

CHAP. VII.

JAMES THE SIXTH.

1600—1603.

 CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

<i>England.</i>	<i>France.</i>	<i>Germany.</i>	<i>Spain.</i>	<i>Portugal.</i>	<i>Popē.</i>
Elizabeth.	Henry IV.	Rudolph II.	Philip III.	Philip III.	Clement VIII.

THE general gratulation manifested at the escape of the King from the treason of Gowrie, was not without its alloy. Though almost all believed in the reality of the conspiracy, a section of the Kirk demurred and doubted; and as the death of both the brothers had involved the particulars of the plot in extreme obscurity, the ministers not only declared it questionable that any treason had been intended, but, after a while, started the extravagant theory that the plot was a conspiracy of the King against Gowrie, not of Gowrie against the King. To examine or refute this hypothesis, after the facts which have been given, would be worse than idle; and we are not to be surprised that the incredulity of the Kirk should have incensed the King. But James adopted an unwise mode of refutation. Instead of simply insisting on the great features of the story, on the leading facts which were indisputably proved by

the evidence of Lennox, Mar, Erskine, and Ramsay, and throwing aside all minor matters and apparent contradictions, which, considering the rapidity, terror, and tumult accompanying the event, confirmed rather than weakened the proof; he forgot his dignity; held repeated conferences with the recusant ministers; argued, cavilled, remonstrated, and attempted in vain to explain and reconcile every minute particular. The effect of all this was precisely what might have been anticipated: Mr Robert Bruce, and his little sceptical conclave of brethren, were quite as ingenious in their special pleading as the King; and not only obstinately refused to accuse Gowrie in their pulpits of any plot against the royal person, but insolently insinuated that their two favourites had been murdered. James, finding them immoveable, banished them from the capital; and interdicted them, under pain of death, from preaching in any part of Scotland.

This severity brought four of the recusants, Balcanquel, Watson, Hall, and Balfour, to reason; and they declared themselves thoroughly satisfied of the truth of Gowrie's treason. But Bruce was inexorable. He considered that the question involved not only the truth of the conspiracy, but the spiritual independence of the Kirk; peremptorily refused to exculpate the King, or believe in his report; and was banished to France.¹ Extreme measures were then adopted against the family of Ruthven; and in a Parliament which assembled in the succeeding month of November, the revolting spectacle was exhibited

¹ Spottiswood, p. 461.

of the trial for treason of the livid corpses of these unhappy brothers; which, after the doom of forfeiture had been pronounced, were hauled to the gibbet, hanged and quartered. Their quarters were then exposed in the most conspicuous places of Perth, Stirling, and Dundee, and their heads fixed on the top of the prison in Edinburgh. Nor was the ignominy heaped upon the dead greater than the severity against the living. An attempt was made, on the very night of the catastrophe, to seize the two younger brothers of the house, who, at the time, were living with their unhappy mother at Dunkeld; but a vague report of danger had reached her, and they had escaped in disguise, accompanied by their tutor, who brought them in safety to Berwick.¹ On the King's return to Falkland, on the night of the 5th of August, the sister of Gowrie, Mrs Beatrix Ruthven, who was maid of honour to the Queen, was dismissed and banished from Court. By an Act of the same Parliament which inflicted the forfeiture, the very name of Ruthven was abolished; and the brethren and posterity of the house of Gowrie declared to be for ever incapable of enjoying inheritance, place, or dignity, in Scotland. Such was the avidity with which the favourites of the Court sought, for their own profit, to hunt down this ill-fated family, and fulfil the stern wishes of the King, that but for the generous protection of England, not a male of the house of Ruthven would have been left.

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., B.C., Scrope to Sir R. Cecil, 11th August, 1600. Ibid., same to the same, 15th August, 1600.

The relations between Elizabeth and James, previous to the conspiracy, had been, we have seen, far from friendly; and this connivance of the Queen at the concealment of the young Ruthvens, with other suspicious reports which arose immediately after the catastrophe, created a strong impression in the mind of the King that the plot had been fostered in England. It was remembered that Gowrie had been admitted, immediately previous to the attempt, into the most intimate confidence of the English Queen; it was observed that Rhynd, Gowrie's tutor, had been found destroying letters at the moment he was apprehended; it was reported that Nicolson, the English resident at Edinburgh, had been seen waiting, early on the morning of the 6th of August, on the shore at Leith, and had whispered to a friend who had betrayed his secret, that he was expecting strange news from the other side of the water. The Earl of Mar accused Lord Wylloughby, the Governor of Berwick, to the King, as being privy to the plot; but his only evidence seems to have been Wylloughby's intimacy with Gowrie at the Court of England; and this high-minded and brave soldier deeming his character far above such suspicion, did not condescend to confute the charge.¹ All these things, however, made an impression. When Nicolson assured the King of his devout thankfulness for his escape, the only answer he received, was an incredulous smile from James;

¹ MS. Letter, St. P. Off., Nicolson to Cecil, 6th August, 1600. Id. Ibid., 11th August, 1600. MS. Letter, St. P. Off., B.C., Lord Wylloughby to Cecil.

