious nature of the allegations of her accusers. But at length, on the 17th of July, 1537, she was brought to trial and condemned, upon the information and testimony of a seemingly disinterested party, for an alleged crime of a much more heinous nature than the majority which had hitherto been laid to her charge, —including indeed the old offence of treasonably assisting, supplying, resetting, intercommuning, and fortifying the Earl of Angus and his brother, but adding the extraordinary item of imagining and conspiring the destruction of the King by poison. The fabrication of this charge, and the circumstances which gave rise to it, together with the condemnation and execution of the lady on the ground of it, constitute one of the most remarkable chapters in the history of public prosecutions ; and they are narrated with much clearness and piquancy in a rare extant *Life of James V.*, which was written not long after the period, and which bears marks of being a careful and impartial compilation from contemporary papers and chronicles.

"The Lady Jane Douglas," says this document, "was the most renowned beauty of Britain, at that time. She was of an ordinary stature, not too fat ; her mien was majestic, her eyes full, her face was oval, and her complexion was delicate and extremely fair. Besides all these perfections, she was a lady of a singular chastity. As her body was a finished piece, without the least blemish, so Heaven designed that her mind should want none of those perfections a mortal creature can be capable of. Her modesty was admirable ; her courage was above what could be expected from her sex ; her judg-

ment solid; her carriage was gaining and affable to her inferiors, as she knew well how to behave herself to her equals. Her second husband, Archibald Campbell, had a good estate, and was of a good family, and commanded the third squadron of King James' army; and this gentleman, who equally admired her beauty and virtue, made his addresses to her with all possible respect, and they were married to both their satisfactions. William Lion, a near relation of her first husband, and one of her former suitors, not being able to stifle his former flame, nor dissemble his rage and discontent for the loss of her, became almost frantic upon this disappointment; and though he was so unhappy as to lose her, yet he did not forbear his addresses. This beautiful lady repulsed him with disdain, and told him, that the reason why she formerly treated him with civility, was more owing to his relation to her last husband, and to her son, than to any regard to himself; but now she hated the sight of him. His last interview with her was spent in complaints, entreaties, reproaches, and threatenings; after which he departed and never visited her more. From that time his feelings were changed into rage and revenge. His thoughts were divided, whether he should kill her himself, or contrive some plot against her life; the first seemed unworthy of his courage, whereas the latter required very nice conduct, and too long a delay, seeing he was enraged to that degree, that he thirsted for present revenge; but at last the latter carried it. So after brooding over his resentment for some months, at last he lighted upon one of the blackest contrivances that hell could suggest, viz. he accused this lady, her son, her husband, and one John Lion, an aged priest, and his own near relation, as guilty of a design to poison the King. This was the most unlikely thing in the world, if we consider the characters and conversation of the persons accused, who lived for the most part in the country at a great distance from court, and seldom had an occasion of seeing the King. However, upon this,

those innocent persons were apprehended and imprisoned in the castle of Edinburgh, and their goods were seized, with a strict charge to the judges of the justice-court to proceed to their trials.

“ William Lion, the accuser, who had the ear of the jealous King, used all his rhetoric to aggravate the matter, and that he might dispose the King to treat them with all possible cruelty, he represented ‘ that the family of Douglas had always been dangerous and troublesome to his predecessors, and even to himself and his kingdom; and reminded him of the insolent behaviour of Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus, the brother of the prisoner, in the time of his Majesty’s minority, whose practices were so pernicious, that by a public decree he was banished the kingdom as a disturber of the peace of his native country; that since that time he was become the subject of Henry, King of England, his Majesty’s enemy, and was now the incendiary betwixt the two kingdoms, and advised all the inroads that were made from England upon Scotland; and that, seeing he could not be restored to his honours and fortune, without great difficulty, revenge incited him to plot all the mischief possible against the King’s person; and whom could he employ for compassing such wicked designs more fit than his own sister, who was obliged to secrecy by the ties of blood? That he engaged her in that conspiracy, thinking that her sex, character, and birth, would make her the less suspected; therefore, if his Majesty had any regard either to his interest or safety, it was necessary to exterminate that race which produced nothing but monsters of rebellion, and especially that woman, whom if he spared, he would put it in her power to accomplish her wicked designs.’ This discourse found too easy a belief with the King, who was naturally jealous and suspicious, and was wholly ignorant of the hatred which William Lion bore to that lady. Upon which he ordered that they should be put upon their trial in all haste; so that small regard

was had either to their characters, birth, or defences they made.

“ Before the judges gave sentence, this lady was brought to the bar according to custom, that they might hear what she could say for herself. She knew well enough that her misfortunes proceeded from her near relation to the Earl of Angus. When she had answered to all the questions which the judges asked, with the greatest courage and boldness imaginable, she delivered the following speech:—‘ Those who hate the merit of my brother are enraged because he is not in their power, that he might fall a sacrifice to their malice ; and they now discharge their spite upon me, because of my near relation to him ; and to gratify their revenge with my blood, they accuse me of crimes which, if true, deserve the severest death. But seeing it is only the prerogative of God to punish men or women for the faults of others, which belongs to no judge on earth, who are obliged to punish every one according to their personal crimes, you ought not to punish in me the actions of my brother, how blameable soever. Above all, you ought to consider if those things I am accused of have the least appearance of truth imaginable; for what gives the greatest evidence either of the guilt or innocence of an impeached person, is their former life. What fault could any hitherto lay to my charge? Did any ever reproach me with any thing that is scandalous? Examine, I entreat you, my former conversation; vice hath its degrees as well as virtue, and none can attain to a perfection in either, except by long use and practice; and if you can find nothing reprobable in my conduct, how can ye believe that I am arrived all of a sudden to contrive this murder, which is the very height and perfection of impiety? I protest I would not deliberately injure the most despicable wretch alive; could I then make the murder of my sovereign, whom I always revered, and who never did me any wrong, the first essay of my wickedness? None are capable of such damnable and unna-

tural actions, except two sorts of persons, viz. those of desperate fortunes who are weary of their lives, or those who are hurried into them by revenge. My birth and manner of life put me beyond the suspicion of the first kind; and for the latter, seeing I was never injured by the King, how can I be suspected to thirst for any revenge? I am here accused for purposing to kill the King; and to make my pretended crime appear more frightful, it is given out, that the way was to be by poison. With what impudence can any accuse me of such wickedness, who never saw any poison, nor know I any thing about the preparation of it? Can any say they ever saw me have any of it? Let them tell me where I bought it, or who procured it me. And though I had it, how could I use it, seeing I never came near the King's person, his table nor palace? It is well known, that since my last marriage with this unfortunate gentleman, I have lived in the country, at a great distance from the court; what opportunity could I ever have then to poison the King? You may see by those circumstances, which give great light in such matters, that I am entirely innocent of those crimes I am charged with. It is the office of you judges to protect injured innocence; but if the malice and power of my enemies be such, that whether innocent or guilty I must needs be condemned, I shall die cheerfully, having the testimony of a good conscience; and assure yourselves that you shall certainly find it more easy to take away my life, than to blast my reputation, or to fix any real blot upon my memory. This is my last desire of you, that I may be the sole object of your severity, and that those other innocent persons may not share in my misfortunes. Seeing my chief crime is, that I am descended of the family of Douglas, there is no reason that they should be involved in my ruin; for my husband, son, and cousin, are neither of that name nor family. I shall end my life with more comfort if you absolve them, for the more of us that suffer by your unjust sentence, the greater

will be your guilt, and the more terrible your condemnation when you shall be tried at the great day by God, who is the impartial Judge of all flesh, who shall then make you suffer for those torments to which we are unjustly condemned.'

"This admirable speech, which was spoken with such boldness and manly courage, astonished the judges extremely; and when they had reasoned upon what she had alleged in her own defence, they determined, before they gave sentence, to send two of their number to the King, and to represent to him, 'that, though the witnesses had proved the articles of impeachment, and that, according to the law of the land, upon this evidence she deserved death, yet, upon a serious consideration of the whole circumstances of the matter, they could not perceive the least probability of her guilt; they were afraid lest the rigour of the law in this case should prove the height of injustice,—therefore they wished rather that equity and mercy should take place, it being more safe to absolve a criminal, than to condemn an innocent person; that time alone could discover the truth of the matter, by making known the character of those witnesses who had sworn against her, whether they were men of honesty, or had been bribed to accuse her; that nothing was so advisable as to delay the whole affair for some days, which could be no danger to the King, seeing those persons were not to have their liberty; but whenever they could perceive any presumptions of their guilt, they should not escape justice. As for themselves, they were tied up to the formalities and letter of the law,—it belonged only to his Majesty to temper and moderate the severity of it by his clemency; upon which account they addressed themselves to him, seeing in such cases wherein the life, honour, and estates of persons of distinction are concerned, all possible caution is necessary.' The King, who was naturally merciful enough, had yielded to this reasonable request, if Lion, who had contrived that hellish plot, and was afraid, if they had escaped, his wickedness

would be discovered, had not prevailed with the King to give this answer to the judges, 'that the exercise of justice was a considerable part of the royal dignity, which he had entrusted them with when he made them judges; that it belonged to their office to preserve the innocent, and punish the guilty; that the book called *Regiam Majestatem*, contained all the forms and rules which ought to determine them in such cases; wherefore he gave them full power to proceed in that business according to justice, and the laws of the land; and said, he knew of nothing that could hinder them from doing their duty like men of honour.' Upon receiving that answer, those that were sent to wait upon the King, returned to the Exchequer, where the Court of Justice then sat, and reported to the rest of the judges, what the King had given them in charge; upon which the judges gave sentence against that lady, which was, that she was to be led out to the place of execution, and there to be burnt alive till she was dead.

"A little time after the sentence, she was delivered into the hands of the executioner, to be led out to suffer. The constancy and courage of this heroine are almost incredible, which astonished all the spectators. She heard the sentence pronounced against her without the least sign of concern; neither did she cry, groan, or shed a tear, though that kind of death is most frightful to human nature. When she was brought out to suffer, the people who looked on could not conceal their grief and compassion; some of them who were acquainted with her, and knew her innocence, designed to rescue her; but the presence of the King and his ministers restrained them. She seemed to be the only unconcerned person there; and her beauty and charms never appeared with greater advantage than when she was led to the flames; and her soul being fortified with support from heaven, and the sense of her own innocence, she outbraved death, and her courage was equal in the fire, to what it was before her judges. She suffered those torments without the least noise,

only she prayed devoutly for divine assistance to support her under her sufferings. Thus died this famous lady with a courage not inferior to that of any of the heroes of antiquity.

“The day following, her disconsolate husband, designing to make his escape from the castle of Edinburgh, was let down over the walls by a cord, which happening to be too short, he fell upon the rocks, where he was dashed to pieces. The King was very sad upon hearing of that lamentable accident, and immediately ordered that Lion, the old priest, should have his liberty, because his great age made him incapable of any such design. As for the young Lord Glamis, though his childhood was sufficient proof of his innocency, yet he was kept still in prison, from whence he was not released till after the King's death.

“William Lion, after this virtuous and incomparable lady had fallen a victim to his fury, whenever he began to think coolly upon the wickedness he had done, was so filled with horror, that he was not able to endure the lashes of his awakened conscience. He lamented, when it was too late, that his malice had occasioned the loss both of the lives and fortunes of those who were his near relations; so that having confidence in the King's mercy, he confessed the whole matter secretly to him. The King, abhorring such frightful wickedness, banished him from the court, and designed his punishment should be answerable to his guilt; but affairs of greater concern, which happened immediately after, made the King forget that matter.”

Mr. Pitcairn gives a very full account of the case of Lady Jane Douglas, together with an interesting collection of illustrative papers upon it in his *Criminal Trials*; and he remarks, among other things, respecting it, “There is one circumstance which strikes me as affording a very extraordinary feature in these proceedings. The truly amiable Magdalene Queen of Scotland, who had only arrived from France on May 19, died on July 7, 1537; which plunged the King

and the nation into the deepest sorrow. Never did a Queen-consort commence her reign under happier auspices, and with so entire a love of all her subjects. James V. had to all appearance abandoned himself to grief for her loss, and had retired from the pleasures of the Court, and from all his usual sports and employments, when suddenly, 'in the very crisis of domestic and national affliction,' these rigorous proceedings were adopted and perpetrated, with feelings of private revenge and hatred altogether abhorrent to human nature. Had such a course been previously determined upon by the advisers of the Crown, certainly the time was the worst that could possibly have been chosen, for even had this excellent Queen survived, Lady Glamis must either have been put to death by burning at the stake during the midst of the festivities which followed her marriage and public reception, or at the very moment of the celebration of her funeral obsequies! The whole complexion of this shocking tragedy bears such savage traces of a furious and unmanly revenge against a noble and unprotected female, who was the only individual of her family on whom they could lay their hands, that it can hardly be compared with any other event, either in ancient or modern history."