

I.

MRS ERSKINE, LADY GRANGE, IN THE ISLAND OF ST KILDA.
By DAVID LAING, Esq., FOR. SEC. S.A. SCOT.

(PLATE XXIII. *Fac-simile of an Original Letter.*)

The interesting communication from Capt. Thomas, read at the last meeting of the Society respecting the Island of St Kilda, brought to my recollection one or two remarkable Autographs, connected with the strange episode of Mrs Erskine, known by the title of Lady Grange. This has been a subject of continued interest since the appearance of Dr Samuel Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides in 1773. These Autographs I now exhibit. A few words only of explanation seem to be necessary.

The Hon. JAMES ERSKINE of Grange, second son of Charles, tenth Earl of Mar, was born in the year 1679. He was admitted advocate in July 1705, and in the course of a few years was promoted to several important offices. When raised to the bench in March 1707, he took the name of Lord Grange, and in 1710 became Lord Justice-Clerk. His wife was RACHEL CHEISLEY, sister of Major Cheisley of Dalry, in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh.¹ After they had been married more than twenty years, and having a family of eight children, he took such an insuperable aversion to her, that they agreed to live separately; yet as he considered her to be a dangerous spy on his proceedings, and that she might be the means of implicating him with the Government, he resolved by some means or other to get rid of her. She is said by all parties to have been jealous of his irregularities, of a fierce revengeful temper, and a victim of intemperance. He himself, however, was a singular compound of good and bad qualities;—he was an acute and accomplished man as a lawyer, somewhat profligate in private life, with great pretensions to piety, restless and intriguing in political affairs, and yet with all his manœuvring, his ambitious schemes were signally disappointed. Most of these points in his character are clearly exemplified in a volume of extracts from his Diary, edited by Mr

¹ Their father had the unenviable distinction of being the assassin of Sir George Lockhart of Carnwath, Lord President, who thus became a victim to private revenge on the 31st March 1869.

James Maidment, under the title of "Extracts from the Diary of a Senator of the College of Justice.¹ M.DCC.XVII.—M.DCC.XVIII," Edinburgh 1843, 8vo.

On the 22d of January 1732, after 11 o'clock at night, Lady Grange, then living in lodgings with a Highland woman, next door to her husband's house, was seized by a party of Highlanders, who carried her off, blindfolded, in what may truly be called a brutal manner, until they had reached the remote Island of Hesker, near Skye, where she was detained a prisoner for two years. In order to conceal the fact of her abduction, and to prevent any further inquiries by her friends, Lord Grange gave out, not only that she was a mad-woman, but also circulated a report that his wife had died suddenly. In 1734 she was conveyed to the still more remote and isolated Island of St Kilda,

"Placed far amidst the melancholy main."

I have no intention to enter into any investigation of Lady Grange's case. It may be sufficient to furnish a list of some well-known works in which the matter is more or less fully detailed.

1st, The "Edinburgh Magazine," 1817, p. 333. This, if I am not mistaken, was communicated by Sir George Stuart Mackenzie of Coull, Bart.

2d, "Chambers's Edinburgh Journal," No. 114, New Series, March 7, 1846.

3d, "Genealogie of the Hayes of Tweeddale, by Father Richard Augustin Hay," &c.; Appendix, p. 106-112, edited by James Maidment, Esq., advocate, Edin. 1835, 4to. Appendix No. 4, John Chiesly of Dalry, and No. 5, An Account of the Misfortunes of Mrs Erskine of Grange, commonly known as Lady Grange. Reprinted from the Scots Magazine, November, 1817.

4th, "Lives of Simon Lord Lovat, and Duncan Forbes, of Culloden," by John Hill Burton, advocate, Edinburgh, 1847; and more recently, in his History of Scotland, Chap. xci.

5th, "The Miscellany of the Spalding Club, Volume Third," 1846; "Letters of Lord Grange," pages 1-67, edited by John Stuart, LL.D.

6th, Since this communication was read to the Society, another article has appeared in Chambers's Journal, July 14, 1874.—"The Story of Lady Grange," by Dr William Chambers.

It was believed, and the opinion still prevails, that the plan of kidnapping or carrying her off to some remote place in the North, and of circulating a report of her death, was devised, if not actually carried into execution, by Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, while he carefully avoided anything like personal interference in the abduction itself. No doubt, he boldly denied having had any concern in it; and among his original letters in my own possession, is one, from which a passage to that effect was quoted many years ago, addressed to his cousin Mr Thomas Fraser, writer, at Edinburgh, dated Beaufort, September 16, 1732. "As to that story about my Lord Grange (he says), it is a much less surprise to me, because they said ten times worse of me when that damn'd woman went from Edinburgh than they can say now; for they said, it was all my contrivance, and that it was my servants that took her away; but I defy'd them then, as I do now, and do declare to you, upon honour, that I do not know what is become of that woman, where she is, or who takes care of her; but if I had contrived, and assisted and saved my Lord Grange from that devil, who threatened every day to murder him and his children, I would not think shame of it before God, or man; and where she is, I wish and hope that she may never be seen again, to torment my worthy friend."

But any assertions or denials on the part of a man who was devoid of all principle, can carry but little weight; and it required the influence and bold resources of such a man as Lovat, rather than her husband, to have attempted and carried out such a scheme. Mrs Erskine of Grange, in her statement, dated 1741, makes this very clear, and she continued to assert—

"One of Lord Lovat's lyes, which he said to John Macleod the young man of Dynwick, that I was going to kill my husband—you know that a lye."

"I hear Alexander M'Donald in the Hasker is dead: His wife has since married. . . *She knows 'twas Lord Lovat and Roderick M'Leod that stole me.* The minister's daughters saw me taken out of Mr M'Lean's house by Rod. M'Leod.

The article in the "Edinburgh Magazine," November 1817, concludes, "From the above curious document, it appears that Lady Grange was at St Kilda nine years after she was taken from Edinburgh. When the author of the notice which precedes the narrative was at St Kilda, in the

year 1800, he was informed by an old man, who remembered having seen Lady Grange, that she had been seven or eight years on that island. On making inquiry respecting what happened afterwards to this ill-fated woman, he was informed by a gentleman in Skye, that in consequence of a dread of discovery, she had been removed to Assint (the Western district of Sutherland), and from thence to Skye, where she died."

The Autographs I now exhibit, which fell into my hands unexpectedly, and not at one time, are as follows :—

I.

The original letter of Rachel Erskine, dated St Kilda, January 20th 1738, giving an account of her treatment. At the foot it is marked, "To the Solicitor." This was Charles Erskine of Tinwald, who had been a Regent and Professor in the University of Edinburgh; he was admitted advocate in 1711, appointed Solicitor-General for Scotland in 1723, and Lord Advocate in January 1737 (a fact which Lady Grange could not have known); and afterwards, he was raised to the Bench, by the title of Lord Tinwald, in 1744, and promoted to be Lord Justice-Clerk in 1748.

As perhaps the only existing specimen of the handwriting of Lady Grange, a facsimile is here given of the beginning and the close of her letter, written at St Kilda in 1738 (see Plate XXIII). The faintness of the ink, and the folds of the paper, rendered a good facsimile of the four folio pages scarcely practicable. Nor was this very necessary, as a literal transcript is here subjoined without any corrections. It was evidently written at different intervals, and the smaller size of the letters near the end was occasioned by the necessity of completing it on a single sheet of paper.

ST KILDA, *Jan. 20, 1738.*

SIR,—It is a great blessing and happiness to a nation when the King employeth such a man as you are to Act and do for him who I'm perswadid his the aw and fear of God on him. Job was a just man and a perfect and the cause that he know not he searched out to deliver the poor and oppressed and him that had none to help him, a Patterne for on in your office. I have the Honour to be your Relation and I know you have much interest with Lord Greange if you can make Peace for me you know the promices that is to the Peace maker, you know I'm not guilty of eny crime except that of loveing my husband to

much, he knowes very well that he was my idol and now God his made him a rode to scourgeth me. Most just, you know he took a dislike and hatred to poor unfortunate Me can a woman get or ask better security of a Man then Vows and Oaths from a man of Conscience and Honour that tho he swaeren to his own hurt yet changeth not, he told me he loved me two years or he gott me and we lived 25 years together few or non I thought so happy there is no person but his a fault but ought he not to forgive me as he desires or expects to be forgiven of God, his heart of Iron is in God's hand and I know he can turne it as he Pleaseth. I know he will do much be the advices of friends. I pray God to incline your hearts to intercess'd for me non on earth his so much power with Ld Grange as Lord Dun and you have if you both favour me I hope it will do. Make my complements to L^d Dun I would have written to him but I want paper I'm sorrow for the great losses that his been in his family since I had the Honour to see him last you may remember you heard the Queen of Spain was put in prison and the Princess Sobeseke went to a Monastre you heard the reason of both no doubt and yet the Pope and other friends made Peace for them if friends take paines the same blessing may happen to me I'm sure you cannot but see how great a dishonour and blot it will leave on his memorie, but if friends can not prevail with L^d Greange then let me have the Benefit of the law it is impossible for me to write or for you to imagine all the misserie and sorrow and hunger and cold and hardships of all kindes that I have sufferd since I was stolen if my paper allowed me I would give a particular account of the way but I must be short and I have a bad pin, upon the 22d of Jan 1732, I lodged in Margaret M'Lean house and at a little before twelve at night Mrs M'Lean being on the plot opened the door and there russed in to my room some servants of Lovals and his Couson Roderick Macleod he is a writter to the Signet they threw me down upon the floor in a Barbarous manner I cried murther murther then they stopp^d my mouth I puled out the cloth and told Rod: Macleod I knew him their hard rude hands bleed and abassed my face all below my eyes they dung out some of my teeth and toere the cloth of my head and toere out some of my hair I wrestled and defend'd my self with my hands then Rod: ordered to tye down my hands and cover'd my face with a cloath and stopp^d my mouth again they had wrestl'd so long with me that it was all that I could breath, then they carri'd me down stairs as a corps at the stair-foot they had a Chair and Alexander Foster of Carsboony in the Chair who took me on his knee I made all the struggel I could but he held me fast in his arms my mouth being stopp^d I could not cry they carri'd me off very quickly without the Ports, when they open'd the Chair and took the cloath of my head I saw I was near to the mutters of hill it being moonlight I then show'd them that all the linnius about me were covered with blood. they had there about 6 or 7 horses

they set me on a horses' behind Mr Foster and tyed me fast with a cloath to him that I might not leope of. if I remember right it was Peter Fraser, L^d Lovael's page that set me on the horse, Rod: Macleod and L^d Lovael's servants rode along with me and Andrew Leishman come attending M^r Foster he is a servant in Wester Pomeise he knows the names of Lovael's Ser: we rode all night it being Saturday we mett no body or day breake they took me into a house which belong to John Macleod advocate a little beyond Lithgow, I saw in that house a Gardener a Ser: of Johns and a Ser: of Alex: Macleod advocate but I'm not sure if he was his first or his second man. they keep me there all day at night I was set on a horse behind M^r Foster they rode with me to Wester Pomeise it belongs to M Stewart, and M^r Foster his Factore he took me to the house of Pomeise thro a vault to a low room all the windows nailed up with thick board and no light in the room he was soo cruel as to leave me all aloan and two doors lock'd on me, a Ser: of L^d Lov: kept the keys of my prison James Fraser, And: Leishman mention'd before is a tannant in Pomeise near thirtie years he brought whar meat and drink I got and his Wife mead my bed and wash'd my linens. I was kept so closs I grew sick then And: told M^r Foster he would not have a hand in my death then I was allow'd to the court to get the Air I then saw a son and three daughter which this Wife his born to And: I told them I was L^d Grange Wife in hopes they would let it be knowen, for M^r Fos: kept a Garner George Rate and his Wife in the house that what provisions came might pass as to them he had a meal yard and house in Stirling, they had two sons and a daughter come often to see them I gave them some thing to tell the ministers of Stirling Hamilton and Erskine that I was a prissonr in Pomeise but all in vain. I was their near seven moneth Aug 15 Peter Fraser L^d Lov: page came and three men with him I had kept my bed that all day with grief and sorrow Peter and James Fraser tho I was naked took me up by force they set me on a horse behind M^r Foster I fainted dead with grief as they set me the horse, And: Leishman rode that night journey with me, when ever I cri'd they came to stope my mouth, they rode to the highlands with me our guide a Servant of Sir Alexander Macdonald Ron'd Macdonald he since marri'd to Lady Macdonald own Cousin, We rode all night or day breake they took me into a little house M^r Foster never came near me after that night, but left the charge of me to Lov: Servants I saw Rod Macleod at that house and a servant of his Duncan Irvine since that bond aprentice to a wright in or about Edin^r M^r Foster and Rod: Macleod rode a part of the way with us I was set on a horse behind that wild fellow James Fraser, I cannot write the anguish and sorrow I was in I never read or heard of any Wife whatever was her crime so cruelly and barbarously treatt as I have been. Peter and James Fraser left me with the three men that came to Pomeise for me and two other came one of them belong'd to L^d Lov. two days after we came to a Loch on Glengarry ground Loch

they had a sloop waiting.

own house and keeps me till farther orders

to this Glengarry his wife

Georges Sons Ronald

and John came to the sloop and saw me on Sep 30 we came to the Isle

it belongs to Sir Alexander Macdonald and this man is the tannent, after I was some time there he thought it was a sin to keep me he said he would let me go for tho Sir Alex: should take the Isle from him he could not take his life, I sent a man for a boat and he ran away with my money in 1734 Rod: sent

for the tannant of this Isle his name Alex. Macdonald to come to the Captain of Clan Ronalds house he told him I was to be taken from him on the

John Macleod and his Brother Norman came with their Galley to the

for me they were very rud and hurt me sore, Oh alas much have I suffer'd often my skin mead black a blew, they took me to St Kilda. John Macleod is called Stewart of the Island he left me in a few days no body lives in but the poor natives it is a poor Isle I was in great miserie in the Husker but I am ten

times worse and worse here, the Society sent a minister here I have given him a much fuller account then this and he writ it down, you may [be] sure I have much more to tell then this, When this coms to you if you hear I'm alive do me justes and relieve me, I beg you make all hast but if you hear I'm dead do what you think right befor God.

I am with great Respect

your most humble servant

but infortunat Cousen

RACHELL ERSKINE

I pray you make my
Complements to all your
young Family

To the Solicitor.

II.

Letter from Thomas Hope of Rankeilor, Esq., Edinburgh, December 13th, 1740, addressed "The Right Honble. Charles Erskine, Esq. His Majesties Advocate."—From this letter it would appear he had only two days previously received information, in the above letter, No. I., respecting this ill-fated woman.

My Lord,—This day when you appointed me one of your busy hours on Monday, your Lop/ had not heard what I said. the affair is concerning poor Lady Grange, I inclose you a Letter from her of an old date, and shall shew you on to myselfe of the same date. they were left att my House two days ago by an unknowen hand. She left a Factory for me with my wife, a little befor her intended Journey for London. I told her I would never use it till I heard she was at a

distance from her Husband so as she could not disturb him.—After she was carried off, and being assured she was well entertained and cared for, I thought it was best not to move in that affair, And now this is the first time I have heard from her. She bids me apply to your Lops/ first, and indeed I would have don it whether or not for your advice in so tender ane affair, and if it cannot be compromised among friends, that I should call for her money and take all legall steps to relieve her. She has been so harshly and barbarously used, that I dar say her Husband knows nothing of it, for his friends from him I suppose, always assured me all care was taken of her. I doubt not but she may be dead by this time, but if she is alive, the hardest heart on earth would bleed to hear of her sufferings. and I think I can't in duty stand this call, but must follow out a course so as to restore her to a seeming liberty and a comfortable life: And it shall be don with that caution and moderation as your Lops/ shall direct, and Grange and his Friends could wish; though she has mett with much cruelty and barbarity as ever a Chrystian did, and more than any almost is able to bear. I am sure I never thought she could have been alive under much hardships. I would have waited of you to night, but being confined with a Coillick, and your time uncertain, I thought proper to delay it. But if am able to come abroad to morrow, and that you are to take tea by yourself, in the afternoon, I shall have the honour to wait on you, as I have of being

Sir

Your most obet humbel Servant

THO. HOPE.

Eden^r. Saturday 13th Dec^r, 1740.

Mr Hope of Rankeillor also, on the 6th of January, addressed a letter to Lord Grange himself, whose reply, containing a Vindication of his own conduct, dated London, 17th January 1740-1, along with Mr Hope's answer, Edinburgh February 23, 1741, are contained in the Spalding Miscellany, Vol. III.

III.

Lady Grange's account, as printed in the "Edinburgh Magazine" and other works, with the date January 21st 1741. This manuscript has no date, and wants pages 5 and 6, which had been supplied from some other copy. It begins, "*I, the unfortunate wife of Mr James Erskine of Grange,*" and appears to have belonged to the Rev. Dr Carlyle of Inveresk. It is unnecessary in this place to republish this statement, as it is easily accessible.

I shall only add, that when the friends of Lady Grange in Edinburgh, were made aware of her situation in 1741, measures were taken for her release. The chief result of this, however, was her being removed to Assint in Sutherland, and from thence to the Island of Skye, where she ended her days in May 1745. Lord Grange himself, who spent most of his latter years in London, died there, January 24, 1754, in the 75th year of his age.

St Kilda Jan: 20 1738.

Sir

It is a great blessing and happiness to a nation when the King employeth such a man as you are to Act and do for him who I'm perswaded had the awe and fear of God on him. Job was a just man and a perfect and the cause that he know not he searched out to deliver the poor and oppressed and him that had none to help him, a Patterne for on in your office. I have the Honour to be your Relation and I know you have much interest with Lord Greasge if you can make Peace for me you know the promices that is to the Peace maker of losing my husband to much, he knowes very well that he was my idol and now God his made him a rode to scourgeth me. * * * * *

* * * * *
 a much fuller account then this and he writ it down. I have just time have much more to tell then this when this comes to you if you hear of me alive do me justes and relieve me, be you make all hast but if you hear I'm dead do what you think right before God

I Pray you make my Compliments to all your young family
 I have truth great Respect
 your Most humble Servant
 but Infortunat Conscie
 Rachel Erskine
 To the Solicitor

LETTER OF LADY GRANGE, FROM ST KILDA, 1738.