

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JAMES III.

JAMES III. succeeded to the throne of Scotland in 1460, when only eight years of age; and was then crowned with great pomp and ceremony in Kelso Abbey. His mother had for some time the main or entire moulding of his mind and managing of his education; and either she, or more probably Bishop Kennedy of St. Andrew's, conducted the chief affairs of the regency. Kennedy was a man of much experience, judgment, firmness, and probity, well able to guide the state amid the difficulties which surrounded it; and up to the period of his death in 1466, he maintained matters in a tolerably healthy state for both the prince and the country. But about the middle of his six years of power, he permitted another person to rise into prominence, who slowly but steadily drugged King and kingdom with disaster. This was Robert, Lord Boyd, who assumed consequential airs on account of the creditable figure his ancestors had made in the reign of Bruce, and who took advantage of the momentary absence of any great leaders around the throne to push himself into power, and succeeded by means of audacity and craftiness in winning the good graces of Bishop Kennedy, and in obtaining a peerage and a high place at court. This man associated some of his nearest and dearest relations with himself in his newly found power; and proceeded silently and cunningly to form around him a strong state faction, with no less lofty an object in view than the exclusive possession of the King's person and the entire usurpation of the government.

Sir Alexander Boyd, the brother of Lord Boyd, and celebrated in the popular histories of the period as a model of

all knightly and chivalrous accomplishments, was selected, by the Queen-mother and Bishop Kennedy so early as 1464, as the tutor of the young King in martial exercises; and from that time till near the complete formation of James's character, the Boyds appear to have had the complete control of his education. And they managed it all for their own selfish purposes, and without due reference, or scarcely any reference at all, to the King's true welfare as either a man or a prince. "It was the interest of this family," says Tytler, "the more easily to overrule every thing according to their own wishes, to give their youthful charge a distaste for public business, to indulge him to an unlimited extent in his pleasures and amusements, to humour every little foible in his character, to keep him ignorant of the state of the country, and to avoid the slightest approach to that wholesome severity and early discipline of the heart and understanding, without which nothing that is excellent or useful in after-life can be expected. The effects of this base system pursued by his governors, were apparent in the future misfortunes of the King, whose natural disposition was good, and whose tastes and endowments were in some respects superior to his age."

In 1466, after the death of Bishop Kennedy, while the King was residing in the palace of Linlithgow, the Boyds, at the head of a small body of the chiefs of their faction, suddenly entered the palace, forcibly carried off the King, placed him on horseback, and rode away with him to Edinburgh. They had already acquired a decided ascendancy in the state, and at the same time held the highest place of favour in the royal boy's own estimation; and they took the seemingly perilous step of forcibly abducting him, less as a means of securing their rise than as a measure to prevent their fall,—less for the purpose of attaching him firmly to themselves, than for the purpose of placing him beyond the influence and access of their rivals. Yet though safe at pre-

sent, they felt that, in some future turn of affairs, they might be accused of treason, and prosecuted for it; and therefore, during the sitting of a parliament which was soon after held in Edinburgh, they obtained first an oral declaration of the King, in the parliament's presence, that he had accompanied them from Linlithgow of his own free will, and next a formal instrument under the great seal, pardoning them for any thing in their conduct which could be construed as offensive to the Crown.

But in 1469, the King married Margaret of Denmark, new counsellors came around his throne, fresh aspirants for his favour formed coalitions and rose to power, and the Boyds were all at once pitched down from their lofty pinnacle and dashed to destruction. Lord Boyd himself made a hasty gathering of his friends and retainers, and marched in military array to Edinburgh, in the hope of overawing parliament, and attracting the support of his old admirers and sycophants; but he speedily found himself weak and forsaken,—and saw cause to retreat precipitately at the first display of the royal banner; and he fled with all speed into Northumberland, and there sickened and died. His son, who had been created Earl of Arran, saved himself by a timely flight to the continent. But the latter's uncle, Sir Alexander Boyd, the quondam instructor of the King in knightly accomplishments, was formally brought to trial on a charge of treason, found guilty, and executed on the Castle-Hill of Edinburgh.

A tissue of prosperity ran through the public affairs of the kingdom during the whole of James' minority; and it also presented a surface appearance of continuing to run through them till 1477, when he was twenty-five years of age; but it really was frittering away, during many years, under the joint influence of adverse circumstances abroad and adverse circumstances in the court,—and in 1477, it gave complete place to the first of a long series of disasters. Revolutions and usurpations had become common throughout Europe; com-

munication between Scotland and the great theatres of political intrigue and commotion had become frequent; the Scottish nobles of the period were illiterate, rude, haughty, and turbulent, and looked contemptuously on every thing which did not favour warfare or the chase; the King's two brothers, the Duke of Albany and the Earl of Mar, were bold and stirring men,—fierce and unprincipled, rough, wild, and pompous,—well fitted in every way to please or dazzle the nobility; and the King himself possessed only, or at least chiefly, such qualities as made him seem to them a contemptible ninny, a conceited simpleton, or a slobbering fool. He really had considerable mental excellence, and might, in a better age, have been a valuable patron and promoter of public improvement; but he had no tastes in common with his kinsmen and his barons, and knew nothing of the arts of government, and practised such continual mistakes and blunders and absurdities as converted his very strength into weakness, and rendered his superior knowledge worse than ignorance. He had a passion for mathematics and judicial astrology,—but showed it chiefly in promoting an astrologer of the name of Schevez to the highest ecclesiastical dignities, and in employing him to read the stars upon all occasions of importance; he had a fondness for architecture, for music, and for rhetoric, but showed it chiefly in promoting to the greatest honours about the court, and taking into familiar companionship, an architect of the name of Cochrane, a musician of the name of Rogers, and a literateur of the name of Ireland; and, in a word, he had a penchant for all sorts of arts and sciences, except those of governing and fighting,—a penchant for all kinds of thought and action which bore on peace and pleasure and improvement,—and he showed it chiefly in neglecting all his proper kingly duties, and in keeping frequent company with tailors, smiths, fencing-masters, and other persons of lowly station. His brothers and barons, therefore, despised him, and became rapidly ripe for

any amount of disaffection or rebellion to which circumstances might tempt them.

The Duke of Albany had inherited the earldom of March, with the castle of Dunbar, and had long held the governorship of Berwick and the wardenship of the eastern marches; and he had used his power wantonly and riotously, and now began, in a great degree, to throw off all the restraints and observances which were proper to him as a subject. He was therefore seized and thrown into prison. But he soon escaped, and took post in his stronghold of Dunbar, and speedily gathered around him a body of Border desperadoes, and set about establishing political connexions for embroiling the whole kingdom, and altogether hurled an absolute and most fierce defiance at the Crown. He saw cause, however, to alter his purposes before going into any actual hostility; and he fled to France with the view of soliciting the French King's support,—but was there unsuccessful, and had to content himself with sitting down, for a time, in the capacity of a self-banished exile.

The Earl of Mar made himself still more obnoxious. He was accused of using magical arts for the purpose of causing the King's death; and, though he may have been neither daring enough to contrive direct assassination nor weak enough to rely wholly on the pretended diablery of witches and warlocks, he certainly appears to have cherished mortal malice against his royal brother, and to have retained in his service a number of very vile professors of "the black art." He was seized, tried, and declared guilty of treason; and some authorities say that he was bled to death, in a warm bath by the King's command, while others say that he took ill and became delirious before any sentence was pronounced against him, that he was carefully attended in his illness by the King's physicians, and that he died from his disease while in a bath which had been prescribed for his advantage.

The dismal sequel of James III.'s history, extending from

the death of the Earl of Mar in 1478 till the King's own death in 1488, narrates, among many concomitant and subordinate matters, how the Duke of Albany passed into England, and ingratiated himself at the English court,—how a powerful army for invading Scotland was led northward by the Duke of Gloucester, afterwards the notorious Richard III., accompanied by Albany,—how a still more numerous army was mustered on the Boronghmuir of Edinburgh to repel the invasion,—how James had carried his low favouritisms to such excess as to raise one of his minions, Cochrane, to the utmost magnificence, and create him Earl of Mar,—how his nobles, when on the march against the invading army, conspired against him, hanged Cochrane and his other chief favourites on Lauder bridge, put himself under arrest, and dispersed the whole camp,—how Albany was reconciled to the King, and made lieutenant-general of the kingdom,—how he turned traitor, and was turned out of his office,—how he collocated with Douglas, and got together a small English army of invasion,—how he afterwards intrigued among the nobles, and drew them into open rebellion, and managed to get possession of the heir-apparent to the Crown,—how a temporary pacification took place, and was followed by a fresh insurrection,—how Shaw of Sauchie, in whom the King primely confided, betrayed his high trust, and shut the castle of Stirling against him in his extremity,—and how the King came to a final encounter with his enemies in the vicinity of that place, and could not obtain assistance from his fleet, under Admiral Wood, though only a few miles down the Forth,—and was overwhelmed in battle, and forced to fly precipitately and alone, and thrown from his horse not far from the field of defeat, and carried into an obscure cottage, and there assassinated by some unknown person, perhaps of the family of Hume, who got access to him under the guise of a priest. Most of these events are fully narrated in the two pieces called 'The Raid of Lauder' and

'The Battle of Sauchieburn,' in the first volume of these Tales; and the conclusion of the tragedy, together with an alleged dying reminiscence of some of the chief facts in the stricken monarch's life, is well told in the following lines of Tait's "Macduff":—

"It was a low and lonely house, hard by old Milton Moss,
Where Scotia's conquering standard floats o'er Bruce's battle
cross;
And Bannockburn, its classic ground spreads to the wander-
ing eye,
'Mid circling hills, mute witnesses of blood and victory.

A King upon a frantic steed rushed on from Torwood green,
His pallid hue and headlong speed were desperate, I ween;
Across the stream, with sudden bound, the clattering hoofs
have sped—
Down drops that corse-like thing, and in that lowly house
is laid.

Can this be he! the son of him who wore the fiery face.
Who died at Rox'bro's thundering siege—a lion of his race—
The while his bold and dauntless queen aveng'd her hus-
band's fall,
Batter'd and took, and to the earth razed down that castle
tall!

That steed a monarch might bestride, where fleetness slays
or saves—
But not a timid king like this—the dupe of fools and knaves—
Of stalwart breed, of matchless speed, well worthy of its
sires—
The gift of Scotland's bravest knight—Lord Lindsay of the
Byres!

Scarce from a rising ground had James seen border battle
spread—

First in the van his youthful son, and lion-ensign red—

When doom prophetic smote his heart, and conscious guilt
his soul—

Dashing his spurs to rowel-head, he fled without controul!

Forth went a dame to Bannock-well, as thus the monarch
sped,

But midway left her water-pail, and, fleet with terror fled:—

Shying, the grey steed leapt the stream—‘ Heard ye the ar-
mour ring?’

‘ Now who art thou, poor, shatter’d man?’—‘ This morn I
was your King.’

Al! where be they, the flattering herd, that sway’d the mo-
narch’s mind

Mid dulcet strains so musical, with sciences refined,

And gorgeous plans for Gothic shrines, and feats of magic
skill,

And daring eyes that, in the stars, read destiny at will?

And where may be his glittering hoard of golden treasures,
wring

From subjects murmuring sullenly, with scarce restrained
tongue?

But hush! He stirs! The quivering lips are parted by a
sigh;

And opens, with a frigid stare, his vacant, cold, grey eye!

Back to the scenes of boyhood’s years his wandering thoughts
have fled;

Grave Kennedy’s him tutoring, whilst gay Boyds round him
played.—

'My mother dear!' thus murmured James. 'What is it that
thee ails!

Sin not! nor shame us more with that dark Hepburn of
Hailes!

And thou, my youngest brother Marre! thy blood is on my
head!

From thee it was I fled the field! Ah! would thou wert not
dead!

And, Albany! I feared thee, too, thou gay and gallant
lance,

Yet rather would I thou wert here, than slain in tilting
France?

Go, Schevez! scan 'the house of Death,' and tell what dan-
ger now

From brethren dead and perished, assails this kingly brow?
Let Cochrane's bones, on Lauder Bridge, bleach in the twi-
light dew.—

No fane he ever planned could shield him from yon rebel
crew!

Let Rogers' silver cord be snapt! I need its strains no more;
Let Andro Wood's tall A'mirals be tost, as wrecks, ashore;
They've ta'en my castles! one and all! Both gold and safety
gone!

My nearest kin—my very son—conspires against my throne!

E'en Shaw of Sauchie—he whose faith was yet my latest
hope—

Holds mine own Stirling for the foes with whom I dare not
cope!

Oh! burst my breaking heart to hear Edina's heavy news!
Both hold and gold surrender'd there!—O! 'tis too much to
lose!

Thus hopes are 'whelmed, like sinking ships, with one last sudden lurch—

One consolation lingers yet—I ever loved the Church!—

'Nay!' cried a stern, harsh voice behind—'James! I'm—no matter whom—

I'll tell thee, then, with this death-blow! I'm of the house of Home!

How likest thou a border shrift?' 'God! what a death to die!'

Gasp'd Scotland's James, with sinking voice and ghastly, glazing eye.

And there, in that poor mill-house, was the King of Scotland sped,

Nor traced they e'er the secret spot wherein his bones were laid!"