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JAMES VI AND
THE GOWRIE
MYSTERY

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INTRODUCTION

An old Scottish lady, four generations ago, used to say, 'It is a great comfort to think that, at the Day of Judgment, we shall know the whole truth about the Gowrie Conspiracy at last.' Since the author, as a child, read 'The Tales of a Grandfather,' and shared King Jamie's disappointment when there was no pot of gold, but an armed man, in the turret, he had supposed that we do know all about the Gowrie Conspiracy, that it was a plot to capture the King, carry him to Fastcastle, and 'see how the country would take it,' as in the case of the Gunpowder Plot. But just as Father Gerard has tried to show that the Gunpowder affair may have been Cecil's plot, so modern historians doubt whether the Gowrie mystery was not a conspiracy by King James himself. Mr. Hume Brown appears rather to lean to this opinion, in the second volume of his 'History of Scotland,' and Dr. Masson, in his valuable edition of the 'Register of the Privy Council,' is also dubious. Mr. Louis Barbé, in his 'Tragedy of Gowrie House,' holds a brief against the King. Thus I have been tempted to study

this 'auld misterie' afresh, and have convinced myself that such historians as Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Frazer Tytler, and Mr. Hill Burton were not wrong; the plot was not the King's conspiracy, but the desperate venture of two very young men. The precise object remains obscure in detail, but the purpose was probably to see how a deeply discontented Kirk and country 'would take it.'

In working at this fascinatingly mysterious puzzle, I have made use of manuscript materials hitherto uncited. The most curious of these, the examinations and documents of the 'country writer,' Sprot, had been briefly summarised in Sir William Fraser's 'Memorials of the Earls of Haddington.' My attention was drawn to this source by the Rev. John Anderson, of the General Register House, who aided Sir William Fraser in the compilation of his book. The Earl of Haddington generously permitted me to have copies made of the documents, which Lady Cecily Baillie-Hamilton was kind enough to search for and rediscover in an enormous mass of documents bequeathed by the learned first Earl.

On reading the Calendars of the Hatfield MSS. I had observed that several letters by the possible conspirator, Logan of Restalrig, were in the possession of the Marquis of Salisbury, who was good enough to permit photographs of some specimens to be taken. These were compared, by Mr. Anderson, with the alleged plot-letters of Logan at Edinburgh; while photographs of the plot-letters were compared with Logan's authentic letters at Hatfield, by Mr. Gunton, to whose acuteness and energy I owe

the greatest gratitude. The results of the comparison settle the riddle of three centuries.

The other hitherto unused manuscripts are in no more recondite place than the Record Office in London, and I do not know how they managed to escape the notice of previous writers on the subject. To Dr. Masson's 'Register of the Privy Council' I am indebted for the sequel of the curious adventure of Mr. Robert Oliphant, whose part in the mystery, hitherto overlooked, is decisive, if we accept the evidence – a point on which the reader must form his own opinion. For copies made at the Record Office I have to thank the care and accuracy of Miss E. M. Thompson.

To Mr. Anderson's learning and zest in this 'longest and sorest chase' (as King James called his hunt on the morning of the fatal August 5) I am under the deepest obligations. The allurements of a romantic conclusion have never tempted him to leave the strait path of historical impartiality.

I have also to thank Mr. Henry Paton for his careful copies of the Haddington MSS., extracts from the Treasurer's accounts, and other researches.

For permission to reproduce the picture of Fastcastle by the Rev. Mr. Thomson of Duddingston, I have to thank the kindness of Mrs. Blackwood-Porter. The painting, probably of about 1820, when compared with the photograph of to-day, shows the destruction wrought by wind and weather in the old fortalice.

My obligations to Sir James Balfour Paul (Lyon King of

Arms) for information on points of Heraldry ought to be gratefully acknowledged.

Since this book was written, the author has had an opportunity to read an Apology for the Ruthvens by the late Andrew Bisset. This treatise is apt to escape observation: it is entitled 'Sir Walter Scott,' and occupies pp. 172–303 in 'Essays on Historical Truth,' long out of print. ¹ On many points Mr. Bisset agreed with Mr. Barbé in his 'Tragedy of Gowrie House,' and my replies to Mr. Barbé serve for his predecessor. But Mr. Bisset found no evidence that the King had formed a plot against Gowrie. By a modification of the contemporary conjecture of Sir William Bowes he suggested that a brawl between the King and the Master of Ruthven occurred in the turret, occasioned by an atrocious insult offered to the Master by the King. This hypothesis, for various reasons, does not deserve discussion. Mr. Bisset appeared to attribute the Sprot papers to the combined authorship of the King and Sir Thomas Hamilton: which our new materials disprove. A critic who, like Mr. Bisset, accused the King of poisoning Prince Henry, and many other persons, was not an unprejudiced historian.

¹ Longmans, Green, & Co., 1871.

I. THE MYSTERY AND THE EVIDENCE

There are enigmas in the annals of most peoples; riddles put by the Sphinx of the Past to the curious of the new generations. These questions do not greatly concern the scientific historian, who is busy with constitution-making, statistics, progress, degeneration, in short with human evolution. These high matters, these streams of tendency, form the staple of history, but the problems of personal character and action still interest some inquiring minds. Among these enigmas nearly the most obscure, 'The Gowrie Conspiracy,' is our topic.

This affair is one of the haunting mysteries of the past, one of the problems that nobody has solved. The events occurred in 1600, but the interest which they excited was so keen that belief in the guilt or innocence of the two noble brothers who perished in an August afternoon, was a party shibboleth in the Wars of the Saints against the Malignants, the strife of Cavaliers and Roundheads. The problem has ever since attracted the curious, as do the enigma of Perkin Warbeck, the true character of Richard III, the real face behind 'The Iron Mask,' the identity of the False Pucelle, and the innocence or guilt of Mary Stuart.

In certain respects the Gowrie mystery is necessarily less attractive than that of 'the fairest and most pitiless Queen on

earth.’ There is no woman in the story. The world, of course, when the Ruthvens died, at once acted on the maxim, *cherchez la femme*. The woman in the case, men said, was the beautiful Queen, Anne of Denmark, wife of James VI. That fair and frivolous dame, ‘very very woman,’ certainly did her best, by her behaviour, to encourage the belief that she was the cause of these sorrows. Even so, when the Bonny Earl Moray – the tallest and most beautiful man in Scotland – died like a lion dragged down by wolves, the people sang:

He was a brave gallant,
And he rode at the ring,
And the Bonny Earl Moray,
He might have been the King.

He was a brave gallant,
And he rode at the glove,
And the Bonny Earl Moray
He was the Queen’s love.

On one side was a beautiful Queen mated with James VI, a pedant and a clown. On the other side were, first the Bonny Earl, then the Earl of Gowrie, both young, brave, handsome, both suddenly slain by the King’s friends: none knew why. The opinion of the godly, of the Kirk, of the people, and even of politicians, leaped to the erroneous conclusion that the young men perished, like Königsmarck, because they were beautiful

and beloved, and because the Queen was fair and kind, and the King was ugly, treacherous, and jealous. The rumour also ran, at least in tradition, that Gowrie 'might have been the King,' an idea examined in Appendix A. Here then was an explanation of the slaying of the Ruthvens on the lines dear to romance. The humorous King Jamie (who, if he was not always sensible, at least treated his flighty wife with abundance of sense) had to play the part of King Mark of Cornwall to Gowrie's Sir Tristram. For this theory, we shall show, no evidence exists, and, in 'looking for the woman,' fancy found two men. The Queen was alternately said to love Gowrie, and to love his brother, the Master of Ruthven, a lad of nineteen – if she did not love both at once. It is curious that the affair did not give rise to ballads; if it did, none has reached us.

In truth there was no woman in the case, and this of course makes the mystery much less exciting than that of Mary Stuart, for whom so many swords and pens have been drawn. The interest of character and of love is deficient. Of Gowrie's character, and even of his religion, apart from his learning and fascination, we really know almost nothing. Did he cherish that strongest and most sacred of passions, revenge; had he brooded over it in Italy, where revenge was subtler and craftier than in Scotland? Did this passion blend with the vein of fanaticism in his nature? Had he been biding his time, and dreaming, over sea, boyish dreams of vengeance and ambition? All this appears not improbable, and would, if true, explain all; but evidence is defective. Had Gowrie really cherished the legacy of revenge for

a father slain, and a mother insulted; had he studied the subtleties of Italian crime, pondered over an Italian plot till it seemed feasible, and communicated his vision to the boy brother whom he found at home – the mystery would be transparent.

As to King James, we know him well. The babe ‘wronged in his mother’s womb;’ threatened by conspirators before his birth; terrified by a harsh tutor as a child; bullied; preached at; captured; insulted; ruled now by debauched favourites, now by godly ruffians; James naturally grew up a dissembler, and betrayed his father’s murderer with a kiss. He was frightened into deceit: he could be cruel; he became, as far as he might, a tyrant. But, though not the abject coward of tradition, James (as he himself observed) was never the man to risk his life in a doubtful brawl, on the chance that his enemies might perish while he escaped. For him a treachery of that kind, an affair of sword and dagger fights on staircases and in turrets and chambers, in the midst of a town of doubtful loyalty, had certainly no attractions. Moreover, he had a sense of humour. This has been the opinion of our best historians, Scott, Mr. Tytler, and Mr. Hill Burton; but enthusiastic writers have always espoused the cause of the victims, the Ruthvens, so young, brave, handsome; so untimely slain, as it were on their own hearthstone. Other authors, such as Dr. Masson in our own day, and Mr. S. R. Gardiner, have abstained from a verdict, or have attempted the *via media*; have leaned to the idea that the Ruthvens died in an accidental brawl, caused by a nervous and motiveless fit of terror on the

part of the King. Thus the question is unsettled, the problem is unsolved. Why did the jolly hunt at Falkland, in the bright August morning, end in the sanguinary scuffle in the town house at Perth; the deaths of the Ruthvens; the tumult in the town; the King's homeward ride through the dark and dripping twilight; the laying of the dead brothers side by side, while the old family servant weeps above their bodies; and the wailing of the Queen and her ladies in Falkland Palace, when the torches guide the cavalcade into the palace court, and the strange tale of slaughter is variously told, 'the reports so fighting together that no man could have any certainty'? Where lay the actual truth?

This problem, with which the following pages are concerned, is much darker and more complex than that of the guilty 'Casket Letters' attributed to Mary, Queen of Scots. The Queen did write these, in the madness of a criminal passion; or she wrote parts of them, the rest being garbled or forged. In either case, her motives, and the motives of the possible forgers, are distinct, and are human. The Queen was in love with one man, and hated another to the death; or her enemies desired to prove that these were her moods. Absolute certainty escapes us, but, either way, motives and purposes are intelligible.

Not so with the Gowrie mystery. The King, Mary's son, after hunting for four hours, rides to visit Lord Gowrie, a neighbour. After luncheon, that nobleman and his brother are slain, in their own house, by the King's attendants. The King gives his version of the events instantly; he never varies from it in any

essential point, but the story is almost incredible. On the other hand, the slain men cannot speak, and only one of them, if both were innocent, could have told what occurred. But one of their apologists, at the time, produced a version of the events which is, beyond all doubt, boldly mendacious. It was easy to criticise and ridicule the King's version; but the opposite version, hitherto unknown to historians, destroys itself by its conspicuous falsehoods. In the nature of the case, as will appear, no story accounting for such wild events could be easily credible, so extraordinary, motiveless, and inexplicable do the circumstances appear. If we try the theory that the King wove a plot, we are met by the fact that his plot could not have succeeded without the voluntary and vehement collaboration of one of his victims, a thing that no man could have reckoned on. If we adopt the idea that the victims had laid a trap for the King, we have only a vague surmise as to its aim, purpose, and method. The later light which seemed to fall on the affair, as we shall see, only darkens what was already obscure. The inconceivable iniquity of the Government, at a later date, reflects such discredit on all concerned on their side, that we might naturally, though illogically, be inclined to believe that, from the first, the King was the conspirator. But *that*, we shall find, was almost, or quite, a physical impossibility.

Despite these embroilments, I am, in this case, able to reach a conclusion satisfactory to myself, a thing which, in the affair of the Casket Letters and Queen Mary, I was unable to do. ² There

² See *The Mystery of Mary Stuart*. Longmans, 1901.

is no doubt, in my own mind, that the Earl of Gowrie and his brother laid a trap for King James, and fell into the pit which they had digged.

To what precise end they had plotted to seize the King's person, what they meant to do with him when they had got him, must remain matter of conjecture. But that they intended to seize him, I have no doubt at all.

These pages, on so old and vexed a problem, would not have been written, had I not been fortunate enough to obtain many unpublished manuscript materials. Some of these at least clear up the secondary enigma of the sequel of the problem of 1600. Different readers will probably draw different conclusions from some of the other documents, but perhaps nobody will doubt that they throw strange new lights on Scottish manners and morals.

The scheme adopted here is somewhat like that of Mr. Browning's poem, 'The Ring and the Book.' The personages tell their own stories of the same set of events, in which they were more or less intimately concerned. This inevitably entails some repetition, but I am unable to find any plan less open to objection.

It must, of course, be kept in mind that all the evidence is of a suspicious nature. The King, if he were the conspirator, or even if innocent, had to clear himself; and, frankly, his Majesty's word was not to be relied upon. However, he alone was cross-examined, by an acute and hostile catechist, and that upon oath, though not in a court of justice. The evidence of his retinue, and of some other persons present, was also taken on oath, three

months after the events, before a Parliamentary Committee, 'The Lords of the Articles.' We shall see that, nine years later, a similar Committee was deceived shamelessly by the King's Government, he himself being absent in England. But the nature of the evidence, in the second case, was entirely different: it did not rest on the sworn testimony of a number of nobles, gentlemen, and citizens, but on a question of handwriting, *comparatio literarum*, as in the case of the Casket Letters. That the witnesses in 1600 did not perjure themselves, in the trial which followed on the slaughter of the Ruthvens, is what I have to argue. Next, we have the evidence, taken under torture, of three of the slain Earl's retainers, three weeks after the events. No such testimony is now reckoned of value, but it will be shown that the statements made by the tortured men only compromise the Earl and his brother incidentally, and in a manner probably not perceived by the deponents themselves. They denied all knowledge of a plot, disclaimed belief in a plot by the Earl, and let out what was suspicious in a casual way, without observing the import of their own remarks.

Finally, we have the evidence of the only living man, except the King, who was present at the central point of the occurrences. That this man was a most false and evasive character, that he was doubtless amenable to bribes, that he was richly rewarded, I freely admit. But I think it can be made probable, by evidence hitherto overlooked, that he really was present on the crucial occasion, and that, with all allowances for his character and

position, his testimony fits into the facts, while, if it be discarded, no hypothesis can account for *him*, and his part in the adventure. In short, the King's tale, almost incredible as it appears, contains the only explanation which is not demonstrably impossible. To this conclusion, let me repeat, I am drawn by no sentiment for that unsentimental Prince, 'gentle King Jamie.' He was not the man to tell the truth, 'if he could think of anything better.' But, where other corroboration is impossible, by the nature of the circumstances, facts corroborate the King's narrative. His version 'colligates' them; though extravagant they become not incoherent. No other hypothesis produces coherency: each guess breaks down on demonstrated facts.

II. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE RUTHVENS

In the month of August 1600 his Majesty the King of Scotland, James, sixth of that name, stood in more than common need of the recreation of the chase. Things had been going contrary to his pleasure in all directions. 'His dearest sister,' Queen Elizabeth (as he pathetically said), seemed likely 'to continue as long as Sun or Moon,' and was in the worst of humours. Her minister, Cecil, was apparently more ill disposed towards the Scottish King than usual, while the minister's rival, the Earl of Essex, had been suggesting to James plans for a military demonstration on the Border. Money was even more than normally scarce; the Highlands were more than common unruly; stories of new conspiracies against the King's liberty were flying about; and, above all, a Convention of the Estates had just refused, in June, to make a large grant of money to his Majesty. It was also irritating that an old and trusted servant, Colonel Stewart, wished to quit the country, and take English service against the Irish rebels. This gentleman, sixteen years before, had been instrumental in the arrest and execution of the Earl of Gowrie; the new young Earl, son of the late peer, had just returned from the Continent to Scotland, and Colonel Stewart was afraid that Gowrie might wish to avenge his father. Therefore

he desired to take service in Ireland.

With all these frets, the King needed the refreshment of hunting the buck in his park of Falkland. He ordered his own hunting costume; it was delivered early in August, and (which is singular) was paid for instantly. Green English cloth was the basis of his apparel, and five ounces of silver decorated his second-best ‘socks.’ His boots had velvet tops, embroidered; his best ‘socks’ were adorned with heavy gold embroidery; he even bought a new horse. His gentlemen, John Ramsay, John Murray, George Murray, and John Auchmuty, were attired, at the Royal expense, in coats of green cloth, like the King.³

Thus equipped, the Royal party rose early on the morning of Tuesday, August 5, left the pleasant house of Falkland, with its strong round towers that had lately protected James from an attack by his cousin, wild Frank Stewart, the Earl of Bothwell; and rode to the stables in the park; ‘the weather,’ says his Majesty, ‘being wonderful pleasant and seasonable.’⁴ ‘All the jolly hunt was there;’ ‘Tell True’ and the other hounds were yelping at the limits of their leashes; the Duke of Lennox and the Earl of Mar, friends of James from his youth, and honourable men, were the chief nobles in the crowd; wherein were two or three of the loyal family of Erskine, cousins of Mar, and a Dr. Herries, remarkable for a club foot.

At the stables, hacks were discarded, hunters were led out,

³ Extracted from the Treasurer’s Accounts, July, August, 1600. MS.

⁴ The King’s Narrative, Pitcairn’s *Criminal Trials of Scotland*, ii. 210.

men were mounting, the King had his foot in the stirrup, when a young gentleman, the Master of Ruthven, rode swiftly up from the town of Falkland. He had trotted over, very early, from the town house, at Perth (some twelve or fourteen miles away), of his brother, the Earl of Gowrie. He was but nineteen years of age, tall, handsome, and brother of the Queen's favourite maid of honour, Mrs. Beatrix Ruthven. That he was himself one of the Gentlemen of the Household has often been said, but we find no trace of money spent for him in the Royal accounts: in fact he had asked for the place, but had not yet obtained it.⁵ However, if we may believe the Royal word (which is a matter of choice), James 'loved the young Master like a brother.'

The Master approached the King, and entered into conversation with him. James's account of what he had to say must be given later. For the present we may be content with the depositions on oath, which were made later, at a trial in November, by the attendants of the King and other witnesses. Among these was the Duke of Lennox, who swore to the following effect. They hunted their buck, and killed him. The King, in place of trotting back to lunch at the House of Falkland (to which the progress of the chase had led the sportsmen round in a circle), bade the Duke accompany him to Perth, some twelve miles away, 'to speak with the Earl of Gowrie.' His Majesty then rode on. Lennox despatched his groom for his sword, and for a fresh horse (another was sent after the King); he then

⁵ The King's Narrative, *ut supra*. Treasurer's Accounts, MS.

mounted and followed. When he rejoined James, the King said ‘You cannot guess what errand I am riding for; I am going to get a treasure in Perth. The Master of Ruthven’ (‘Mr. Alexander Ruthven’) ‘has informed me that he has found a man with a pitcher full of gold coins of great sorts.’ James also asked Lennox what he deemed of the Master, whose manner he reckoned very strange. ‘Nothing but an honest, discreet gentleman,’ said the Duke. The King next gave details about the treasure, and Lennox said he thought the tale ‘unlikely,’ as it was, more or less. James then bade Lennox say nothing on the matter to Ruthven, who wanted it to be a secret. At about a mile from Perth, the Master galloped forward, to warn his brother, the Earl, who met the Royal party, on foot, with some companions, near the town.⁶ This was about one o’clock in the afternoon.

The Royal party, of thirteen nobles and gentlemen, then entered the Earl’s house. It faced the street, as the House of Falkland also does, and, at the back, had gardens running down to the Tay. It is necessary to understand the situation and topography of Gowrie House. Passing down South Street, or ‘Shoe Gait,’ the chief street in Perth, then a pretty little town, you found it crossed at right angles by a street called, on the left, Water Gate, on the right, Spey Gate. Immediately fronting you, as you came to the end of South Street, was the gateway of Gowrie House, the garden wall continuing towards your right. On your left were the houses in Water Gate, occupied by rich

⁶ Lennox in Pitcairn, ii. 171–174.

citizens and lairds. Many will understand the position if they fancy themselves walking down one of the streets which run from the High Street, at Oxford, towards the river. You then find Merton College facing you, the street being continued to the left in such old houses as Beam Hall. The gate of Gowrie House fronted you, as does the gate-tower of Merton, and led into a quadrangle, the front court, called The Close. Behind Gowrie House was the garden, and behind that ran the river Tay, as the Isis flows behind Merton and Corpus. Entering the quadrangle of Gowrie House you found, on your right and facing you, a pile of buildings like an inverted L (\neg). The basement was occupied by domestic offices: at the angle of the \neg was the main entrance. On your right, and much nearer to you than the main entrance, a door opened on a narrow spiral staircase, so dark that it was called the Black Turnpike.

As to the interior, entering the main doorway you found yourself in the hall. A door led thence into a smaller dining-room on the left. The hall itself had a door and external stair giving on the garden behind. The chief staircase, which you entered from the hall, led to the Great Gallery, built and decorated by the late Earl. This extended above the dining-room and the hall, and, to the right, was separated by a partition and a door from the large upstairs room on the same flat called 'The Gallery Chamber.' At the extremity of this chamber, on the left hand as you advanced, was a door leading into a 'round,' or turret, or little circular-shaped 'study,' of which one window seems to have looked to

the gateway, the other to the street. People below in the street could see a man looking out of the turret window. A door in the gallery chamber gave on the narrow staircase called 'The Black Turnpike,' by which the upper floor might be reached by any one from the quadrangle, without entering the main door, and going up the broad chief staircase. Thus, to quote a poet who wrote while Gowrie House was extant (in 1638):

The Palace kythes, may nam'd be Perth's White Hall
With orchards like these of Hesperides.

The palace was destroyed, to furnish a site for a gaol and county buildings, in 1807, but the most interesting parts had long been in ruins.⁷

In 1774, an antiquary, Mr. Cant, writes that the palace, after the Forty Five, was converted into artillery barracks. 'We see nothing but the remains of its former grandeur.' The coats of arms of 'the nobility and gentlemen of fortune,' who dwelt in Spey Gate and Water Gate, were, in 1774, still visible on the walls of their houses. A fragment of the old palace is said to exist to-day in the Gowrie Inn. Into this palace the King was led by Gowrie: he was taken to the dining chamber on the left of the great hall; in the hall itself Lennox, Mar, and the rest of the retinue waited and wearied, for apparently no dinner had been provided, and even a drink for his thirsty Majesty was long in

⁷ The description is taken from diagrams in Pitcairn, derived from a local volume of Antiquarian Proceedings. See, too, *The Muses' Threnodie*, by H. Adamson, 1638, with notes by James Cant (Perth, 1774), pp. 163, 164.

coming. Gowrie and the Master kept going in and out, servants were whispered to, and Sir Thomas Erskine sent a townsman to buy him a pair of green silk stockings in Perth.⁸ He wanted to dine comfortably.

Leaving the King's retinue in the hall, and the King in the dining chamber off the hall, we may note what, up to this point, the nobles and gentlemen of the suite had to say, at the trial in November, about the adventures of that August morning. Mar had not seen the Master at Falkland; after the kill Mar did not succeed in rejoining James till they were within two or three miles of Perth.

Drummond of Inchaffray had nodded to the Master, at Falkland, before the Master met the King at the stables. He later saw the Master in conference for about a quarter of an hour with James, outside the stables. The Master then left the King: Inchaffray invited him to breakfast, but he declined, 'as his Majesty had ordered him to wait upon him.' (According to other evidence he had already breakfasted at Falkland.) Inchaffray then breakfasted in Falkland town, and next rode along the highway towards his own house. On the road he overtook Lennox, Lindores, Urchill, Hamilton of Grange, Finlay Taylor, the King, and the Master, riding Perthwards. He joined them, and went with them into Gowrie House.

Nobody else, among the witnesses, did anything but agree with Lennox's account up to this point. But four menials of

⁸ Pitcairn, ii. 199.

James, for example, a cellarer and a porter, were at Gowrie House, in addition to the nobles and gentlemen who gave this evidence.

To return to Lennox's tale: dinner was not ready for his hungry Majesty, as we have said, till an hour after his arrival, was not ready, indeed, till about two o'clock. He had obviously not been expected, or Gowrie did not wish it to be known that he was expected, and himself had dined before the King's arrival, between twelve and one o'clock. A shoulder of mutton, a fowl, and a solitary grouse were all that the Earl's caterer could procure, except cold meat: obviously a poor repast to set before a king. It is said that the Earl had meant to leave Perth in the afternoon. When James reached the stage of dessert, Gowrie, who had waited on him, entered the hall, and invited the suite to dine. When they had nearly finished, Gowrie returned to them in the hall, and sent round a grace-cup, in which all pledged the King. Lennox then rose, to rejoin the King (who now passed, with the Master, across and out of the hall), but Gowrie said 'His Majesty was gone upstairs quietly some quiet errand.' Gowrie then called for the key of the garden, on the banks of the Tay, and he, Lindores, the lame Dr. Herries, and others went into the garden, where, one of them tells us, they ate cherries. While they were thus engaged, Gowrie's equerry, or master stabler, a Mr. Thomas Cranstoun, who had been long in France, and had returned thence with the Earl in April, appeared, crying, 'The King has mounted, and is riding through the Inch,' that is, the

Inch of Perth, where the famous clan battle of thirty men a side had been fought centuries ago. Gowrie shouted ‘Horses! horses!’ but Cranstoun said ‘Your horse is at Scone,’ some two miles off, on the further side of the Tay. Why the Earl that day kept his horse so remote, in times when men of his rank seldom walked, we may conjecture later (cf. p. 86, *infra*).

The Earl, however (says Lennox), affected not to hear Cranstoun, and still shouted ‘Horses!’ He and Lennox then passed into the house, through to the front yard, or Close, and so to the outer gate, giving on the street. Here Lennox asked the porter, Christie, if the King had gone. The porter said he was certain that the King had not left the house. On this point Lindores, who had been with Gowrie and Lennox in the garden, and accompanied them to the gate, added (as indeed Lennox also did) that Gowrie now explained to the porter that James had departed by the back gate. ‘That cannot be, my Lord,’ said the porter, ‘for I have the key of the back gate.’ Andrew Ray, a bailie of Perth, who had been in the house, looking on, told the same tale, adding that Gowrie gave the porter the lie. The porter corroborated all this at the trial, and quoted his own speech about the key, as it was given by Lindores. He had the keys, and must know whether the King had ridden away or not.

In this odd uncertainty, Gowrie said to Lennox, ‘I am sure the King has gone; but stay, I shall go upstairs, and get your lordship the very certainty.’ Gowrie thereon went from the street door, through the court, and up the chief staircase of the house, whence

he came down again at once, and anew affirmed to Lennox that ‘the King was forth at the back gate and away.’ They all then went out of the front gate, and stood in the street there, talking, and wondering where they should seek for his Majesty.

Where was the King? Here we note a circumstance truly surprising. It never occurred to the Earl of Gowrie, when dubiously told that the King had ‘loupen on’ – and ridden off – to ask, *Where is the King’s horse?* If the Royal nag was in the Earl’s stable, then James had not departed. Again – a thing more astonishing still – it has never occurred to any of the unnumbered writers on the Gowrie conspiracy to ask, ‘How did the Earl, if guilty of falsehood as to the King’s departure, mean to get over the difficulty about the King’s horse?’ If the horse was in the stable, then the King had not ridden away, as the Earl declared. Gowrie does not seem to have kidnapped the horse. We do not hear, from the King, or any one, that the horse was missing when the Royal party at last rode home.

The author is bound, in honour, to observe that this glaring difficulty about the horse did not occur to him till he had written the first draft of this historical treatise, after reading so many others on the subject. And yet the eagle glance of Mr. Sherlock Holmes would at once have lighted on his Majesty’s mount. However, neither at the time, nor in the last three centuries (as far as we know), was any one sensible enough to ask ‘How about the King’s horse?’

We return to the question, ‘Where was the King?’

Some time had elapsed since he passed silently from the chamber where he had lunched, through the hall, with the Master, and so upstairs, 'going quietly a quiet errand,' Gowrie had explained to the men of the retinue. The gentlemen had then strolled in the garden, till Cranstoun came out to them with the news of the King's departure. Young John Ramsay, one of James's gentlemen, had met the Laird of Pittencrieff in the hall, and had asked where his Majesty was. Both had gone upstairs, had examined the fair gallery filled with pictures collected by the late Earl, and had remained 'a certain space' admiring it. They thence went into the front yard, the Close, where Cranstoun met them and told them that the King had gone. Instead of joining the gentlemen whom we left loitering and wondering outside the front gate, on the street, Ramsay ran to the stables for his horse, he said, and, as he waited at the stable door (being further from the main entrance than Lennox, Mar, and the rest), he heard James's voice, 'but understood not what he spake.'⁹

The others, on the street, just outside the gate, being nearer the house than Ramsay, suddenly heard the King's voice, and even his words. Lennox said to Mar, 'The King calls, be he where he will.' They all glanced up at the house, and saw, says Lennox, 'his Majesty looking out at the window, hatless, his face red, and a hand gripping his face and mouth.' The King called: 'I am murdered. Treason! My Lord of Mar, help, help!' Mar corroborated: Inchaffray saw the King vanish from the window,

⁹ The evidence of these witnesses is in Pitcairn, ii. 171–191.

‘and in his judgment, his Majesty was pulled, perforce, in at the same window.’ Bailie Ray of Perth saw the window pushed up, saw the King’s face appear, and heard his cries. Murray of Arbany, who had come to Perth from another quarter, heard the King. Murray seems to have been holding the King’s falcon on his wrist, in hall; he had later handed the bird to young Ramsay.

On beholding this vision of the King, hatless, red-faced, vociferous, and suddenly vanishing, most of his lords and gentlemen, and Murray of Arbany, rushed through the gate, through the Close, into the main door of the house, up the broad staircase, through the long fair gallery, *and there they were stopped by a locked door*. They could not reach the King! Finding a ladder, they used it as a battering-ram, but it broke in their hands. They sent for hammers, and during some half an hour they thundered at the door, breaking a hole in a panel, but unable to gain admission.

Now these facts, as to the locked door, and the inability of most of the suite to reach the King, are denied by no author. They make it certain that, if James had contrived a plot against the two Ruthvens, he had not taken his two nobles, Mar and Lennox, and these other gentlemen, and Murray of Arbany, into the scheme. He had not even arranged that another of his retinue should bring them from their futile hammer-work, to his assistance, by another way.

For there *was* another way. Young Ramsay was not with Lennox and the rest, when they saw and heard the flushed and

excited King cry out of the window. Ramsay, he says, was further off than the rest; was at the stable door: he heard and recognised James's voice, but saw nothing of him, and distinguished no words. He ran into the front yard, through the outer gate. Lennox and the rest had already vanished within the house. Ramsay noticed the narrow door in the wall of the house, giving on the quadrangle, and nearer him than the main door of entrance, to reach which he must cross the quadrangle diagonally. He rushed into the narrow doorway, ran up a dark corkscrew staircase, found a door at the top, heard a struggling and din of men's feet within, 'dang open' the door, *caught a glimpse of a man behind the King's back*, and saw James and the Master 'wrestling together in each other's arms.'

James had the Master's head under his arm, the Master, 'almost upon his knees,' had his hand on the King's face and mouth. 'Strike him low,' cried the King, 'because he wears a secret mail doublet' – such as men were wont to wear on a doubtful though apparently peaceful occasion, like a Warden's Day on the Border. Ramsay threw down the King's falcon, which he had taken from Murray and bore on his wrist, drew his dagger or *couteau de chasse*, and struck the Master on the face and neck. The King set his foot on the falcon's leash, and so held it. Ramsay might have spared and seized the Master, instead of wounding him; James later admitted *that*, but 'Man,' he said, 'I had neither God nor the Devil before me, but my own defence.' Remember that hammers were thundering on a door hard by, and that neither

James nor Ramsay knew who knocked so loud – enemies or friends.

The King then, says Ramsay, pushed the wounded Master down the steep narrow staircase up which the young man had run. The man of whom Ramsay had caught a glimpse, standing behind the King, had vanished like a wraith. Ramsay went to a window, looked out, and, seeing Sir Thomas Erskine, cried, ‘Come up to the top of the staircase.’

Where was Erskine, and what was he doing? He had not followed Lennox and Mar in their rush back into the house. On hearing James’s cries from the window, he and his brother had tried to seize Gowrie, who had been with the party of Lennox and Mar. If James was in peril, within Gowrie’s house, they argued, naturally, that Gowrie was responsible. Not drawing sword or dagger – daggers, indeed, they had none – the two Erskine brothers rushed on Gowrie, who was crying ‘What is the matter? I know nothing!’ They bore him, or nearly bore him, to the ground, but his retainers separated the stragglers, and one, a Ruthven, knocked Sir Thomas down with his fist. The knight arose, and ran into the front court, where Dr. Herries asked him ‘what the matter meant.’ At this moment Erskine heard Ramsay cry ‘Come up here,’ from the top of the narrow dark staircase, he says, *not* from the window; Ramsay may have called from both. Erskine, who was accompanied by the lame Dr. Herries, and by a menial of his brother’s named Wilson, found the bleeding Master near the foot of the stair, and shouted ‘This is the traitor, strike him.’

The stricken lad fell, saying, 'Alas, I had not the wyte of it,' and the three entered the chamber where now were only the King and Ramsay. Words, not very intelligible as reported by Erskine (we consider them later), passed between him and the King. Though Erskine does not say so, they shut James up in the turret opening into the chamber where they were, and instantly Cranstoun, the Earl's equerry, entered with a drawn sword, followed by Gowrie, with 'two swords,' while some other persons followed Gowrie.

Where had Gowrie been since the two Erskines tried to seize him in the street, and were separated from him by a throng of his retainers? Why was Gowrie, whose honour was interested in the King's safety, later in reaching the scene than Erskine, the limping Dr. Herries, and the serving man, Wilson? The reason appears to have been that, after the two Erskines were separated from Gowrie, Sir Thomas ran straight from the street, through the gateway, into the front court of the house, meeting, in the court, Dr. Herries, who was slow in his movements. But Gowrie, on the other hand, was detained by certain of Tullibardine's servants, young Tullibardine being present. This, at least, was the story given under examination by Mr. Thomas Cranstoun, Gowrie's master stabler, while other witnesses mention that Gowrie became involved in a struggle, and went 'back from' his house, further up or down the street. Young Tullibardine, present at this fray, was the heir of Murray of Tullibardine, and ancestor, in the male line, of the present Duke of Atholl. He later married a niece of the Earl of Gowrie. His father being a man of forty

in 1600, young Tullibardine must have been very young indeed. The Murrays were in Perth on the occasion of the marriage of one of their clan, an innkeeper.

Some of their party were in the street, and seeing an altercation in which two of the King's gentlemen were prevented from seizing Gowrie, they made an ineffectual effort to capture the Earl. Gowrie ran from them along the street, and there 'drew his two swords out of one scabbard,' says Cranstoun.¹⁰ The Earl had just arrived in Scotland from Italy, where he had acquired the then fashionable method of fencing with twin-swords, worn in a single scabbard. Gowrie, then, had retreated from the Murrays to the house of one Macbreck, as Cranstoun and Macbreck himself declared. Cranstoun too drew his sword, and let his cloak fall, asking Gowrie 'what the fray was.' The Earl said that 'he would enter his own house, or die by the way.' Cranstoun said that he would go foremost, 'but at whom should he strike, for he knew not who was the enemy?' He had only seen the Erskines collar Gowrie, then certain Murrays interfere, and he was entirely puzzled. Gowrie did not reply, and the pair advanced to the door of the house through a perplexed throng. A servant of Gowrie's placed a steel cap on his head, and with some four or five of Gowrie's friends (Hew Moncrieff, Alexander Ruthven, Harry Ruthven, and Patrick Eviot) the Earl and Cranstoun entered the front court.

Here Cranstoun saw the body of a man, whether dead or

¹⁰ Cranstoun's deposition in Pitcairn, ii. 156, 157. At Falkland August 6.

wounded he knew not, lying at ‘the old turnpike door,’ the entry to the dark narrow staircase up which Ramsay had run to the King’s rescue. ‘Who lies there?’ asked Cranstoun. Gowrie only replied, ‘Up the stair!’ Cranstoun led the way, Gowrie came next; the other four must have followed, for several witnesses presently saw them come down again, wounded and bleeding. Cranstoun found Erskine, Ramsay, and Herries with drawn swords in the chamber. The King, then in the turret, he did not see. He taunted Herries; Ramsay and Gowrie crossed swords; Cranstoun dealt, he says, with Herries, Erskine, and perhaps Wilson. But, though Cranstoun ‘nowise knew who followed him,’ the four men already named, two Ruthvens, a Moncrieff, and Eviot, were in the fray, though there was some uncertainty about Eviot.¹¹

The position of the King, at this moment, was unenviable. He was shut up in the little round turret room. On the other side of the door, in the chamber, swords were clashing, feet were stamping. James knew that he had four defenders, one of them a lame medical man; who or how many their opponents might be, he could not know. The air rang with the thunder of hammers on the door of the chamber where the fight raged; were they wielded by friends or enemies? From the turret window the King could hear the town bell ringing, and see the gathering of the burgesses of Perth, the friends of their Provost, Gowrie. We know that they

¹¹ The adversaries of the King say that these men ran up, and were wounded, *later*, in another encounter. As to this we have no evidence, but we have evidence of their issuing, wounded, from the dark staircase at the moment when Cranstoun fled thence.

could easily muster eight hundred armed men. Which side would they take? The Murrays, as we saw, had done nothing, except that some of them had crowded round Gowrie. Meanwhile there was clash of steel, stamping of feet, noise of hammers, while the King, in the turret, knew not how matters were going.

Cranstoun only saw his own part of the fight in the chamber. How Ramsay and Gowrie sped in their duel he knew not. Ramsay, he says, turned on *him*, and ran him through the body; Herries also struck him. Of Gowrie he saw nothing; he fled, when wounded, down the turret stair, his companions following or preceding him. Gowrie, in fact, had fallen, leaving Ramsay free to deal with Cranstoun. Writers of both parties declare that Ramsay had cried to Gowrie, 'You have slain the King!' that Gowrie dropped his points, and that Ramsay lunged and ran him through the body. Erskine says that he himself was wounded in the right hand by Cranstoun; Herries lost two fingers. When Ramsay ran Gowrie through, the Earl, says Erskine, fell into the arms of a man whom he himself knew not; Gowrie's party retreated, but it seems they returned to the head of the narrow staircase, and renewed hostilities by pushing swords and halberds under the narrow staircase door. This appears from the evidence of Lennox.

After pounding at the door so long, Lennox's party at last sent Robert Brown (a servant of James's, who had brought the hammers) round to discover another way of reaching the King. Brown, too, now went up the narrow staircase, and in the gallery

chamber he found the King, with Herries, Erskine, Ramsay, Wilson, and the dead Earl. He reassured James; the hammerers were his friends. They handed, says Lennox, one of the hammers to the King's party, through a shattered panel, 'and they within broke the doors, and gave them entry.' At this time, halberts and swords were being struck, by Gowrie's retainers, under the door, and through the sides of the door, of the chamber; this door apparently being that from the chamber to the narrow staircase. Murray of Arbany (who had come into the house at the end of dinner) was stricken through the leg by one of these weapons. Deacon Rhynd of Perth saw Hew Moncrieff striking with 'a Jeddart staff,' a kind of halbert. A voice, that of Alexander Ruthven (a cousin of the fallen Earl), cried 'For God's sake, my lord, tell me how the Earl of Gowrie does.' 'He is well. Go your way; you are a fool; you will get no thanks for this labour,' answered Lennox, and all was silence. Alexander Ruthven and the rest retreated; Ruthven rushed to the town, rousing the people, and rifling shops in search of gunpowder. The King and the nobles knelt in prayer on the bloody floor of the chamber where the dead Gowrie lay. For some time the confused mob yelled outside, shaking their fists at the King's party in the window: men and women crying 'Come down, Green-coats, ye have committed murder! Bloody butchers!' Others cried 'The King is shot!' The exits of the house were guarded by retainers of Gowrie – Rentoul, Bissett, and others.

Mar and Lennox, from the window, explained to the mob that

the King was well. James showed himself, the magistrates and nobles pacified the people, who, some armed, some unarmed, were all perplexed, whether they were anxious about the King or about their Provost, the Earl. From the evidence of scores of burghers, it appears that the tumult did not last long. One man was reaping in the Morton haugh. Hearing the town bell he hastened in, 'when all the tumult was ceased,' and the magistrates, Ray and others, were sending the people to their houses, as also did young Tullibardine. A baker, hearing the bell, went to the town cross, and so to Gowrie's house, where he met the stream of people coming away. Another baker was at work, and stayed with his loaves, otherwise he 'would have lost his whole baking.' The King represents that it was between seven and eight in the evening before matters were quiet enough for him to ride home to Falkland, owing to the tumult. The citizens doubtless minimised, and James probably exaggerated, the proportions and duration of the disturbance.

This version of that strange affair, the slaughter of the Ruthvens, is taken entirely from the lips of sworn witnesses. We still know no more than we did as to what passed between the moment when James and the Master, alone, left the dining chamber, and the moment when the King cried 'Treason!' out of the turret window.

The problem is, had James lured the Master to Falkland for the purpose of accompanying him back to Perth, as if by the Master's invitation, and of there craftily begetting a brawl,

in which Gowrie and the Master should perish at the hands of Ramsay? Or had the Master, with or without his brother's knowledge, lured James to Perth for some evil end? The question divided Scotland; France and England were sceptical as to the King's innocence. Our best historians, like Mr. Hill Burton and Mr. Tytler, side with the King; others are dubious, or believe that James was the conspirator, and that the Ruthvens were innocent victims.

III. THE KING'S OWN NARRATIVE

So far we have not gained any light on the occurrences of the mysterious interval between the moment when the King and Alexander Ruthven passed alone through the hall, after dinner, up the great staircase, and the moment when the King cried 'Treason!' out of the turret window. In the nature of the case, the Master being for ever silent, only James could give evidence on the events of this interval, James and *one other man*, of whose presence in the turret we have hitherto said little, as only one of the witnesses could swear to having seen a man there, none to having seen him escaping thence, or in the tumult. Now the word of James was not to be relied on, any more than that of the unequalled Elizabeth. If we take the King's word in this case, it is from no prejudice in his favour, but merely because his narrative seems best to fit the facts as given on oath by men like Lennox, Mar, and other witnesses of all ranks. It also fits, with discrepancies to be noted, the testimony of *the other man*, the man who professed to have been with the Master and the King in the turret.

The evidence of that other man was also subject, for reasons which will appear presently, to the gravest suspicion. James, if himself guilty of the plot, had to invent a story to excuse himself; the other man had to adopt the version of the King, to save his own life from the gibbet. On the other hand, James, if innocent,

could not easily have a credible story to tell. If the Master was sane, it was hardly credible that, as James averred, he should menace the King with murder, in his brother's house, with no traceable preparations either for flight or for armed resistance. In James's narrative the Master is made at least to menace the King with death. However true the King's story might be, his adversaries, the party of the Kirk and the preachers, would never accept it. In Lennox's phrase they 'liked it not, because it was not likely.' Emphatically it was not likely, but the contradictory story put forward by the Ruthven apologist, as we shall see, was not only improbable, but certainly false.

There was living at that time a certain Mr. David Calderwood, a young Presbyterian minister, aged twenty-five. He was an avid collector of rumour, of talk, and of actual documents, and his 'History of the Kirk of Scotland,' composed at a much later date, is wonderfully copious and accurate. As it was impossible for King James to do anything at which Calderwood did not carp, assigning the worst imaginable motives in every case, we shall find in Calderwood the sum of contemporary hostile criticism of his Majesty's narrative. But the criticism is negative. Calderwood's critics only pick holes in the King's narrative, but do not advance or report any other explanation of the events, any complete theory of the King's plot from the Ruthven side. Any such story, any such hypothesis, must be to the full as improbable as the King's narrative.

There is nothing probable in the whole affair; every system,

every hypothesis is *difficile à croire*. Yet the events did occur, and we cannot reject James's account merely because it is 'unlikely.' The improbabilities, however, were enormously increased by the King's theory that the Ruthvens meant to *murder* him. This project (not borne out by the King's own version of Ruthven's conduct) would have been insane: the Ruthvens, by murdering James, would have roused the whole nation and the Kirk itself against them. But if their object was to kidnap James, to secure his person, to separate him from his Ministers (who were either secretly Catholics, or Indifferents), and to bring in a new administration favourable to Kirk, or Church, then the Ruthvens were doing what had several times been done, and many times attempted. James had been captured before, even in his own palace, while scores of other plots, to take him, for instance, when hunting in Falkland woods, remote from his retinue, had been recently planned, and had failed. To kidnap the King was the commonest move in politics; but as James thought, or said, that the idea at Gowrie House was to *murder* him, his tale, even if true, could not be easily credible.

The first narrative was drawn up at Falkland in the night of August 5. Early on August 6 the letter reached the Chancellor in Edinburgh, and the contents of the letter were repeated orally by the Secretary of State (Elphinstone, later Lord Balmerino) to Nicholson, the English resident at the Court of Holyrood. Nicholson on the same day reported what he remembered of what the Secretary remembered of the Falkland letter, to Cecil.

Yet though at third hand Nicholson's written account of the Falkland letter of August 5¹² contains the same version as James later published, with variations so few and so unessential that it is needless to dwell upon them, they may safely be attributed to the modifications which a story must suffer in passing through the memories of two persons. Whatever the amount of truth in his narrative, the King had it ready at once in the form to which he adhered, and on which he voluntarily underwent severe cross-examination, on oath, by Mr. Robert Bruce, one of the Edinburgh ministers; a point to which we return.

James declares in a later narrative printed and published about the end of August 1600, that the Master, when he first met him at Falkland, made a very low bow, which was not his habit. The Master then said (their conference, we saw, occupied a quarter of an hour) that, while walking alone on the previous evening, he had met a cloaked man carrying a great pot, full of gold in large coined pieces. Ruthven took the fellow secretly to Gowrie House, 'locked him *in a privy derved house*, and, after locking many doors on him, left him there and his pot with him.'

It might be argued that, as the man was said to be locked in a *house*, and as James was not taken out of Gowrie House to see him, James must have known that, when he went upstairs with the Master, he was not going to see the prisoner. The error here is that, in the language of the period, a *house* often means a

¹² Quoted by Pitcairn, ii. 209. The Falkland letter, as we show later, was probably written by David Moysie, but must have been, more or less, 'official.' Cf. p. 100, *infra*.

room, or chamber. It is so used by James elsewhere in this very narrative, and endless examples occur in the letters and books of the period.

Ruthven went on to explain, what greatly needed explanation, that he had left Perth so early in the morning that James might have the first knowledge of this secret treasure, concealed hitherto even from Gowrie. James objected that he had no right to the gold, which was not treasure trove. Ruthven replied that, if the King would not take it, others would. James now began to suspect, very naturally, that the gold was foreign coin. Indeed, what else could it well be? Coin from France, Italy, or Spain, brought in often by political intriguers, was the least improbable sort of minted gold to be found in poor old Scotland. In the troubles of 1592–1596 the supplies of the Catholic rebels were in Spanish money, whereof some was likely enough to be buried by the owners. James, then, fancied that Jesuits or others had brought in gold for seditious purposes, ‘as they have ofttimes done before.’ Sceptics of the period asked how one pot of gold could cause a sedition. The question is puerile. There would be more gold where the potful came from, if Catholic intrigues were in the air. James then asked the Master ‘what kind of coin it was.’ ‘They seemed to be foreign and uncouth’ (unusual) ‘strokes of coin,’ said Ruthven, and the man, he added, was a stranger to him.

James therefore suspected that the man might be a disguised Scottish priest: the few of them then in Scotland always wore

disguises, as they tell us in their reports to their superiors.¹³ The King's inferences as to *popish* plotters were thus inevitable, though he may have emphasised them in his narrative to conciliate the preachers. His horror of 'practising Papists,' at this date, was unfeigned. He said to the Master that he could send a servant with a warrant to Gowrie and the magistrates of Perth to take and examine the prisoner and his hoard. Contemporaries asked why he did not 'commit the credit of this matter to another.' James had anticipated the objection. He *did* propose this course, but Ruthven replied that, if others once touched the money, the King 'would get a very bad account made to him of that treasure.' He implored his Majesty to act as he advised, and not to forget him afterwards. This suggestion may seem mean in Ruthven, but the age was not disinterested, nor was Ruthven trying to persuade a high-souled man. The King was puzzled and bored, 'the morning was fair, the game already found,' the monarch was a keen sportsman, so he said that he would think the thing over and answer at the end of the hunt.

Granting James's notorious love of disentangling a mystery, granting his love of money, and of hunting, I agree with Mr. Tytler in seeing nothing improbable in this narration. If the Master wanted to lure the King to Perth, I cannot conceive a better device than the tale which, according to the King, he told. The one improbable point, considering the morals of the

¹³ Many of these may be read in *Narratives of Scottish Catholics*, by Father Forbes-Leith, S.J.

country, was that Ruthven should come to James, in place of sharing the gold with his brother. But Ruthven, we shall see, had possibly good reasons, known to James, for conciliating the Royal favour, and for keeping his brother ignorant. Moreover, to seize the money would not have been a safe thing for Ruthven to do; the story would have leaked out, questions would have been asked. James had hit on the only plausible theory to account for a low fellow with a pot of gold; he *must* be 'a practising Papist.' James could neither suppose, nor expect others to believe that he supposed, one pot of foreign gold enough 'to bribe the country into rebellion.' But the pot, and the prisoner, supplied a clue worth following. Probabilities strike different critics in different ways. Mr. Tytler thinks James's tale true, and that he acted in character. That is my opinion; his own the reader must form for himself.

Ruthven still protested. This hunt of gold was well worth a buck! The prisoner, he said, might attract attention by his cries, a very weak argument, but Ruthven was quite as likely to invent it on the spur of the moment, as James was to attribute it to him falsely, on cool reflection. Finally, if James came at once, Gowrie would then be at the preaching (Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays were preaching days), and the Royal proceedings with the captive would be undisturbed.

Now, on the hypothesis of intended kidnapping, this was a well-planned affair. If James accepted Ruthven's invitation, he, with three or four servants, would reach Gowrie House while

the town of Perth was quiet. Nothing would be easier than to seclude him, seize his person, and transport him to the seaside, either by Tay, or down the north bank of that river, or in disguise across Fife, to the Firth of Forth, in the retinue of Gowrie, before alarm was created at Falkland. Gowrie had given out (so his friends declared) that he was to go that night to Dirleton, his castle near North Berwick, ¹⁴ a strong hold, manned, and provisioned. Could he have carried the King in disguise across Fife to Elie, Dirleton was within a twelve miles sail, on summer seas. Had James's curiosity and avarice led him to ride away at once with Ruthven, and three or four servants, the plot might have succeeded. We must criticise the plot on these lines. Thus, if at all, had the Earl and his brother planned it. But Fate interfered, the unexpected occurred — *but the plot could not be dropped*. The story of the pot of gold could not be explained away. The King, with royal rudeness, did not even reply to the new argument of the Master. 'Without any further answering him,' his Majesty mounted, Ruthven staying still in the place where the King left him. At this moment Inchaffray, as we saw, met Ruthven, and invited him to breakfast, but he said that he was ordered to wait on the King.

At this point, James's narrative contains a circumstance which, confessedly, was not within his own experience. He did not know, he says, that the Master had any companion. But, from the evidence of another, he learned that the Master had a companion,

¹⁴ Carey to Cecil. Berwick, *Border Calendar*, vol. ii. p. 677, August 11, 1600.

indeed two companions. One was Andrew Ruthven, about whose presence nobody doubts. The other, one Andrew Henderson, was not seen by James at this time. However, the King says, on Henderson's own evidence, that the Master now sent him (about seven o'clock) to warn Gowrie that the King was to come. Really it seems that Henderson was despatched rather later, during the first check in the run.

It was all-important to the King's case to prove that Henderson had been at Falkland, and had returned at once with a message to Gowrie, for this would demonstrate that, in appearing to be unprepared for the King's arrival (as he did), Gowrie was making a false pretence. It was also important to prove that the ride of Ruthven and Henderson to Falkland and back had been concealed, by them, from the people at Gowrie House. Now this *was* proved. Craigengelt, Gowrie's steward, who was tortured, tried, convicted, and hanged, deponed that, going up the staircase, just after the King's arrival, he met the Master, booted, and asked 'where he had been.' 'An errand not far off,' said the Master, concealing his long ride to Falkland.¹⁵ Again, John Moncrieff, a gentleman who was with Gowrie, asked Henderson (who had returned to Perth much earlier than the King's arrival) where he had been, and he said 'that he had been two or three miles above the town.'¹⁶ Henderson himself later

¹⁵ Deposition of Craigengelt, a steward of Gowrie's, Falkland, August 16, 1600. Pitcairn, ii. 157.

¹⁶ Pitcairn, ii. p. 185.

declared that Gowrie had told him to keep his ride to Falkland secret.¹⁷ The whole purpose of all this secrecy was to hide the fact that the Ruthvens had brought the King to Perth, and that Gowrie had early notice, by about 10 a.m., of James's approach, from Henderson. Therefore to make out that Henderson had been in Falkland, and had given Gowrie early notice of James's approach, though Gowrie for all that made no preparations to welcome James, was almost necessary for the Government. They specially questioned all witnesses on this point. Yet not one of their witnesses would swear to having seen Henderson at Falkland. This disposes of the theory of wholesale perjury.

The modern apologist for the Ruthvens, Mr. Louis Barbé, writes: 'We believe that Henderson perjured himself in swearing that he accompanied Alexander' (the Master) 'and Andrew Ruthven when.. they rode to Falkland. We believe that Henderson perjured himself when he asserted, on oath, that the Master sent him back to Perth with the intelligence of the King's coming.'¹⁸

On the other hand, George Hay, lay Prior of the famous Chartreux founded by James I in Perth, deponed that Henderson arrived long before Gowrie's dinner, and Peter Hay corroborated. But Hay averred that Gowrie asked Henderson 'who was at Falkland with the King?' It would not follow that Henderson had been at Falkland himself. John Moncrieff deponed that

¹⁷ Pitcairn, ii. p. 179.

¹⁸ Barbé, p. 91.

Gowrie said nothing of Henderson's message, but sat at dinner, feigning to have no knowledge of the King's approach, till the Master arrived, a few minutes before the King. Mr. Rhynd, Gowrie's tutor, deponed that Andrew Ruthven (the Master's other companion in the early ride to Falkland) told him that the Master had sent on Henderson with news of the King's coming. If Henderson had been at Falkland, he had some four hours' start of the King and his party, and must have arrived at Perth, and spoken to Gowrie, long before dinner, he himself says at 10 a.m. Dinner was at noon, or, on this day, half an hour later. Yet Gowrie made no preparations for welcoming the King.

It is obvious that, though the Hays and Moncrieff both saw Henderson return, booted, from a ride somewhere or other, at an early hour, none of them could *prove* that he had ridden to Falkland and back. There was, in fact, no evidence that Henderson had been at Falkland except his own, and that of the poor tortured tutor, Rhynd, to the effect that Andrew Ruthven had confessed as much to him. But presently we shall find that, while modern apologists for Gowrie deny that Henderson had been at Falkland, the contemporary Ruthven apologist insists that he had been there.

To return to James's own narrative, he asserts Henderson's presence at Falkland, but not from his own knowledge. He did not see Henderson at Falkland. Ruthven, says James, sent Henderson to Gowrie just after the King mounted and followed the hounds. Here it must be noted that Henderson himself says

that Ruthven did not actually despatch him till after he had some more words with the King. This is an instance of James's *insouciance* as to harmonising his narrative with Henderson's, or causing Henderson to conform to his. 'Cooked' evidence, collusive evidence, would have avoided these discrepancies. James says that, musing over the story of the pot of gold, he sent one Naismith, a surgeon (he had been with James at least since 1592), to bring Ruthven to him, during a check, and told Ruthven that he would, after the hunt, come to Perth. James thought that this was *after* the despatch of Henderson, but probably it was before, to judge by Henderson's account.

During this pause, the hounds having hit on the scent again, the King was left behind, but spurred on. At every check, the Master kept urging him to make haste, so James did not tarry to break up the deer, as usual. The kill was but two bowshots from the stables, and the King did not wait for his sword, or his second horse, which had to gallop a mile before it reached him. Mar, Lennox, and others did wait for their second mounts, some rode back to Falkland for fresh horses, some dragged slowly along on tired steeds, and did not rejoin James till later.

Ruthven had tried, James says, to induce him to refuse the company of the courtiers. Three or four servants, he said, would be enough. The others 'might mar the whole purpose.' James was 'half angry,' he began to entertain odd surmises about Ruthven. One was 'it might be that the Earl his brother *had handled him so hardly*, that the young gentleman, being of a high spirit, had taken

such displeasure, as he was become somewhat beside himself.' But why should Gowrie handle his brother hardly?

The answer is suggested by an unpublished contemporary manuscript, 'The True Discovery of the late Treason,'¹⁹ &c. 'Some offence had passed betwixt the said Mr. Alexander Ruthven' (the Master) 'and his brother, for that the said Alexander, both of himself and by his Majesty's mediation, had craved of the Earl his brother the demission and release of the Abbey of Scone, which his Majesty had bestowed upon the said Earl during his life... His suit had little success.'²⁰

If this be fact (and there is no obvious reason for its invention), James might have reason to suspect that Gowrie had 'handled his brother hardly:' Scone being a valuable estate, well worth keeping. To secure the King's favour as to Scone, Ruthven had a motive, as James would understand, for making him, and not Gowrie, acquainted with the secret of the treasure. Thus the unpublished manuscript casually explains the reason of the King's suspicion that the Earl might have 'handled the Master hardly.'

On some such surmise, James asked Lennox (who corroborates) whether he thought the Master quite 'settled in his wits.' Lennox knew nothing but good of him (as he said in his evidence), but Ruthven, observing their private talk, implored

¹⁹ State Papers, Scotland (Elizabeth), vol. lxvi. No. 50.

²⁰ Mr. S. R. Gardiner alone remarks on this point, in a note to the first edition of his great History. See note to p. 54, *infra*.

James to keep the secret, and come *alone* with him – at first – to see the captive and the treasure. James felt more and more uneasy, but he had started, and rode on, while the Master now despatched Andrew Ruthven to warn Gowrie. Within a mile of Perth the Master spurred on his weary horse, and gave the news to Gowrie, who, despite the messages of Henderson and Andrew Ruthven, was at dinner, unprepared for the Royal arrival. However, Gowrie met James with sixty men (four, says the Ruthven apologist).

James's train then consisted of fifteen persons. Others must have dropped in later: they had no fresh mounts, but rested their horses, the King says, and let them graze by the way. They followed because, learning that James was going to Perth, they guessed that he intended to apprehend the Master of Oliphant, who had been misconducting himself in Angus. Thus the King accounts for the number of his train.

An hour passed before dinner: James pressed for a view of the treasure, but the Master asked the King not to converse with him then, as the whole affair was to be kept secret from Gowrie. If the two brothers had been at odds about the lands of Scone, the Master's attitude towards his brother might seem intelligible, a point never allowed for by critics unacquainted with the manuscript which we have cited. At last the King sat down to dinner, Gowrie in attendance, whispering to his servants, *and often going in and out of the chamber*. The Master, too, was seen on the stairs by Craigengelt.

If Gowrie's behaviour is correctly described, it might be attributed to anxiety about a Royal meal so hastily prepared. But if Gowrie had plenty of warning, from Henderson (as I do not doubt), that theory is not sufficient. If engaged in a conspiracy, Gowrie would have reason for anxiety. The circumstances, owing to the number of the royal retinue, were unfavourable, yet, as the story of the pot of gold had been told by Ruthven, the plot could not be abandoned. James even 'chaffed' Gowrie about being so pensive and *distract*, and about his neglect of some little points of Scottish etiquette. Finally he sent Gowrie into the hall, with the grace-cup for the gentlemen, and then called the Master. He sent Gowrie, apparently, that he might slip off with the Master, as that gentleman wished. 'His Majesty desired Mr. Alexander to bring Sir Thomas Erskine with him, who' (Ruthven) 'desiring the King to go forward with him, and promising that he should make any one or two follow him that he pleased to call for, desiring his Majesty to command *publicly* that none should follow him.' This seems to mean, James and the Master were to cross the hall and go upstairs; James, or the Master for him, bidding no one follow (the Master, according to Balgonie, did say that the King would be alone), while, presently, the Master should return and privately beckon on one or two to join the King. The Master's excuse for all this was the keeping from Gowrie and others, for the moment, of the secret of the prisoner and the pot of gold.

Now, if we turn back to Sir Thomas Erskine's evidence, we find that, when he joined James in the chamber, after the

slaying of the Master, he said ‘I thought your Majesty would have concredited more to me, than to have commanded me to await your Majesty at the door, if you thought it not meet to have taken me with you.’ The King replied, ‘Alas, the traitor deceived me in that, as in all else, for I commanded him expressly to bring you to me, and he returned back, as I thought, to fetch you, but he did nothing but *steik* [shut] the door.’

What can these words mean? They appear to me to imply that James sent the Master back, according to their arrangement, to bring Erskine, that the Master gave Erskine some invented message about waiting at some door, that he then shut a door between the King and his friends, but told the King that Erskine was to follow them. Erskine was, beyond doubt, in the street with the rest of the retinue, before the brawl in the turret reached its crisis, when Gowrie had twice insisted that James had ridden away.

In any case, to go on with James’s tale, he went with Ruthven up a staircase (the great staircase), ‘and through three or four rooms’ – ‘three or four sundry *houses*’ – ‘the Master ever locking behind him every door as he passed, and so into a little study’ – the turret. This is perplexing. We nowhere hear in the evidence of more than two doors, in the suite, which were locked. The staircase perhaps gave on the long gallery, with a door between them. The gallery gave on a chamber, which had a door (the door battered by Lennox and Mar), and the chamber gave on a turret, which had a door between it and the chamber.

We hear, in the evidence, of no other doors, or of no other locked doors. However, in the Latin indictment of the Ruthvens, ‘many doors’ are insisted on. As all the evidence tells of opposition from only *one* door – that between the gallery and the chamber of death – James’s reason for talking of ‘three or four doors’ must be left to conjecture. ‘The True Discourse’ (MS.) gives but the gallery, chamber, and turret, but appears to allow for a door between stair and gallery, which the Master ‘closed,’ while he ‘made fast’ the next door, that between gallery and chamber. One Thomas Hamilton,²¹ who writes a long letter (MS.) to a lady unknown, also speaks of several doors, on the evidence of the King, and some of the Lords. This manuscript has been neglected by historians.²²

Leaving this point, we ask why a man already suspicious, like James, let the Master lock any door behind him. We might reply that James had dined, and that ‘wine and beer produce a careless state of mind,’ as a writer on cricket long ago observed. We may also suppose that, till facts proved the locking of one door at least (for about that there is no doubt), James did not know that any door *was* locked. On August 11 the Rev. Mr. Galloway, in a sermon preached before the King and the populace at the Cross of Edinburgh, says that the Master led the monarch upstairs, ‘and through a *trans*’ (a passage), ‘the door whereof, so soon as they had entered, *chekit to with ane lok*, then through a gallery, whose

²¹ Apparently not Sir Thomas Hamilton, the King’s Advocate.

²² State Papers, Scotland (Elizabeth), vol. lxvi. No. 51.

door also *chekit to*, through a chamber, and the door thereof *chekit to*, also,' and thence into the turret of which he 'also locked the door.'²³

Were the locks that 'chekit to' spring locks, and was James unaware that he was locked in? But Ramsay, before the affray, had wandered into 'a gallery, very fair,' and unless there were two galleries, he could not do this, if the gallery door was locked. Lennox and Mar and the rest speak of opposition from only one door.

While we cannot explain these things, *that* door, at least, between the gallery and the gallery chamber, excluded James from most of his friends. Can the reader believe that he purposely had that door locked, we know not how, or by whom, on the system of compelling Gowrie to 'come and be killed' by way of the narrow staircase? Could we see Gowrie House, and its 'secret ways,' as it then was, we might understand this problem of the locked doors. Contemporary criticism, as minutely recorded by Calderwood, found no fault with the number of locked doors, but only asked 'how could the King's fear but increase, perceiving Mr. Alexander' (the Master) 'ever to lock the doors behind them?' If the doors closed with spring locks (of which the principle had long been understood and used), the King may not have been aware of the locking. The problem cannot be solved; we only disbelieve that the King himself had the door locked, to keep his friends out, and let Gowrie in.

²³ Pitcairn, vol. ii, p. 249.

Note. — *The Abbey of Scone*. On page 48 we have quoted the statement that James had bestowed on Gowrie the Abbey of Scone ‘during his life.’ This was done in 1580 (*Registrum Magni Sigilli*, vol. iii. No. 3011). On May 25, 1584, William Fullarton got this gift, the first Earl of Gowrie and his children being then forfeited. But on July 23, 1586, the Gowrie of the day was restored to all his lands, and the Earldom of Gowrie included the old church lands of Scone (*Reg. Mag. Sig.* iv. No. 695, No. 1044). How, then, did John, third Earl of Gowrie, hold only ‘for his life’ the Commendatorship of the Abbey of Scone, as is stated in S. P. Scot. (Eliz.) vol. lxvi. No. 50?

IV. THE KING'S NARRATIVE – II. THE MAN IN THE TURRET

We left James entering the little 'round,' or 'study,' the turret chamber. Here, at last, he expected to find the captive and the pot of gold. And here the central mystery of his adventure began. His Majesty saw standing, 'with a very abased countenance, not a bondman but a freeman, with a dagger at his girdle.' Ruthven locked the door, put on his hat, drew the man's dagger, and held the point to the King's breast, '*avowing now that the King behoved to be at his will, and used as he list; swearing many bloody oaths that if the King cried one word, or opened a window to look out, that dagger should go to his heart.*'

If this tale is true, murder was not intended, unless James resisted: the King was only being *threatened* into compliance with the Master's 'will.' Ruthven added that the King's conscience must now be burthened 'for murdering his father,' that is, for the execution of William, Earl of Gowrie, in 1584. His conviction was believed to have been procured in a dastardly manner, later to be explained.

James was unarmed, and obviously had no secret coat of mail, in which he could not have hunted all day, perhaps. Ruthven had his sword; as for the other man he stood 'trembling and quaking.' James now made to the Master the odd harangue reported even

in Nicholson's version of the Falkland letter of the same day. As for Gowrie's execution, the King said, he had then been a minor (he was eighteen in 1584), and Gowrie was condemned 'by the ordinary course of law' – which his friends denied. James had restored, he said, all the lands and dignities of the House, two of Ruthven's sisters were maids of honour. Ruthven had been educated by the revered Mr. Rollock, he ought to have learned better behaviour. If the King died he would be avenged: Gowrie could not hope for the throne. The King solemnly promised forgiveness and silence, if Ruthven let him go.

Ruthven now uncovered his head, and protested that the King's life should be safe, if he made no noise or cry: in that case Ruthven would now bring Gowrie to him. 'Why?' asked James; 'you could gain little by keeping such a prisoner?' Ruthven said that he could not explain; Gowrie would tell him the rest. Turning to *the other man*, he said 'I make you the King's keeper till I come again, and see that you keep him upon your peril.' He then went out, and locked the door. The person who later averred that he had been the man in the turret, believed that Ruthven never went far from the door. James believed, indeed averred, that he ran downstairs, and consulted Gowrie.

If there was an armed man in the turret, he was either placed there by the King, to protect him while he summoned his minions by feigned cries of treason, or he was placed there by Gowrie to help the Master to seize the King. In the latter case, the Master's position was now desperate; in lieu of an ally he had procured

a witness against himself. Great need had he to consult Gowrie, but though Gowrie certainly entered the house, went upstairs, and returned to Lennox with the assurance that James had ridden away, it is improbable that he and his brother met at this moment. James, however, avers that they met, Ruthven running rapidly downstairs, but this was mere inference on the King's part.

James occupied the time of Ruthven's absence in asking the man of the turret what he knew of the conspiracy. The man replied that he knew nothing, he had but recently been locked into the little chamber. Indeed, while Ruthven was threatening, the man (says James) was trembling, and adjuring the Master not to harm the King. James, having sworn to Ruthven that he would not open the window himself, now, characteristically, asked the man to open the window 'on his right hand.' If the King had his back to the turret door, the window on his right opened on the courtyard, the window on his left opened on the street. The man readily opened the window, says the King, and the person claiming to be the man deposed later that he first opened what the King declared to be the wrong window, but, before he could open the other, in came the Master, who, 'casting his hands abroad in desperate manner, said "he could not mend it, his Majesty behoved to die."' Instead of stabbing James, however, he tried to bind the Royal hands with a garter, 'swearing he behoved to be bound.' (A garter was later picked up on the floor by one of the witnesses, Graham of Balgonie, and secured by Sir Thomas

Erskine. ²⁴)

²⁴ Mr. Scott suggested that a piece of string was found by Balgonie. The words of Balgonie are 'ane gartane' – a garter. He never mentions string.

V. HENDERSON'S NARRATIVE

The man in the turret had vanished like a ghost. Henderson, on the day after the tragedy, was also not to be found. Like certain Ruthvens, Hew Moncrieff, Eviot, and others, who had fought in the death-chamber, or been distinguished in the later riot, Henderson had fled. He was, though a retainer of Gowrie, a member of the Town Council of Perth, and 'chamberlain,' or 'factor,' of the lands of Scone, then held by Gowrie from the King. To find any one who had seen him during the tumult was difficult or impossible. William Robertson, a notary of Perth, examined in November before the Parliamentary Committee, said then that he only saw Gowrie, with his two drawn swords, and seven or eight companions, in the forecourt of the house, and so, 'being afraid, he passed out of the place.' The same man, earlier, on September 23, when examined with other citizens of Perth, had said that he followed young Tullibardine and some of his men, who were entering the court 'to relieve the King.'²⁵ He saw the Master lying dead at the foot of the stair, and saw Henderson 'come out of the said turnpike, over the Master's belly.' He spoke to Henderson, who did not answer. He remembered that Murray of Arbany was present. Arbany, before the Parliamentary Committee in November, said nothing

²⁵ Pitcairn, ii. 197.

on this subject, *nor did Robertson*. His evidence would have been important, had he adhered to what he said on September 23. But, oddly enough, if he perjured himself on the earlier occasion (September 23), he withdrew his perjury, when it would have been useful to the King's case, in the evidence given before the Lords of the Articles, in November. Mr. Barbé, perhaps misled by the sequence of versions in Pitcairn, writes: 'Apparently it was only when his memory had been stimulated by the treatment of those whose evidence was found to be favourable to the King that the wily notary recalled the details by which he intended to corroborate Henderson's statement...'²⁶

The reverse is the case: the wily notary did not offer, at the trial in November, the evidence which he had given, in September, at the examination of the citizens of Perth. It may perhaps be inferred that perjury was not encouraged, but depressed.²⁷

²⁶ *The Tragedy of Gowrie House*, by Louis Barbé, 1887, p. 91.

²⁷ Mr. Barbé, as we saw, thinks that Robertson perjured himself, when he swore to having seen Henderson steal out of the dark staircase and step over Ruthven's body. On the other hand, Mr. Bisset thought that Robertson spoke truth on this occasion, but concealed the truth in his examination later, because his evidence implied that Henderson left the dark staircase, not when Ramsay attacked Ruthven, but later, when Ruthven had already been slain. Mr. Bisset's theory was that Henderson had never been in the turret during the crisis, but had entered the dark staircase from a door of the dining-hall on the first floor. Such a door existed, according to Lord Hailes, but when he wrote (1757) no traces of this arrangement were extant. If such a door there was, Henderson may have slunk into the hall, out of the dark staircase, and slipped forth again, at the moment when Robertson, in his first deposition, swore to having seen him. But Murray of Arbany cannot well have been there at that moment, as he was with the party of Lennox and Mar, battering at the door of the gallery chamber. —

Despite the premiums on perjury which Ruthven apologists insist on, not one witness would swear to having seen Henderson during or after the tumult. Yet he instantly fled, with others who had been active in the brawl, and remained in concealment. Calderwood, the earnest collector of contemporary gossip and documents, assures us that when the man in the turret could not be found, the first proclamation identified him with a Mr. Robert Oliphant, a 'black grim man,' but that Oliphant proved his absence from Perth. One Gray and one Lesley were also suspected, and one Younger (hiding when sought for, it is said) was killed. But we have no copy of the proclamation as to Mr. Robert Oliphant. To Mr. Robert Oliphant, who had an alibi, we shall return, for this gentleman, though entirely overlooked by our historians, was probably at the centre of the situation (p. 71, *infra*).

Meanwhile, whatever Henderson had done, he mysteriously vanished from Gowrie House, during or after the turmoil, 'following darkness like a dream.' Nobody was produced who could say anything about seeing Henderson, after Moncrieff and the Hays saw him on his return from Falkland, at about ten o'clock in the morning of August 5.

By August 12, Henderson was still in hiding, and was still being proclaimed for, with others, of whom Mr. Robert Oliphant

Bisset, *Essays in Historical Truth*, pp. 228–237. Hailes, *Annals*. Third Edition, vol. iii. p. 369. Note (1819).

was not one: they were Moncrieff, Eviot, and two Ruthvens.²⁸ But, on August 11 at the Cross of Edinburgh, in presence of the King, his chaplain, the Rev. Patrick Galloway, gave news of Henderson. Mr. Galloway had been minister of Perth, and a fierce Presbyterian of old.

Blow, Galloway, the trumpet of the Lord!

exclaimed a contemporary poet. But James had tamed Galloway, he was now the King's chaplain, he did not blow the trumpet of the Lord any longer, and, I fear, was capable of anything. He had a pension, Calderwood tells us, from the lands of Scone, and knew Henderson, who, as Chamberlain, or steward, paid the money. In his exciting sermon, Galloway made a dramatic point. Henderson was found, and Henderson was the man in the turret! Galloway had received a letter from Henderson, in his own hand; any listener who knew Henderson's hand might see the letter. Henderson tells his tale therein; Galloway says that it differs almost nothing from the King's story, of which he had given an abstract in his discourse. And he adds that Henderson stole downstairs while Ramsay was engaged with the Master.²⁹

Henderson, being now in touch with Galloway, probably received promise of his life, and of reward, for he came in before August 20, and, at the trial in November, was relieved of the

²⁸ *Privy Council Register*, vi. 149, 150.

²⁹ *Pitcairn*, ii. 250.

charge of treason, and gave evidence.

Here we again ask, Why did Henderson take to flight? What had he to do with the matter? None fled but those who had been seen, sword in hand, in the fatal chamber, or stimulating the populace to attack the King during the tumult. Andrew Ruthven, who had ridden to Falkland with Henderson and the Master, did not run away, no proclamation for *him* is on record. Nobody swore to seeing Henderson, like his fellow fugitives, armed or active, yet he fled and skulked. Manifestly Henderson had, in one way or other, been suspiciously concerned in the affair. He had come in, and was at Falkland, by August 20, when he was examined before the Chancellor, Montrose, the King's Advocate, Sir Thomas Hamilton, Sir George Hume of Spot (later Earl of Dunbar), and others, in the King's absence. He deponed that, on the night of August 4, Gowrie bade him and Andrew Ruthven ride early to Falkland with the Master, and return, if the Master ordered him so to do, with a message. At Falkland they went into a house,³⁰ and the Master sent him to learn what the King was doing. He came back with the news; the Master talked with the King, then told Henderson to carry to Gowrie the tidings of

³⁰ Mr. Panton, who, in 1812, published at Perth, and with Longmans, a defence of the Ruthvens, is very strong on the improbability that Henderson was at Falkland. Why were not the people to whose house in Falkland he went, called as witnesses? Indeed we do not know. But as Mr. Panton looked on the King's witnesses as a gang of murderous perjurers, it is odd that he did not ask himself why they, and the King, did not perjure themselves on this point. (*A Dissertation on the Gowrie Conspiracy*, pp. 127–131.)

the King's visit, 'and that his Majesty would be quiet.' Henderson asked if he was to start at once. Ruthven told him to wait till he spoke to the King again. They did speak, at a gap in a wall, during the check in the run; Ruthven returned to Henderson, sent him off, and Henderson reached Perth about ten o'clock. Gowrie, on his arrival, left the company he was with (the two Hays), and here George Hay's evidence makes Gowrie ask Henderson 'who was with the King at Falkland?' Hay said that Gowrie then took Henderson into another room. Henderson says nothing about a question as to the King's company, asked in presence of Hay, a compromising and improbable question, if Gowrie wished to conceal the visit to Falkland.

Apart, Gowrie put some other questions to Henderson as to how the King received the Master. Henderson then went to his house; an hour later Gowrie bade him put on his secret coat of mail, and plate sleeves, as he had to arrest a Highlander. Henderson did as commanded; at twelve the steward told him to bring up dinner, as Craigenfelt (the caterer) was ill. Dinner began at half-past twelve; at the second course the Master entered, Andrew Ruthven had arrived earlier. The company rose from table, and Henderson, who was not at the moment in the room, heard them moving, and thought that they were 'going to make breeks for Maconilduy,' that is, to catch the Highlander. Finding he was wrong, he threw his steel gauntlet into the pantry, and sent his boy to his house with his steel cap. He then followed Gowrie to meet the King, and, after he had fetched 'a drink' (which

James says ‘was long in coming’), the Master bade him ask Mr. Rhynd, Gowrie’s old tutor, for the key of the gallery, which Rhynd brought to the Master. Gowrie then went up, and spoke with the Master, and, after some coming and going, Henderson was sent to the Master in the gallery. Thither Gowrie returned, and bade Henderson do whatever the Master commanded. (The King says that Gowrie came and went from the room, during his dinner.) The Master next bade Henderson enter the turret, and locked him in. He passed the time in terror and in prayer.

There follows the story of the entry of James and the Master, and Henderson now avers that he ‘threw’ the dagger out of the Master’s hand. He declares that the Master said that he wanted ‘a promise from the King,’ on what point Gowrie would explain. The rest is much as in the King’s account, but Henderson was ‘pressing to have opened the window,’ he says, when the Master entered for the second time, with the garter to bind the King’s hands. During the struggle Henderson removed the Master’s hand from the King’s mouth, and opened the window. The Master said to him, ‘Wilt thou not help? Woe betide thee, thou wilt make us all die.’³¹

³¹ Pitcairn, ii. 222, 223.

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