

I.

QUEEN MARY AND THE LEGEND OF THE BLACK TURNPIKE.

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Before successive improvements' commissions followed one another in the work of erasure, Old Edinburgh was singularly rich in historic buildings, with their traditional associations perpetuating names and events replete with interest. But for upwards of a century the civic reformers have been at work; and now, when too late, a younger generation looks back with vain regrets on the erasure of many memorials intimately associated with national story. Now that the old buildings have been swept away, as in the majority of cases was inevitable; and even their sites have undergone such transformation as to tax the imagination in the effort to identify them with the events of earlier centuries, it may be wisest to let oblivion work its will. There are, however, still localities of exceptional interest from the historical significance of the events enacted there; and from among those I select some specially associated with Queen Mary's last days in Edinburgh.

The interest in such seems to be ineradicable. Edinburgh is the city of St Margaret, with her venerable oratory still crowning its Castle rock. It is the city of the Fourth James, and the poets of his too brief but brilliant reign; happily, with the Cross restored to perpetuate the tragic mystery and romance associated with the warning of the Flodden king. Gawain Douglas, Sir David Lindsay, our Scottish Caxton Walter Chepman, the Regent Murray, John Knox, and—

perhaps more than all,—Walter Scott, live in the local associations of his “own romantic town;” but preeminently Edinburgh is the city of Mary Stuart. And yet the duration of her reign as actual Queen and ruler, into which so many strange incidents and wild deeds of violence are crowded, is embraced within the brief term from her landing at Leith on the 19th of August 1561 to her surrender at Carberry Hill on the 15th of June 1567. I propose now to review some of the most memorable events of the last year of her reign in their relation to the localities hitherto assigned to them.

It is still within the recollection of many citizens of Edinburgh when the old Flodden wall, extending along the line of Drummond Street, stood nearly intact, forming the southern boundary enclosing the Royal Infirmary grounds. The tower or bastion, which may be seen in Edgar’s and other older maps and views of the city, midway between the Pleasance and the University buildings, had been removed as an obstruction to the thoroughfare; but its site, directly facing Roxburgh Street, was traceable from the difference in the masonry; and this served as a landmark in connection with one of the strangest and most memorable deeds of violence of the sixteenth century: the murder of Lord Darnley.

The attendant incidents of that singularly barbarous assassination, and the action of nearly all the participators in it, have been minutely recorded; and contemporary drawings preserve many details of the scene. The birth of a prince, the son of Darnley, heir to the Scottish, and, as it proved, to the English throne, on the 19th of June 1566, had been welcomed as a solution of many difficulties. But it served in no degree to alter the conduct of Lord Darnley; and some evidence now adduced has been assumed to throw fresh light on the dissolute course of the consort of Queen Mary. Only a few months had elapsed since the birth of their son when Lord Darnley was attacked with a virulent cutaneous disease, which at first led to a suspicion of poison. The current belief at the time is vividly reproduced in Knox’s narrative. Darnley had gone to Stirling, and was actually lodging in the Castle at the time when his son was baptised in the Great Hall there by the Bishop of St Andrews; and yet he absented himself from the ceremony.

He "soon after went, without good-night," says Knox, "toward Glasgow, to his father. He was hardly a mile out of Sterlin when the poyson (which had been given him,) wrought so upon him, that he had very great pain and dolour in every part of his body. At length, being arrived at Glasgow, the blisters brake out, of a blewish colour; so the Physitians presently knew the disease to come by poyson. He was brought so low that nothing but death was expected; yet the strength of his youth at last did surmount the poison."¹ Whether correctly or not, the disease was finally pronounced to be smallpox. At Glasgow he was tended under the care of his father, the Earl of Lennox. There the Queen visited him, and persuaded him to remove to Edinburgh, proposing that he should take up his abode for a time at Craigmillar Castle. It was a favourite resort of Queen Mary, as it had been of former sovereigns; but Darnley viewed the proposal with distrust. As Crawford, a confidential adviser of the Earl expressed it, "taking her husband to Craigmillar instead of his own place of residence was odd. It seemed as if she was going to take him more like a prisoner than a husband." So, after partial recovery, he was brought to Edinburgh and lodged in the house of the Provost, or dean, of the Collegiate Church of St Mary in the Field, which, from its vicinity to the Palace, and its open site, surrounded with gardens, seemed well adapted for the reception of the invalid.

Here Queen Mary visited Darnley, and even tarried over-night, undeterred by the infectious character of the disease; and contemporary eye-witnesses describe with graphic picturesqueness the Queen and her train on their way back to the Palace, by Blackfriars' Wynd and the Canongate, on the last fatal night, when she had just parted from her husband, and was thus seen by some of the agents of Bothwell: "gang-and before them with licht torches as they came up the Black Freir Wynd."² Of the locality specially identified with the extraordinary deed of violence that rid the Queen of her worthless consort very circumstantial data have been preserved, including a minutely detailed contemporary drawing. This appears to have been executed

¹ Knox's *Hist.*, vol. ii. p. 537.

² Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials*, vol. i. part ii. p. 493.

immediately after the event; and purports to show the scene of the murder, and a succession of incidents occurring on the morning after its perpetration. This drawing was forwarded to the English Court, and is still extant in the State Paper Office. An engraving of it is given in Chalmers' *Life of Queen Mary*; and another, and more accurate one, in the *Registrum Domus de Soltre*. The ruins of "Our Lady Kirk of Field," which remained at the date of the assassination, had been replaced by the Old University Buildings when Gordon of Rothiemay executed his bird's-eye view of Edinburgh, in 1647. But the garden of the Provost of St Mary's was still open ground; and it is even assumed that the ruins of the Provost's lodging had been allowed to stand, and are there represented. If so, however, this must have been a mere conjectural restoration; for it is wholly inconsistent with the contemporary evidence of the destruction of the house. Its actual site appears to have been considerably to the east of the ruined building shown on the plan, and its destruction was seemingly complete. In the letter forwarded by Queen Mary immediately after the event to the Archbishop of Glasgow, then resident as her representative at the French Court, she thus writes:—"The matter is horrible, and so strange, as we believe the like was never heard of in any country. This night past, being the 9th of February, a little after twa houris after midnight, the house quhairin the King was logit was in ane instant blawin in the air, he lyand sleipand in his bed, with sic a vehemencie that of the hail logging, wallis, and other, there is nothing remainit, na, not a stane abone another, but all either carrit away, or dung in dross to the very ground stane." This fully accords with the evidence of the contemporary drawing, and is therefore inconsistent with the idea of any ruin surviving into the following century.

From the description of the Provost's lodging it appears to have been a building of very moderate size for the deanery of the Collegiate Church of St Mary. But an exaggerated significance has been given to this, as well as to other features connected with it. "The Provost's house," says Burton, "seems to have been singularly destitute of defence for a building of that age," and even so zealous a champion of Queen Mary as Mr John Hosack makes a mistaken addition to its defencelessness by the

statement that "a house had been fitted up for Darnley's reception in the southern suburbs of the town, just outside the walls."¹ In reality, it stood within a well-enclosed area, with the city wall for its southern boundary; and was selected after the original destination of Craigmillar Castle had been abandoned in compliance with the objections of Darnley and those of his confidant Crawford, by whom that stronghold was looked upon as a prison. Whatever may be thought of the Provost's lodging, the choice by the Queen of Craigmillar Castle was in every way unobjectionable. Its embattled walls and keep, combined with its fine airy site, had led to its frequent selection as a place of residence by the Scottish Kings; and there accordingly, shortly before, the Queen, when herself an invalid, had been seen by the French ambassador, Le Croc, under the care of her physicians.

The detached character of the ridge surmounting the low valley of the Cowgate, surmounted of old by the monastery of the Blackfriars and Our Lady Kirk of Field, is now largely concealed by the bridges and avenues of lofty houses that connect it with that on which the High Street is reared. The Collegiate Church, which has long been displaced by the University buildings, was founded before the close of the thirteenth century, though it was not till the sixteenth century that it assumed the status of a Collegiate Church. As such it had its prebendaries and choristers, who were lodged in a group of buildings forming a quadrangle, with the Provost's house on the south side; a covered well in the centre, and on the north an alley leading by "Our Lady Steps" to the kirkyard. The whole ground extending eastward from the Provost's house to the wall of "the Black Fryars"—the Old High School Yards of later times,—was laid out in gardens and an orchard bounded by hedges. The buildings thus forming the church-close are shown of various sizes, the larger of them with crow-stepped gables, dormer windows, and projecting staircases; but of the deanery itself the drawing shows only a ruined pile of stones. As the residence provided for the Provost, it may be assumed to have formed the chief building in the close. It was two stories in height, probably with an attic and dormer windows. Of its three doors, the one entering from the quadrangle gave access to

¹ *Mary Queen of Scots and Her Accusers*, i. 241.

the rooms on the ground floor and the stair leading to the floors above, where was Darnley's chamber. A door which seems to have adjoined the doorway in the adjacent town wall led to a cellar. The third door opened into the garden. By this entrance the Queen is described as going there, in the evening, in company with Lady Reres, to sing and take recreation, which implies an unusually mild springtide in the early days of February. The house, it thus appears, though of limited extent according to our modern ideas either of a deanery or a royal lodging, was large enough for the Queen to find accommodation when she inclined to tarry over-night, as she more than once did.

The dimensions of the retreat thus selected for the invalid husband of the Queen are variously estimated according to the leanings of her assailants and defenders; and the small size of the Provost's house has been unduly dwelt upon by historians. The little chamber still shown in Holyrood Palace as that in which the Queen was seated in company with the Lady Argyle and Rizzio, when the latter was dragged forth by his assassins; and the equally straitened dimensions of the apartment in the Castle of Edinburgh where she gave birth to her son furnish the most trustworthy standard by which to test the adequacy of the accommodation provided for Lord Darnley. As to the fittings, the ample details betray no evidence of neglect; whether this be ascribed to regard for the patient, or to policy on the part of his enemies. The tapestry, the dais of black velvet and chair of state, the turkey carpet, velvet cushions, &c.; the bed that had belonged to the Queen-mother, hung with violet-brown velvet pasmented with gold and silver, and embroidered with cyphers and flowers in needlework of gold and silk; the wardrobe, cabinet, &c., as enumerated in the Queen's inventories,¹ seem in no way indicative of purposed neglect of all due requirements.

In the deposition of Nelson, Darnley's page, he describes "that door quhilk passit through the scellar and the toun wall." This archway could be seen to the last in the wall opposite Roxburgh Street. The road had been so much raised as to bury the old doorway to half its height, but its position fully accorded with the old maps and drawings,

¹ *Inventaires de la Royme Descosse*, p. xcix.

and is noted by Arnot as the doorway leading into the Provost's house. In so far, therefore, as any genuine interest attaches to the specific scenes of memorable historical events, there can be little hesitation in identifying that of the murder of Henry, Lord Darnley; nor is it difficult in imagination to recall the long-vanished church-close and well, the Provost's lodging, and the garden reaching down the eastern slope to the wall of the ancient monastery founded by Alexander II. A.D. 1230.

The mode of assassination resorted to by the murderers of Darnley was in its clumsy violence peculiarly characteristic of the chief actor, the Earl of Bothwell; though also, no doubt, consistent with the unrefined manners of the age and country. With the victim still prostrate from the effects of a disease so generally fatal, his death might have been easily accomplished by means that would have effectually prevented discovery, and even disarmed suspicion. The deed, however, was perpetrated by Bothwell after his own fashion. He and his accomplices were tracked from the lodging of the Laird of Ormiston, in Todrick's Wynd, to the gardens of the Dominican Monastery, already described as lying immediately to the east of that of the Provost of St Mary's. The details of the preparations for the barbarous deed, and nearly all the subsequent proceedings of Bothwell and his hirelings, are on evidence. Their method of procedure, indeed, defied concealment. Some two hours after midnight a loud explosion awoke the citizens, and gave the first warning of the deed that proved scarcely less fatal to Queen Mary than to Darnley.

The drawing in the State Paper Office shows more than one phase in the succession of events. The body of the victim is represented lying in the adjacent garden, and again in process of transportation to the largest of the prebendal buildings, designated in the drawing, "The house in which the King was kept after the murder." The body was embalmed; and on the evening of the 15th of the same month of February was deposited in the royal vault in the Abbey Church of Holyrood, where the Queen's father, James V., his first consort, the Princess Magdalen, along with older representatives of the royal line, had been laid. Birrel notes in his Diary that a solemn mass for the repose of the King's soul was performed on the 23rd of March by

command of the Queen ; and so, with obsequies not unfitting his rank, he was laid to rest.

There, accordingly, the body of Darnley reposed for a couple of centuries. The royal vault was indeed broken into by a revolutionary mob in 1688, and the leaden coffins opened ; but perhaps rather from curiosity than violence, as the bodies appear to have been left undisturbed. In 1776, Arnot, the historian of Edinburgh, had seen the royal remains, including those of James V. and his first Queen, Magdalen, exposed in their open coffins ; but two years thereafter the Abbey Church was covered with a roofing of heavy flagstones, the weight of which broke down the groined arching, and reduced the nave to ruin. Arnot, writing in 1779, thus describes a second visit to the royal vault subsequent to the fall of the roof. "What had escaped the fury of the mob at the Revolution became a prey to the rapacity of the mob who ransacked the Church after its fall. In A.D. 1776 we had seen the body of James V. and some others in their leaden coffins. The coffins were now stolen. The head of Queen Magdalen, which was then entire, and even beautiful, and the skull of Darnley, were also stolen." ¹

The head of the fair young princess, whose untimely death, Drummond tells us, excited a national sorrow greater than Scotland had ever before known, was no more heard of. But the skull of Darnley came into the possession of Mr James Cummyng, Clerk in the Lyon Herald Office, and the first secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. He was an eccentric and unmethodical official, and a miscellaneous collector of curiosities, objects of antiquity, and natural history. The troubles resulting from the indiscriminate mingling of his own private collection with that of the Society are duly set forth in the narrative prepared by Dr David Laing, and printed in the third volume of the Society's *Transactions*.² On the death of Mr Cummyng in 1793 his collection was sold ; and along with it many objects belonging to the Society, owing to the eagerness of the deceased Secretary's executors to turn the whole to profitable account for themselves.

As to the reputed skull of Darnley, the retention of it, after the rifling

¹ Arnot's *Hist. of Edinburgh*, p. 255.

² *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. iii. p. xii.

of the royal vault, especially by a Government official, was a grave infraction of the law; and had he been inclined, it was scarcely possible for him to have transferred the historical relic to the Society's Museum. Even as it was, that unscrupulous functionary did not wholly escape retribution for his sacrilegious deed. His acquisition of the relic came to the ears of a rival custodian; and his life was said to have been rendered miserable by the persecution of the shrewish cicerone of the Abbey, who haunted him like the ghost of the murdered Darnley, and levied blackmail by trading on his fears, under the threat of exposing him to the Barons of Exchequer. After Cummyng's death the skull was traced to the studio of an Edinburgh sculptor; and on my noting this in my "Memorials," with the remark that all further clue to it had been lost, I learned from the late Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe that it had been subsequently secured by one of the Frasers of Lovat.

The subject had long passed out of my mind, when, on a visit to London in 1878, I availed myself of the facilities kindly offered to me by Professor Flower, F.R.S., the Curator of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, to make a careful study of the collection of Crania illustrative of the diversities of type in aboriginal races. In the course of these investigations my curiosity was awakened by a skull of exceptional character, to which I was puzzled to assign any specific ethnical classification. On referring accordingly to the catalogue, I read with some surprise the following entry:—"No. 5957 B. purchased by Mr Belt at the sale of Messrs Sotheby & Co. (March 2nd, 1865), of a collection of fossils and minerals, &c., formed during the last century by the Hon. Archd. Fraser of Lovat, and described in the catalogue as: 'Skull and thigh-bone of Lord Darnley'; presented to the R.C.S. by G. T. Belt, Esq., 1869."

Here then, to all appearance, is the reputed skull of Darnley, the second husband of Queen Mary, which, after the interval of a century from the date of its theft from the royal vault in Holyrood Abbey, has found strange resting-place among the illustrative crania of barbarous tribes from every quarter of the globe. If race could have helped him, Darnley was sprung from a noble stock. He inherited whatever Stuart, Tudor, and Douglas blood could transmit to that worthless scion of the

royal lines of Scotland and England. He was in courtly and heraldic designation Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, Earl of Ross, Duke of Albany, and King of Scots. But History leaves no room to question his equal right to the attributes of vice and folly ascribed to him. If, then, the authenticity of the skull, thus "mated with narrow foreheads," may be assumed on the evidence now adduced, it is an object not only of curious interest, but of historical significance. I write of it now with a vivid remembrance of the impression left on my mind as this strange "Stuart relic" lay before me. But I am also able to refer to careful notes of its most remarkable characteristics made at that time.

Alike in cerebral capacity, and whatever indications of intellectual expression could be inferred from its contour and relative proportions, the skull seems fully to accord with the character that History assigns to Darnley. It is stained dark brown, perhaps as a result of the process of embalming. The forehead is depressed, low, and receding. The face is broad, and the orbits or hollows of the eyes unusually large, with no projection of the superciliary ridges, but with an indentation at the nasal suture. The larger development is in the occipital region, which extends behind the mastoid processes to an unusual length.

Sir James Melvil, during his stay at the English Court in 1564, saw Darnley under all the advantages of rank and royal favour, when, as nearest prince of the blood, he bore the sword at the creation of Lord Robert Dudley as Earl of Leicester. He was then a youth of only nineteen years of age, whom Queen Elizabeth pointed out to the Scottish Ambassador as "yonder long lad"; and who is still more graphically depicted by Melvil, when, in reply to the Queen, he said that "no woman of spirit would make choice of such a man; for he was very lusty, beardless, and lady-faced."¹ With every allowance for the politic dissimulation of both speakers, such references, spoken as they were with the subject of them in sight, could not have been made without some manifest justification; and they suggest elements of comparison with the reputed skull. Here is the smooth low forehead, sloping down to the eye, with no superciliary ridge: unintellectual, effeminate, and with

¹ Melvil's *Memoirs, Bann. Club*, p. 122.

an overmastering predominance of the animal passions. With these, stimulated by unrestrained indulgence in later years, we seem to look upon the capricious, heartless, dissolute fool whom Queen Mary wedded on the 29th July 1565. He was at that date still a raw youth, three years her junior; while she—a woman of rare intellect, trained from childhood at the Court of Henry II., with amplest experience of its Italianised refinement and dissimulation,—must have speedily learned to view with contempt the vacillating, brainless profligate, who proved the ready tool of any faction that cared to play on his selfish vanity for its own ends.

The skull which now, not altogether unfitly, occupies a place in the cabinets of the Royal College of Surgeons with the typical crania of untutored savages, accords so far with what we know of Darnley. But it is marked with other exceptional features, which also merit consideration. The right side of the skull is largely affected with caries. Holes, single, and running together in groups, occur in its outer plate; and if, as I surmised from the appearance of the bones, they indicate virulent syphilitic disease, they help to cast a lurid light on the close of Darnley's worthless life. Burton says of his illness: "Poison was at first naturally suspected. The disease was speedily pronounced to be smallpox; but it has been conjectured that it may have been one of those forms of contamination which had then begun to make their silent and mysterious visitation in this country; while the immediate cause by which they were communicated was yet unknown."¹ The historian thus sums up the results of a careful study of all the contemporary evidence concerning Darnley's habits:—"He indulged every vicious appetite to the extent of his physical capacity. He overate himself, and drank hard. His amours were notorious and disgusting; and they had not the courtly polish which would entitle them to the compromising designation of intrigues; for he broke the seventh commandment with the most dissolute and degraded, because they were on that account the most accessible of their sex." It is manifest, therefore, that the course pursued by Darnley was in every way calculated to result in the more formidable aspect of the loathsome disease which manifested itself with such viru-

¹ Burton's *Hist.*, 8vo ed., vol. iv. p. 336.

lence before the close of the fifteenth century. If so, it all the more reasonably accounts for the arrangements to provide the invalid with apartments elsewhere than in the Palace; and on his objecting to Craigmillar Castle, the selection of the lodging of the Provost of St Mary Kirk of Field, with its adjoining pleasure-grounds, and its vicinity to Holyrood, would commend itself to every impartial student of history, were it not for the tragic climax.

The defenceless condition of the lodging at the Kirk of Field is of minor significance when the incidents of *Rizzio's* murder, and the neglect of the most ordinary means of secrecy by Bothwell and his hireling assassins, are recalled. To those, indeed, who assume the complicity of the Queen in the latter deed, Holyrood would have better sufficed for the purpose; for it is inconceivable that one trained at the Court of *Catharine de Medici*, and familiarised with the refinements of Italian duplicity, could favour an act of brutal violence that seemed by its very method to court publicity.

That Queen Mary had contemplated seeking a divorce from Darnley is unquestionable; and if it were possible to erase from history the evidence of her infatuated passion for the rude Earl, who resorted to such direct means for ridding her of an unfaithful and worthless husband, there would be little reason for censuring any lack of mourning on the part of the twice widowed Queen. Her experiences in matrimony had been singularly unfortunate; and whatever be the final verdict as to her complicity in the proceedings that freed her from so hateful a bond, she must be judged by the standards of her age. Moreover, in estimating her conduct at this period, we have to think of a woman of brilliant intellect and high culture wedded under exigencies of State to the low-browed, coarse libertine, whose vices had apparently culminated in a loathsome disease that helped to render him equally repulsive physically and morally.

The deed thus perpetrated with so strange an admixture of mystery and reckless violence marks a memorable crisis in the tragic career of Mary Stuart. The locality of the murder has still a historic interest, in spite of the changes that Time has wrought on its old features; nor is there any difficulty in identifying the spot, or even in picturing to the

mind's eye the old monastic garden, with the Provost's lodging on the southern slope of the Cowgate ravine. It is otherwise with another of the old Edinburgh localities associated with the final crisis that brought to an end the reign of Queen Mary, and her connection with the capital of her royal race.

The final parting with Bothwell, and the surrender of Queen Mary to the Confederate Lords at Carberry Hill, followed the incidents already referred to within a wonderfully brief period. The date of the birth of a prince, which had seemed a solution of so many difficulties, and in whom the rival crowns of Elizabeth and Mary were ultimately united, is the 19th of June 1566. The baptism of the child at Stirling, the absenting of Darnley from the ceremony, his withdrawal to Glasgow, his illness and death, are all crowded into the following months; and ere a full year had run its course, on the 15th of June 1567, the Queen was brought captive to Edinburgh, and passed her last night, and the closing hours of her reign, in the house of Sir Simon Preston, the Provost. Now that reforming commissioners and "Time's effacing fingers" have combined to erase nearly all the architectural remains in Old Edinburgh associated with such historic events, it may seem scarcely worth while to discuss anew the precise locality of the unhappy Queen's lodging on that memorable night. But the persistency with which, in spite of change and erasure, a specific site has been assigned to that event, shows that time has not lessened the interest which associates the tragic romance of Mary Stuart with Old Edinburgh.

For upwards of a century no doubt has been entertained as to the precise spot rendered memorable by that event. Tradition, indeed, busied itself in the fabrication of much more venerable associations with the locality. Till the year 1788, when Improvements' Commissioners were busy with the great arterial avenue that was to bisect the High Street, and supersede the ancient southern thoroughfare by Leith Wynd and the Pleasance, there stood on the site of the corner land, at the junction of the High Street and Hunter Square, an ancient building styled the Black Turnpike. It was of unusual extent, finished throughout with polished ashlar, with a turnpike or spiral stair fronting the street, and with its pointed windows and doorway surmounted with decorated weather

mouldings, finished with croquets and finials. In the rear the old building had received additions of a later style and date, as appeared from a characteristic decoration. On the lintel of the uppermost of three entrances to the mansion from Peebles Wynd was this inscription, with the accompanying date :—

PAX . INTRANTIBUS . SALUS . EXEUNTIBUS . 1674.

But the earlier date of the main building fronting the High Street was manifest from its architectural details, and of this precise evidence is adduced by Maitland. The old historian of Edinburgh failed to appreciate the interest that later generations would attach to the abodes of the chief actors and participators in the history of elder centuries. It is a proof of the conspicuous architectural aspect of the Black Turnpike, that (with the exception of one other, and still more noticeable lodging in Blyth's Close, which he notes for its "ancient chapel, or private oratory, belonging to Mary of Lorraine, Dowager to King James V. and mother to Mary, Queen of Scots") it is the only building of this class noticed by him. Writing in 1753, he thus describes it :—"At the north-west corner of Peebles Wynd is situated a magnificent edifice denominated the Black Turnpike ; which, were it not partly defaced by a false wooden front, it would appear to be the most sumptuous building perhaps in Edinburgh ; which, together with its front in Peebles Wynd, with three turnpikes thereunto belonging, no doubt is owing its being said to have been built by King Kenneth, the last of whom, called the Third, died in the year one thousand. This relation being *not* in the least probable, I applied to Malcolm Brown, a principal proprietor of the said edifice, for some account of its origin, when he was kindly pleased to shew me a principal sasine wherein George Robertson of Lockhart is acknowledged by the Bailies of Edinburgh to be the son and heir of George Robertson, burghess of Edinburgh, who built the said tenement. The sasine is dated the 6th of December, Anno 1461, which intirely refutes the idle story of King Kenneth." Such popular legends, however, are little affected by documentary evidence, and it is curious to watch the process of their growth. When Dr Robert Chambers wrote, in 1825, the venerable building had been long

demolished. But he notes: "Tradition assigned to it the most distant antiquity, and affirmed that it was built by King Kenneth, the extirpator of the Picts, and that it had been at one period the residence of Robert the Bruce."¹

Maitland assumes the youngest of the Kenneths for the reputed builder, but Chambers carries us back more than a century and a half, to Kenneth MacAlpin. But what is of more significance now is that Maitland, while discussing the trustworthiness of the Kenneth legend, says nothing about Queen Mary; though he recalls the association of that of her mother with the Queen Regent's lodging in Blyth's Close. The earliest notice of Queen Mary's name in association with the Black Turnpike that I have been able to recover occurs in a letter, dated September 20, 1787, quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of the following April, in which it is remarked: "The old house where Queen Mary is said to have lodged is to be pulled down in eight or ten days hence." An engraved plate of it is introduced accordingly, with the title of "The house at Edinburgh where Mary, Queen of Scots, was confined." In the accompanying description it is spoken of as "the ancient provost's house in Pebbles Wynd," and again as "the most ornamented of any house of its time, and being by tradition the house in which Mary, Queen of Scots, was confined after her surrender at Carberry Hill."²

The house, it is obvious, was notable among those of the wealthiest burghesses of old Edinburgh, alike for its extent and architectural finish. It is probably the same that is referred to by Calderwood, when "upon Tuesday, the 26th of March (1594), James Murrey of Powmais was talkin by the captan of the garde; and three craftsmen, taylers, were talkin by the proveist, for receaving waiges from Bothwell. James Murrey was imprisoned in the jayle of Edinburgh, and examined by the Maister of Glamis and others of the Counsell; and after lett out unto Johne Robertson's house, upon requeest, with some of the garde to keepe him."³ John Robertson's name repeatedly appears as an in-

¹ *Traditions of Old Edinburgh*, i. p. 186.

² *Gentleman's Mag.*, vol. lviii. pt. i. p. 312.

³ Calderwood's *Hist. of the Kirk*, vol. v. p. 294.

fluent citizen, and one of the bailiffs or magistrates; and he may be presumed to have succeeded by inheritance to the Robertson tenement. But there is no evidence that it was ever possessed by Sir Simon Preston; and if the above surmise be correct, it is incompatible with any such ownership. The tradition is referred to as a mere bit of hearsay, at the time of the demolition of the old mansion; but it becomes ever more definite at each repetition. Creech, describing to Sir John Sinclair the completion of the South Bridge and its approaches, says:—"By this change Niddry's, Merlin's, and Pebbles Wynds were annihilated; and the oldest stone building in Edinburgh was pulled down, where Queen Mary lodged the night after the battle of Carberry Hill. It was then the house of Sir Simon Preston of Craigmillar, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, 1567."¹ Skene repeats the statement in the notice accompanying his etching of the Old Town Guard House and the adjacent buildings; and refers to the then long-demolished Black Turnpike as "one of the most remarkable objects in the city of Edinburgh; the largest and most ancient of its buildings; having been erected in 1461 upon the site of a structure ascribed to King Kenneth." Then follows in detail the account of the Queen's incarceration in "a wretched apartment to the street, of 13 feet square and 8 feet high." The same statement reappears in the *Traditions of Old Edinburgh*, with the addition that "this fact is perfectly authentic." It is amusing thus to follow surmise as it grows into tradition, and ends in becoming authenticated fact. Having reached this stage, it was an appropriate culmination when, in 1886, Mr Sydney Mitchell reproduced a group of the most interesting and characteristic features of the old town as "The Old Edinburgh Street," erected in the area of the Western Meadows, the Black Turnpike occupied a prominent place. It was described in Miss Alison Dunlop's *Book of Old Edinburgh* as "The stately town house of Sir Simon Preston of that Ilk and Craigmillar, Provost of Edinburgh;" and it is added, "from its windows Queen Mary saw the last of her kingdom's capital."

In revising, after an interval of more than forty years, my *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time*—in which I also became responsible

¹ *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces*, p. 65.

for the statement that Queen Mary "was lodged in the Black Turnpike, the town house of the Provost, Sir Simon Preston,"—I have been led to review the evidence on which this and other statements of a like kind rest, and have satisfied myself that the Black Turnpike tradition is inconsistent with contemporary evidence; and in its later form is no older than the eighteenth century; though, as will be seen, it is far from improbable that it had its origin in genuine tradition.

Were it not possible to replace the erroneous identification with a more probable substitute, it would seem a pity to disturb a picturesque tradition that has long assumed the aspect of accredited, if not authentic history. But the venerable structure has vanished generations ago, and possibly the tradition can be located anew on an equally acceptable site, without robbing the old locality of its genuine associations with Queen Mary. The following are the most definite contemporary references to that last miserable night of poor Mary Stuart's reign. Du Croc, the French ambassador, writing to his master, Rulet, says:—"Voilla les deux armées ensemble qui se retirent en ceste ville de Lislebourgue, et logèrent la Royné en la maison du Prévost. Je suis bien lire, que se nom de Prévost sera bien odieux en France; mais en ce pays c'est la principale maison de la ville." Again, an officer who had commanded the French garrison, writes:—"L'on la mena souper au logié du Prevost. Mais combien qu'elle n'avoit mange de xxiii heures par avant, ne voulet onques rien gouter; ains s'en alla u sa chambre."² Sir James Melvil's statement simply is:—"Hir Majeste was that nycht convoyed to Edenborough, and logit in the midis of the toun, in the provestis loging."² But to this we have the more definite addition in the narrative of Archbishop James Beaton: "Thay logit hir Majestie in the provest's loging, fornent the croce, upon the north syd of the gait."⁴

From the contemporary notices here produced, the two facts apparently present themselves: that the Queen was lodged in the Provost's house; and that it was on the north side of the street, opposite the cross. It is readily ascertainable from other sources that at the date of Queen Mary's surrender to the Confederate Lords Sir Simon Preston was Provost of

¹ *Papiers d'Etat*, 8vo., ii. 319.

² *Teulet*, ii. 166.

³ Melvil's *Mem.*, p. 134.

⁴ Laing, ii. 113.

Edinburgh. He figures in 1550 in a list of the adversaries of the Reformation, and the maintainers of impiety, denounced by John Knox in his most trenchant style of vituperation: "Blasphemous Balfour, now called Clerk of Register; Sinclar Dean of Restalrige and Bischope of Brechin, blynd of ane eie in the body, but of boithe in his saule; John Leslye, preastis gett, Abbot of Londorse and Bischope of Ross; Symon Preastoun of Craigmyllare, a right epicureane, whose end wilbe, or it be long, according to thare warkis."¹ Sir Simon Preston accordingly figures among the most trusted of the Queen's party; and when, shortly after her marriage, Knox took advantage of Lord Darnley's presence in St Giles's church to speak of the government of wicked princes, who, for the sins of the people, are sent as tyrants and scourges to plague them; and then more pointedly added that "God sets in that room (for the offences and ingratitude of the people) boys and women." The historian adds: "Within four days after the King and Queen sent to the Counsell of Edinburgh, commanding them to depose Archibald Douglas, and to receive the Laird of Craigmillar for their provost, which was presently obeyed."² Sir Simon Preston accordingly filled the office of Provost from 1566 to 1568; and it was to the house of her own chosen nominee that, under such altered circumstances, the captive Queen was brought on that fatal June day in 1567. This fact has to be kept in remembrance in estimating the statements relative to "the wretched little apartment to the street," assigned by the Provost to his royal guest. Her fortune could not have seemed, in a single day, so irretrievably desperate as to induce him to put upon her any needless slight. The probability rather is that the Queen was lodged in the best room at his disposal; and this is confirmed by the fact that the little chamber had its window looking to the High Street.

More than one well-authenticated visit of Queen Mary to the houses of Edinburgh citizens are on record during the brief period of her rule. Foremost among those is one in the brief bright days of her joyous welcome by her subjects, when, shortly after her landing at Leith, the *Diurnal of Occurrents* notes: "Upoun the neynt day of Februar, at even, the Queenis grace and the remanent lordis come up in ane

¹ Knox's *Hist.*, vol. i. p. 235.

² *Ibid.*, vol. ii. pp. 497, 498.

honourabill maner fro the palice of Halyrudhous to the Cardinalis ludging in the Black Freir Wynd, and were their feasted and entertained." From the same contemporary diarist we learn of another visit to an Edinburgh mansion under greatly changed circumstances. On her return to the capital with Darnley, on the 18th of March 1566, while the incidents of Rizzio's murder were still fresh in her mind, it is noted that they "lugeit not in thair palice of Halyrudhous, bot lugeit in my Lord Home's lugeing, callit the auld bischope of Dunkell his lugin, anent the salt tron." This designation of Lord Home's house and its locality enables us unhesitatingly to identify it as "The Clam Shell Turnpike," a substantial tenement that stood immediately to the west of the Black Turnpike, and is styled in the earliest extant title "The old land formerly of George, Bishop of Dunkeld." The Queen, it will be remembered, was then anticipating her confinement. Her next lodging was in the royal apartments in the Castle, where the little chamber is now shown in which, three months from that date, the prince was born, who, while still an infant, was to usurp his mother's throne. The resort of the Queen and Lord Darnley, on their return to the capital, to that lodging in the High Street "anent the salt trone" in preference to the neighbouring palace of Holyrood, so recently stained with the blood of her favourite secretary, could not fail to leave its impress on the popular mind; and it is therefore far from improbable that the later assignment of the immediately adjoining building as the place of durance of the captive Queen was based on the survival of a vague tradition of her actual lodging in Lord Home's house at the earlier date referred to. When the demolition of the adjoining building, noticeable as among the most ornate and substantial of the old civic mansions, became inevitable, the genuine local association was revived, and assigned to it. Hence the legend of the Black Turnpike.

The identification of the actual house of Sir Simon Preston can only be determined by access to title-deeds in which his name appears, either as owner, or in the specification of the boundaries of adjacent properties. But it is possible that another tradition of the eighteenth century had its origin in a vague reminiscence of the last lodging of Queen Mary in her capital. When Dr Robert Chambers undertook to

collect the traditions of Edinburgh, the identification of the Black Turnpike as the town mansion of the Laird of Craigmillar had become such a universally credited article of faith in the annals of the city, that it did not occur to any one to question it. Yet at that date the memory of the famous Corps of Crochallan Fencibles, founded by William Smellie, the author of the *Philosophy of Natural History*, and translator of Buffon, was still fresh; and with it a tradition that connected the name of Queen Mary with their favoured haunt.

This club is associated with some of the foremost names in Old Edinburgh circles; and it has been celebrated by Burns both in prose and verse. But the distinguished character of its members, and the novel aspect of their festivities, prevented attention being directed to older associations with the scene of these meetings. It had become a matter of course that they habitually dated their circulars from "Queen Mary's Council Room" in their haunt at the head of the Anchor Close; and a tradition of the Queen's presence there was cherished with such exaggerative zeal as perhaps helped to prevent its receiving any serious attention. In an account of the Anchor Close and its occupants, printed by Mr Alexander Smellie, the son of the founder of the old Club, in 1843, it is stated that "the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland held their anniversary meetings here, in the room which bore the name of the Crown. What is somewhat remarkable, there was, about forty years ago—*i.e.*, about the beginning of the century,—a niche in the wall where Queen Mary's crown was said to be deposited when she sat in the Council. None of the occupants of the tavern, although they always wrote [read?] the word 'The Crown,' on the top of their tavern bills, ever knew why it was so called. The windows in this building are extremely long and narrow. The fireplace in the Crown Room is also uncommonly large;" and the niche in the wall was no doubt one of the sculptured ambries, such as stood alongside of the large Gothic fireplaces in Mary of Guise's lodging in Blyth's Close, as well as in others of the city dwellings of the same period.

Here we find a tradition of Queen Mary, but overlaid with extravagant and childish additions well calculated to prevent its receiving any serious attention. Yet the locality so far accords with Archbishop

Beaton's description of the lodging "forment the Croce, upon the north syde of the gait," the scene of the brief durance of the captive Queen, that the vague tradition of her presence there may have had its origin in the associations with the actual site, in a neighbouring tenement, of that memorable last night's lodging of Mary Stuart in Edinburgh.

I am indebted to Mr Peter Miller, a Fellow of the Society, for putting me in possession of the evidence which enables me to identify the precise historical site. From a careful research in the Registers of Sasines, confirmed by other proofs, it appears that the Prestons of Craigmillar retained possession of a tenement on the north side of the High Street from 1423 to 1718. In Edgar's Map, Stewart's and Pearson's Closes appear on what is now the site of the Royal Exchange. To the west of this was Mary King's Close, not even now wholly effaced. In a Sasine of 1496 the tenement of Henry Court is bounded on the east by Pearson's Close; and that tenement constitutes the eastern boundary of Sir Simon Preston's lodging. The position and measurements of the old properties are still preserved on the Government Survey Sheets of 1759, and suffice to show that the old provost's tenement, and the last lodging of Queen Mary in her Scottish capital, occupied the site of the present entrance to the Royal Exchange, directly "forment the Croce," in accordance with the explicit statement of Archbishop Beaton, whose letter was written within a day or two after the events that he described. The Prestons owned property in other parts of the town, and more than one reference occurs to them in the rental of certain of the Altars of St Giles's Church. Among the gifts to the Altar of the Holy Cross is the following: "From the tenement formerly held by John de Quyltness, lying on the south side of the Burgh of Edinburgh, between the tenement of Walter Mentyn on the east, and the tenement of Sir Simon de Preston, Knight, from the gift of the late foresaid John, 4 lb. xiii s. iiii d." The rental to the Altar of St Nicholas also includes a gift of eight shillings annually "from the tenement of Sir Simon de Prestoun, between the tenement of John de Quyltnes on the east, and the tenement of John de Fentoun on the west," leaving no doubt of the Provost's zeal for the ecclesiastical system to which the Queen's party adhered.