

Ladies of the Covenant

Margaret McLauchlan and Margaret Wilson.

THE years 1684 and 1685 were years of terrible suffering to the Covenanters. The history of these years is written in letters of blood, and they were emphatically called, by the sufferers, *The killing time*. The savage ruffians, who were scouring the country like incarnate demons, hunted the poor helpless victims of their cruelty like wild beasts, over moors and mountains. If they met with a person who refused to answer their questions, or who did not satisfy them in his answers; or if they found another reading the Bible; or observed a third, apparently alarmed or attempting to escape, they reckoned all such persons fanatics, and in many instances shot them dead on the spot. The devil had gone forth, having great wrath, as if knowing that his time was short. Patrick Walker remarks, that during these two years, eighty persons were shot in the fields, in cold blood; and he further says, "Since that time, some that write of court affairs of Britain for twenty of these years, assert that the very design of that killing time was to provoke the Lord's people in the west of Scotland to rise in arms in their own defence, as at Pentland, Bothwell, and Ayr's Moss, that they might get the sham occasion to raise fire and sword in the west, to make it a hunting field, as the Duke of York had openly threatened, saying, 'There was no other way of rooting fanaticism out of it.'" [*Biograph. Presby., vol. i., p. 302.*] But whatever may be as to this, the ferocity of the persecutors had risen to an unprecedented height, creating general alarm, and threatening to wear out the saints of the Most High.

We are now to narrate the history of one of the bloody scenes enacted during the last of these years - the year 1685 - the scene of the judicial murder of two blameless, inoffensive, and pious females, Margaret M'Lauchlan, [*Or Lauchlison, which is the name given her in her petition to the privy council.*] an aged widow, and Margaret Wilson, a young girl, who were drowned in the tide at the mouth of the river Blednoch, which runs into the sea about a hundred yards to the south of the town of Wigton, in Lower Galloway. The tragical fate of Isabel Alison and Marion Harvey has already been brought under the notice of the reader; and the case before us is no less touching, whether we consider the advanced age of the one sufferer and the youth of the other, or the king of death to which they were subjected, or the shocking barbarity of their ruthless murderers, or the undaunted courage with which they suffered and yielded up their spirits to God.

MARGARET WILSON, the younger of the two martyrs, who was only about eighteen years of age at the time of her death, was daughter of Gilbert Wilson, farmer, of Glenvernock, the property of the Laird of Castlestewart, in the parish of Penningham, in Wigtonshire. He was in good outward circumstances; and his farm, which was excellent soil, and in the best condition, was well stocked with sheep and cattle. Both he and his wife were conformists to prelacy, and regularly attended the ministry of the curate of Penningham; nor could the government lay any thing to their charge. Their children, however, which is rather remarkable, were, at an early age, not only well acquainted with the principles of religion, but, contrary to the example of their parents, ardently attached to the persecuted faith, and would on no consideration attend the ministry of the prelatial incumbent of the parish. On this account, though scarcely of such age as rendered them obnoxious to the law, they were searched for; and, to secure their safety, were compelled to betake themselves, like many others, to the desert solitudes of the upper part of Galloway. They were, in fact, treated in every respect as outlaws. Their parents were forbidden, at their highest peril, to harbour them, to supply their wants, or to have any intercourse with them; and were even commanded so far to disregard natural affection, as to lodge information against them, that they might be apprehended. But the barbarous and unprincipled men who were ravaging Wigtonshire did not stop at this. Mr. Wilson being a man of substance, they looked with a greedy eye upon his wealth; and, notwithstanding his own compliance with prelacy, fined him for the nonconformity of his children. In addition to this, he was grievously harassed by parties of soldiers, who, sometimes to the number of a hundred, would come to his house, and not only live at free quarters, but commit that wanton

destruction upon his property to which, by the fierceness of their dispositions, they were prompted. To hardships of this nature he was subjected for several years; and these hardships, together with his frequent attendance upon courts at Wigton, which was thirteen miles distant from his own house, and at Edinburgh, reduced him from comparative affluence to poverty. So heavy, indeed, were his pecuniary losses - amounting, at a moderate calculation, to upwards of 5,000 merks - that, though before being thus pillaged, he was one of the most substantial men in that part of the country, he died about the year 1704 or 1705, in destitution, and his widow, who was alive in 1711, then very aged, subsisted upon the charity of her friends. This is one instance, among many others which might be adduced, in which persons of property, against whose loyalty and religion the government had nothing to object, were exposed to the spoliation of their goods, and were even sometimes reduced to absolute penury, for the recusancy of those connected with them, and over whom they had often no control. Loyal and conforming parents were fined, and otherwise punished, for the nonconformity of their children; loyal and conforming husbands for the nonconformity of their wives; loyal and conforming masters for the nonconformity of their servants; loyal and conforming proprietors for the nonconformity of their tenants. The troopers, too, who, like licensed robbers, traversed the country, in many cases pillaged, with indiscriminate wantonness, such as were friendly to the government and conformists to prelacy, and such as were not.

Margaret Wilson, and her sister, Agnes, who was then only about thirteen years of age, at length fell into the hands of the persecutors. In the beginning of the year 1685, these two girls, to secure their safety, were obliged to leave for some time their father's house, and, in company with their brother, a youth of not more than sixteen years of age, and other persecuted wanderers, to seek shelter in the mosses, mountains, and caves of Carrick, Nithsdale, and Galloway. On the death of Charles II, when the persecution was for a brief period relaxed, the two sisters, leaving their hiding places, ventured to come secretly to Wigton to visit some of their fellow-sufferers in the same cause, and particularly the aged Margaret M'Lauchlan, whom they greatly loved, and who was well qualified to minister comfort and counsel to them under their troubles. Here both of them were discovered and made prisoners, through the treachery of a man named Patrick Stuart, with whom they were personally acquainted, and who professed to take a deep and friendly interest in their welfare. This base fellow, from what motive it is not said, but doubtless either from pure malignity of disposition, or from the love of the paltry wages given to informers, purposed to betray these friendless and unsuspecting girls. To find some plausible ground of complaint against them, he, with much apparent kindness, invited them to go with him and partake of some refreshment, which being brought, he proposed that they should drink the king's health. This, as he probably anticipated from what he knew of their character, they modestly declined to do; upon which he left them, and immediately proceeded to the authorities of Wigton, to lodge information against them. A party of soldiers was forthwith dispatched to apprehend them. The two girls were cast into that abominable place called "the thieves' hole," and, after lying there for some time, were removed to the prison in which their beloved friend, Margaret M'Lauchlan, who had been apprehended about the same time, or very shortly after, was confined, and of whom we now proceed to give some account.

MARGARET M'LAUHLAN, was the widow of John Mulligen or Millikin, carpenter, a tenant in the parish of Kirkinner, in the shire of Galloway, in the farm of Drumjargan, belonging to Colonel Vans of Barnbarroch; and she had now nearly reached the venerable age of seventy. [*The inscription on her gravestone in the churchyard of Wigton makes her age 63; but in her petition to the privy council, she says that she is "about the age of three score [and] ten years."*] She was a plain country woman, but superior to most women of her station in religious knowledge; blameless in her deportment, and a pattern of virtue and piety. Being strictly Presbyterian in her principles, she had regularly absented herself from hearing the curate of the parish of Kirkinner; she had also attended the sermons of the proscribed ministers, and had afforded shelter and relief to her persecuted nonconforming relations and acquaintances in their wanderings and distresses. Honourable as was all this to her character, it was in those days of oppression regarded as highly criminal; and, on this account, she suffered much in her property, and at last was apprehended on the Sabbath-day, when engaged in the exercise of family worship in her own dwelling, the day of rest being now the season when the persecutors were most active in searching for

“the fanatics,” and often most successful in discovering them. She was immediately carried to prison, in which she lay for a long time, and was treated with great harshness, not being allowed a fire to warm her, nor a bed upon which to lie, nor even an adequate supply of food to satisfy the cravings of nature.

When Margaret M'Lauchlan, Margaret Wilson, and her sister were apprehended, it was demanded of them, as a test of their loyalty, that they should swear the abjuration oath. This was an oath abjuring a manifesto published by the Society People, or the Cameronians, on the 8th of November 1684, [*It was fixed upon the market crosses of several burghs, and upon a great many church doors.*] entitled “The Apologetic Declaration and Admonitory Vindication of the True Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland, especially anent Intelligencers and Informers.” In this manifesto, after expressing their adherence to their former declarations, in which they disowned the authority of Charles Stuart, and declared war against him and his accomplices; and after testifying that they “utterly detest and abhor that hellish principle of killing all who differ in judgment or persuasion from them;” they declare it to be their purpose to punish, according to their power, and according to the degree of the offence, such as should stretch forth their hands against them by shedding their blood on account of their principles, or willingly give such information as should lead thereto. This step we do not undertake to vindicate, it being “calculated, notwithstanding all their qualifications, and in spite of all their precautions they might use, to open a door to lawless bloodshed, and to give encouragement to assassination. At the same time, it is impossible to condemn them with great severity, when we reflect that they were cast out of the protection of law, driven out of the pale of society, and hunted like wild beasts in the woods and on the mountains, to which they had fled for shelter.” [*M'Crie's Review of Tales of My Landlord in his Miscellaneous Writings, p. 443.*] It is also to be noticed that what they chiefly aimed at was to inspire their persecutors with a wholesome terror, [*“The only instances in which it is alleged, so far as we recollect, that it led to murder, were those of two soldiers at Swine-Abbey, and of the curate of Carsphairn. The last of these was publicly disowned and condemned by the Society People.” - M'Crie's Review of Tales of My Landlord in his Miscellaneous Writings, p. 444.*] and this object was to a considerable degree gained, in regard to the more active and malignant informers, who dared not now, as they had done before, to dog the footsteps and discover to the soldiers the hiding places of men, whom intolerable oppression had driven to desperation. The more virulent and persecuting of the curates in Nithsdale and Galloway, were also so panic-struck on the publication of the paper, as to leave their parishes and seek safety elsewhere for a time. On the government the effect was different: it roused their fury to the utmost height. On the 22d of November, they passed an act, which Wodrow justly calls a “bloody act,” ordaining “every person, who owns, or will not disown, the late treasonable declaration upon oath, whether they have arms or not, to be immediately put to death; there being present two witnesses, and the person or persons having commission for that effect” [*Wodrow's History, vol. iv, p. 155.*] - an act on which is to be charged the blood of not a few who were shot in the fields by officers, and even by private sentinels, who pretended to be invested with such powers. On the following day, they gave commission, with a judiciary power, to certain noblemen, gentlemen, and military officers, to convocate all the inhabitants, men and women above fourteen years of age (in certain parishes named), to execute, by military commission upon the place, such of them as owned the “late traitorous declaration;” and also to execute the sentence of death on such as refused to disown it, after trying them by a jury. An oath was also framed abjuring the Apologetic Declaration, and hence called “the abjuration oath,” which all, both men and women, above the age of sixteen years, were required to swear, under the pains of high treason.

Margaret M'Lauchlan, and the two youthful sisters, Margaret and Agnes Wilson, refused to swear the abjuration oath. They were accordingly brought to a formal trial before Sir Robert Grierson, of Lagg,* Colonel David Graham (brother to the bloody Claverhouse), Major Windram, Captain Strachan, and Provost Cultrain at Wigton, on the 13th of April 1685. In their indictment, they were charged with being at the battle of Bothwell Bridge, at the skirmish of Ayr's Moss, at twenty field conventicles, and at an equal number of house conventicles. The two first charges were notoriously false. None of the panels had ever been within many miles of either of these places. It is, besides, to be noticed that at the time of the battle of Bothwell Bridge, the two girls were mere children - the one only about seven years of age, and the other only about eleven or

* Of these commissioners, Grierson, of Lagg has obtained the most infamous celebrity in the annals of the persecution. So cruel and brutal was his temper, that he seems to have felt an infernal delight in murdering, in cold blood, the unarmed and unresisting peasantry of his country. In 1685, he shot five Covenanters dead on the spot, without giving them leave to pray; and when one of them, Mr. Bell, of Whiteside, who was acquainted with him, begged for a quarter of an hour to prepare for death, he remorselessly answered, "What the Devil! have you not got time enough to prepare since Bothwell?" Among the Wodrow MSS., we have met with some specimens of his profanity, but they are too shocking to be here repeated. - (Vol. xxxvii. 4to. no. 1.) He outlived the persecution nearly half a century, having died on the 23d of December 1733. Many of the cruelties which he perpetrated have been recorded in his *Elegy, or, A Mock Lamentation of the Prince of Darkness upon his Death*; which is supposed to have been written long before the time of his demise. Of this production, the following lines, taken from the 21st edition, are a specimen: -

What fatal news is this I hear!
 On earth who shall my standard bear?
 For Lag, who was my champion brave,
 Is dead, and now laid in his grave.
 The want of him is a great grief;
 He was my manager and chief;
 He bore my image on his brow,
 My service he did still avow.
 He had no other Dietie
 But this world, the flesh, and me;
 Unto us he did homage pay,
 And did us worship every day.
 In Galloway he was well known,
 His great exploits in it were shown;
 He was my general in that place;
 He did the Presbyterians chase;
 Thro' moss, and moor, and many a hag,
 They were pursued, by my friend Lag,
 He many a saint pursu'd to death;
 He feared neither hell nor wrath.
 His conscience was so cauteriz'd,
 He refus'd nothing that I pleas'd:
 For which he's had my kindness still,
 Since he his labours did fulfil.
 Any who read the Scriptures through,
 I'm sure they'll find but very few
 Of my best friends that's mentioned there,
 That could with Grier of Lagg compare."
The History of Galloway, vol. ii., pp. 281, 282.

twelve - while sixty-five years had passed over the head of the aged widow; and it cannot for a moment be supposed, that two girls of so tender an age, or that an humble inoffensive female, who had nearly reached the utmost limits of human earthly existence, could be concerned in that insurrection. The same remark applies to the skirmish at Ayr's Moss, which took place only a little more than a year after the rising at Bothwell Bridge. The other charges brought against these sufferers may have been true in part or in whole; but nothing was proved against them. Being again required to swear the abjuration oath, all of them refused to swear it; and this refusal seems to have been the main ground upon which they were condemned. After the mockery of a trial, a jury was found so unprincipled as to bring in a verdict of guilty against the whole three; and the sentence pronounced upon them was, that, upon the 11th of May; they should be tied to stakes fixed within the flood mark in the water of Blednoch, near Wigton, where the sea flows at high water, there to be drowned. They were commanded to receive their sentence on their bended knees; and refusing to kneel, they were pressed down by force till it was pronounced. [*Cloud of Witnesses, p. 301.*] But they were by no means daunted; they heard the cruel sentence with much composure, and even with cheerful countenances, accounting it their honour that they were called to suffer in the cause of Christ.

This extraordinary sentence could not but produce great excitement in Wigton, and the friends of the three females were plunged into the deepest distress. The afflicted father of the two girls, on going to Edinburgh, was allowed to purchase at the price of £100 sterling, the life of his younger daughter, in consequence of her tender age. When in Edinburgh, he would also, no doubt, use every means in his power to save the life of his other daughter; and his intercessions, as we shall afterwards see, had a mollifying effect upon the members of the privy council. At the same time, Margaret Wilson's friends did all they could to prevail with her to swear the abjuration oath, and to promise to attend the ministry of the curate of the parish in which she lived, but without effect; for by no solicitations would she surrender her convictions of truth and duty, whatever it might cost her. During her imprisonment, she wrote a long letter to her relations, highly honourable to her character. It was full of the deep and affecting sense which she had of God's love to her soul, and expressed an entire resignation to his sovereign disposal. It also contained a vindication of her refusal to save her life by swearing the abjuration oath, and by engaging to conform to prelacy; written with a cogency of argument, and a solidity of judgment, far above her years and education. [*Wodrow's History, vol. iv., p. 248.*] The aged Margaret M'Lauchlan, it would appear, exhibited in prison less heroic resolution than her youthful companion. She was induced to send a petition to the privy council, praying them to recall the sentence of death pronounced upon her, acknowledging the justice of the sentence, and expressing her willingness to take the abjuration oath, and regularly to attend her parish church. The petition is as follows: -

“Unto his Grace, my Lord High Commissioner, and remanent Lords of his Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council - The Humble Supplication of Margaret Lauchlison, now prisoner in the Tolbooth of Wigton;

“SHOWETH,

“That whereas I being justly condemned to die by the lords commissioners of his majesty's most honourable privy council and justiciary, in a court holden at Wigton the 13th day of April instant, for my not disowning that traitorous Apologetical Declaration lately affixed at several parish churches within this kingdom, and my refusing the oath of abjuration of the same, which was occasioned by my not perusing the same, and now I having considered the said Declaration, do acknowledge the same to be traitorous, and tends to nothing but rebellion and sedition, and to be quite contrary unto the written Word of God, and am content to abjure the same with my whole heart.

“May it therefore please your grace, and remanent lords, as said is, to take my case to your serious consideration, being about the age of threescore [and] ten years, and to take pity and compassion on me, and recall the foresaid sentence so justly pronounced against me, and to grant warrant to any your grace thinks fit to administrat the oath of abjuration to me, and, upon my taking of it, to order my liberation; and your supplicant shall live hereafter a good and faithful subject in time comeing, and shall frequent the ordinances and live regularly, and give what other obedience your grace and remanent lords shall prescribe thereanent, and your petitioner shall ever pray.

“Written by William Moir.

“W. Dunbar, witness.

“Will. Gordoun, witness.” [*Warrants of Privy Council.*]

Yielding to the prayer of this petition, and to the representations of Margaret Wilson's father, the privy council granted a reprieve to these two females, and recommended them to the secretaries of state for his majesty's pardon. The act of council is as follows:-

“Edinburgh, April 30, 1685.

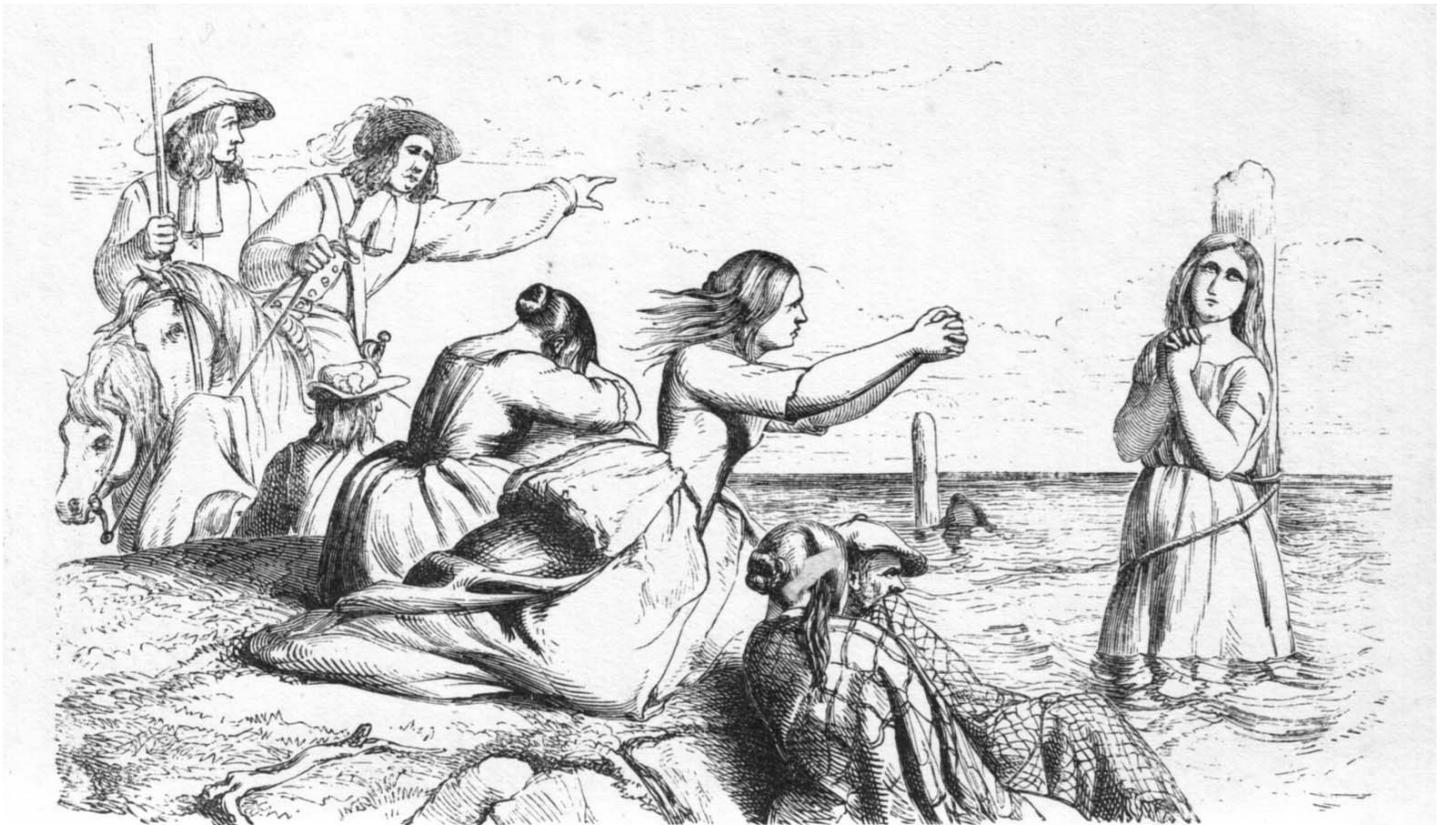
“The lords of his majesty's privy council do hereby reprieve the execution of the sentence of death, pronounced by the justices against Margaret Wilson and Margaret Lauchlison, until the day . . . of . . . and discharge the magistrates of Wigton from putting of the said sentence to execution against them until the foresaid day; and recommend the said Margaret Wilson and Margaret Lauchlison to the lords secretaries of state, to interpose with his most sacred majesty for the royal remission to them.” [*Register of Acts of Privy Council.*]

But, notwithstanding this reprieve, these two women were, on the day appointed - the 11th of May - conducted from the tolbooth of Wigton to the place of execution, amidst a numerous crowd of spectators, who had assembled to witness so unusual a sight. They were guarded by Major Windram* with a company of soldiers,

* It is not unworthy of notice, as affording a singular instance of the sovereignty of Divine grace, that several of this persecutor's children gave pleasing evidence of early piety. Mr. James Renwick, in a letter "to the Honourable Mr. Robert Hamilton," dated July 9, 1684, says, "A grand persecutor, callers Major Windram, had three children, who within a little while of [each] other died - one of them a very young boy, and two daughters come to the years of discretion, who died very sweetly and pleasingly - declaring that the Lord's hand, was stretched forth against them because of the hand their father hath in shedding the blood of the saints; and obtested him, before God, that he would quit the course he followed; which things had some, though no lasting effect upon him." - Renwick's Letters, p. 81.

and, on arriving at the place, were fastened to stakes fixed in the sand, between high and low water mark. Margaret M'Lauchlan, who is said to have now manifested great fortitude, though, when in prison, she had offered to make concessions, was tied to the stake placed nearest the advancing tide, that she might perish first; for the obvious purpose of terrifying into submission the younger sufferer, who was bound to a stake nearer the shore. The multitude looked on, thrilled with horror. The flood gradually made its way to the aged matron, rising higher and higher at each successive wave, "mounting up from knee, waist, breast, neck, chin, lip," until it choked and overwhelmed her. Margaret Wilson witnessed the whole scene, and knew that she would soon share the same fate; but her steadfastness remained unshaken; and so far from exhibiting any symptoms of terror, she displayed a calm courage, rivalling that of the most intrepid martyrs. When her fellow-sufferer was struggling in the waters with the agonies of death, a heartless by-stander, perhaps one of the soldiers, asked the youthful Margaret, to whom the tide had not yet advanced so far, what she thought of the spectacle before her. "What do I see," she answered, "but Christ, in one of his members, wrestling there? Think you that *we* are the sufferers? No, it is Christ in us; for he sends none a warfare upon their own charges."

When bound to the stake, Margaret Wilson sang several verses of the 25th Psalm, beginning at the 7th verse: -



Drowning of Margaret McLauchlan and Margaret Wilson.

“Let not the errors of my youth,
Nor sins remembered be:
In mercy for thy goodness’ sake,
O Lord, remember me.
The Lord is good and gracious,
He upright is also:
He therefore sinners will instruct
In ways that they should go.” &c.

She then repeated, with a calm and even cheerful voice, a portion of the 8th chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans; and, through a steadfast faith in the great and consoling truths exhibited in that sublime chapter, and in the interesting verses of the psalm she had sung, she was enabled to meet death with unshrinking courage, looking forward with humble hope to that exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, which would do more than counterbalance all her sufferings in the cause of Christ. She next engaged in prayer; and, while so employed, the waters had risen upon her so high as to reach her lips, and she began to struggle with the agonies of death, At this moment, by the command of her murderers, who *pretended* to be willing to preserve her life, provided she should swear the abjuration oath, [*We say, pretended; because it may fairly be questioned, from what we know of the character of her persecutors, whether her life would have been spared, even though she had sworn the abjuration oath. The other questions which it was common to put to the Covenanters might also have been put to her, as, “Will you renounce the Covenant?” - “Was the killing of the archbishop of St. Andrews murder?” - “Was the rising of Bothwell Bridge rebellion?” - and failing to answer any of these questions in the affirmative, she might, after all, have been drowned by these blood-thirsty men.*] the cords which bound her to the stake were unloosened, and she was pulled out of the waters. As soon as she recovered and was able to speak, it was asked her, by Major Windram’s orders, if she would pray for the king. With the christian meekness which formed so engaging a feature in her character, she answered, “I wish the salvation of all men, and the damnation of none.” “Dear Margaret,” exclaimed a friend, deeply moved with pity, and anxious to save her life, “say, God. save the king! say, God save the king!” With the greatest composure, she replied, “God save him, if he will; for it is his salvation I desire.” [*It is therefore a mistake to say, as Chambers has done in his Picture of Scotland (vol. i., pp. 273, 274), that our two martyrs “were offered their lives when at the stake, on condition of saying, ‘God save the king,’ and on refusing were left to be overwhelmed by the rising waves.” - See Appendix, no. x.*] Immediately her friends called out to Windram, “Sir, she hath said it! she hath said it!” But with this her murderers were not satisfied. Lagg, we are told, bellowed out, “Damned bitch! we do not want such prayers; tender the oath to her;” [*Aikman’s Annals of the Persecution, p. 518.*] and Windram, coming near her, demanded that she should swear the abjuration oath, else she should be again instantly cast into the sea. She needed not long to deliberate; in an instant her resolve was taken; preferring to die rather than do what she believed would be a denial of Christ and his truth, she firmly replied, “I will not; I am one of Christ’s children; let me go.” And so, after her sufferings were thus inhumanly protracted, and after being thus cruelly tantalized with the hope of life, she was, by Windram’s orders, thrust into the waters, which speedily closed over her for the last time.

These females, it would appear, as has been said before, were executed in disregard of the reprieve granted them by the privy council, who recommended them to the royal clemency. The day to which they were reprieved is left a blank in the Records of the Council; but there is every reason to believe that it would be to a later day than the 11th of May, as at that period, the facilities of communication being greatly less than at present, there would hardly be time, betwixt the 30th of April and the 11th of May, to get a return from London. It seems, therefore, highly probable that our two martyrs were, by the brutality of their judges and the magistrates of Wigton, executed without orders from the government. But of the blood of these women the government were not altogether guiltless. They had ordained the abjuration oath to be put to all persons above sixteen years of age, whether male or female; and such as refused to swear it, were liable to be tried and punished capitally. They had invested inferior officers with the power of trying and condemning such as refused it. They had even given instructions to their commissioners, to condemn such women as had been signally active in supporting the Apologetic Declaration to be drowned; [*Wodrow’s History, vol. iv., p. 165.*] and though, in the present instance, they granted a reprieve to these condemned women, and recommended them to

the mercy of the king, yet, when their unprincipled and hardened officers executed the sentence contrary to orders, they did not even censure them for such a deed of revolting atrocity.

The bodies of the two martyrs, on being taken from the waters, were buried in the churchyard of Wigton. A stone was afterwards erected to their memory. The particular date of its erection cannot now be ascertained, but, from the freedom of its language, it is evident that it was after the Revolution. It is placed in the wall of the church, and the inscription upon it, copied *verbatim et literatim*, is as follows: -

HERE LIES MARGARET LACHLANE (SURNAMED GRIER)
WHO WAS BY UNJUST LAW SENTENCED
TO DYE BY LAGG STRACHANE WINRAME
AND GRAME AND TYED TO A STAKE WITH
THE FLOOD FOR HER
ADHERENCE TO SCOTLAND'S REFORMATION
COVENANTS NATIONAL AND SOLEMN LEAGUE.
AGED 63. 1685
ME MENTO MORI

HERE LYES MARGARET WILSON
DOUGHTER TO GILBERT WILSON
IN GLENVERNOCH WHO WAS
DROUND ANNO 1685.
AGED 18.

LET EARTH AND STONE STILL WITNESS BEARE
THEIR LYES A VIRGINE MARTYR HERE.
MURTHERD FOR OWNING CHRIST SUPREME,
HEAD OF HIS CHURCH AND NO MORE CRIME
BUT NOT ABJURING PRESBYTERY,
AND HER NOT OWNING PRELACY,
THEY HER CONDEMND, BY UNJUST LAW;
OF HEAVEN NOR HELL THEY STOOD NO AW.
WITHIN THE SEA TYD TO A STAKE;
SHE SUFFERED FOR CHRIST JESUS SAKE
THE ACTORS OF THIS CRUEL CRIME
WAS LAGG. STRACHAN. WINRAM. AND GRAHAME
NEITHER YOUNG YEARS, NOR YET OLD AGE
COULD STOP THE FURY OF THERE RAGE.

It may here be stated, that a monument, in honour of these and other martyrs whose ashes repose in the churchyard of Wigton, is about to be erected. A sermon was preached, by the Rev. Dr. William Symington of Glasgow, in the parish church of Wigton, on Sabbath, the 24th of September 1848, in aid of a fund for carrying that object into effect. The subject chosen by the preacher was the opening of the fifth seal, Rev. vi. 9-11; and, in an address at the close of public worship, he thus vindicates the erection of such memorials to the memory of our martyrs: - "Let not our object be mistaken. It is not, by any means, to canonize the sufferers; or to imitate the conduct of the church of Rome, by cherishing a superstitious and undue veneration for departed saints. Our object is to draw attention to the principles, rather than to the persons, of the martyrs.

And this we propose to do by commemorating their noble deeds, and their sufferings. We affect to tell the simple tale of their martyrdom, and to renew those touching memorials which are falling into a state of decay and obliteration by the lapse of time. The principle upon which we act, we regard as distinctly recognized in the approved example of saints, the statements of Holy Writ, and the procedure of God himself. We have read of 'the pillar of Rachel's grave,' reared by patriarchal hands, 'in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.' We cannot forget the declarations that 'the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance,' and that 'the memory

of the just is blessed;’ nor that one of the marks of the Divine displeasure against the wicked consists in ‘cutting off their memory from the earth,’ and making ‘all their memory to perish.’ Nor can we suffer ourselves to overlook the circumstance, that the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is just a noble monumental pile, raised by the Spirit, in commemoration of elders who had received a good report, and whose names, lest they should pass away into oblivion, are legibly inscribed on its surface.”

Chambers, in his Picture of Scotland, relates what he calls “a strange and ridiculous story,” which is told at Wigton, connected with the drowning of these women. “One of the most active persons at the execution,” says he, “was, it seems, the town officer of Wigton, who, when the girls were raised out of the water, and refused to save their lives by the simple expression above mentioned [God save the King], took his halbert, and, pressing them down again into the water, exclaimed, with savage glee, ‘Then, take another drink, my hearties.’ Heaven, for this, is said to have afflicted him with an intolerable and unquenchable thirst, insomuch that he never after durst venture abroad without carrying along with him an enormous jar full of water, wherewithal to gratify his unnatural appetite. As he crawled about, with this singular load, people used to pass him by with silent horror; for, though his misfortune might have been the result of disease, it was, in that superstitious age, universally believed to be the manifestation of Divine vengeance.” [Pp.273,274.] This traditionary anecdote we have given as we find it, without vouching for its truth. But the assertion of this popular writer, that it was superstitious to regard the calamity which befell this man, on the supposition that the story is true, as the manifestation of Divine vengeance, since it might have been the result of disease, is most certainly unsound in theology. Even granting it to have been the result of disease, this would not prove that it was not a judgment of God; for disease, like every thing else, is under his direction and control, and he can make it the minister of his justice as well as any other agent, even when it is brought on, not by any supernatural infliction, but in the ordinary course of nature. No doubt, in cases of this sort, a mistaken, an uncharitable, and even an impious interpretation, may be put upon providence, in reference to the calamities which befall our fellow-creatures.* But still, it must be admitted by every observer of providence, altogether apart from the authority of revelation, that though wickedness, and even atrocious wickedness, may often pass unpunished in the present life, yet there are instances in which it is punished in the course of events, in so striking a manner, as to extort, even from the most unthinking, and the least inclined to superstition, the acknowledgment that such visitations bear the impress of the hand of a righteous God. “In the Divine management of the fortuitous events of life,” says Isaac Taylor, “there is, in the first place, visible some occasional flashes of that retributive justice which, in the future world, is to obtain its long postponed and perfected triumph. There are instances, which, though not very common, are frequent enough to keep alive the salutary fears of mankind; wherein vindictive

*As an example of this, we may quote the following passage from one of Mr. Robert Baillie’s letters. Writing to Mr. Spang, apparently in June 1658, he says, “Mr. Gillespie remains there [in London] sorely sick, some think in displeasure that his desires were not granted. However, at his last going to Hamptoun Court, he got no speech of the protector; if this grieved him, I know not; but he went immediately from Hamptoun Court to Wombledoun, Lambert’s house, being Saturday at night; and having engaged to preach on Sunday morning, before sermon, he had five stools, and after his painful preaching, four-score before he rested; thereafter, for many days, a great flux and fever, together with the breach of a hulcer in the guts, put him to the very brink of death. *Many thought it the evident hand of God upon him, and would not have sorrowed for his death.* For myself, I was grieved, foreseeing the hurt of our college by his removal.” - (Baillie’s Letters and Journals, vol. iii., p. 356.) Mr. Patrick Gillespie, who was then principal of the University of Glasgow, was a zealous protester during the controversy between the Resolutioners and the Protesters; and the men who are here said to have viewed his illness as a judgment of God, were Resolutioners. This accounts for their uncharitable and impious explanation of the conduct of Divine providence in bringing that severe illness upon Gillespie. It was the suggestion of the animosity of party spirit; and it was substantially saying, that God was such an one as themselves. It threw no light on God’s providence towards Gillespie, but it threw light upon the temper of their own minds. It indicated plainly enough, that had they been intrusted with the government of the world, disease would soon have thinned the ranks of the Protesters, or have even exterminated the whole of that race. Had this been done, we would have had few martyrs during the persecution of Charles II; for the ministers who refused to conform to Prelacy, and who suffered for nonconformity, were nearly all Protesters; the most of the Resolutioners, though they had sworn against Prelacy, having too little principle, and too little courage, to make sacrifices for conscience’ sake. Happily for the Protesters, the government of the world was in more merciful hands than in those of the Resolutioners. It may be added, that Gillespie was again restored to health.

visitations speak articulately in attestation of the righteous judgment of God upon them that do evil. Outrageous villanies, or appalling profaneness, sometimes draw upon the criminal the instant bolt of Divine wrath; and in so remarkable a manner, that the most irreligious minds are quelled with a sudden awe, and confess the fearful hand of God.” [Natural History of Enthusiasm, pp. 135, 136.]

Another singular anecdote, connected with the drowning of these women, has been preserved by the industrious Wodrow. Between nineteen and twenty years after the Revolution, a daughter of Margaret M'Lauchlan dreamed, it would seem, that her mother appeared to her and bade her go and tell Provost Cultrain of Wigton, who was a very active instrument in her death, and who was then alive, that he must soon stand before the bar of the great God, to give in his account. Within a few months or a few weeks after this dream, the provost died. Having gone, in the beginning of November 1708, to hold a justice court at Stranraer, he no sooner stood up to make a speech when the court assembled, than his tongue faltered, and he fell back. He was immediately carried to his lodgings, at which he died within a few days. Wodrow had received some hints of this matter from Mr. Henry Davidson, minister of Galashiels, [In a letter from him, dated August 29, 1717; Letters to Wodrow, vol. x., 4to, no. 47. Mr. Davidson says, “He [Provost Cultrain] was acquainted with the dream some months before his death; but he jested at it.”] but from his extreme care in authenticating, as far as possible, the information communicated to him, he wrote a letter to Mr. William Campbell, minister of Kirkinner, requesting him to examine Margaret M'Lauchlan's daughter, who was then alive, in reference to her dream; and the answer which Mr. Campbell returned is as follows: - [The letter is dated April 11, 1718.]

“REV. DEAR BROTHER, - In compliance with your desire anent Elizabeth Millikin's dream, know that I went and discoursed her this day, in order to give you the genuine account of it. The said Elizabeth dreamed, some weeks or months before the quarter sessions that met in November 1708, that her mother, Margaret Lauchlison, came to her, at the cross of Wigton, with garb, gesture, and countenance that she had five minutes before she was drowned in Blednoch, and said to her, ‘Elizabeth, go and warn Provost Cultrain that he must shortly compear before the tribunal of the great God, to answer for his ways,’ and immediately her sleep was broken, and it made such an impression upon her, that she resolved, for her own exoneration, and the provost's edification, prudently and meekly to communicate the said dream to the said William Cultrain of Drummorral, with the first convenience; but not finding or expecting that, she told the dream to Bailie Lafries, Drummorral's friend, being married to Lady Drummorral's sister, a man of age, gravity, and experience, and an elder in Wigton; and solemnly desired and engaged him to signify the said dream to the said Drummorral; and she doubted not but the said Bailie Lafries did tell the said Drummorral. And, accordingly, in the beginning of November 1708, he rode from Wigton to the quarter session of the justices of the shire, that met that time at Stranraer, and there, on the Wednesday, at the court table, was suddenly struck with a lethargy, was carried to his quarters, and continued speechless till Saturday, the 8th of November, and then died.” [Letters to Wodrow, vol. x., 4to, no. 57. In a subsequent letter to Wodrow, dated Kirkinner, May 14, 1718, Mr. Campbell says, “Next morning, after I was favoured with yours, I discoursed Elizabeth Millikin, but she cannot give you further satisfaction as to the circumstances of that dream; only she dreamed it in her own bed, in the town of Barnbarroch; and all the relations of Provost Cultrain and Bailie Lafries deny they know any thing of the Bailie's informing the Provost, or the Provost's answer.” - Ibid., vol. x., 4to, no. 59.] Mr. Campbell adds: - “The said Elizabeth is poor but pious; a widow indeed, the worthy daughter of such an honoured martyred mother. It hath pleased God lately to afflict her by a sore fall in her walking home from this church; and having a large Bible under her arm, and falling with a great deal of violence upon that side where her Bible was, it has broken some of her ribs, and disables her for business. I have been her acquaintance these sixteen years. I know she is poor and straitened; but I never heard her say she wanted any thing. If ye please, procure and send Mr. Martin, bookseller at Edinburgh, some supply.”

