Graham, the principal murderer of the late monarch, in the midst of the cruel tortures which preceded his death, had avowed that the day was at hand when the Scottish nobles would venerate his memory for having rid them of a tyrant ; and these proud and powerful barons, when they remembered the magnitude of James’s plans, and the stern and sometimes unjust severity with which he carried them into execution, could not but feel that now was the time to recover the privileges which they had lost, and to provide some strong and permanent barrier against all future en­croachments of the crown.

This observation is the key to the history of the country, not only during the reign of this monarch, but for the next century. It unfortunately happened, that with the excep­tion of James the Fourth, who on his accession was a youth of seventeen, Scotland was visited by a series of minorities in James the Second, James the Third, James the Fifth, and Mary, which occupied the long interval between 1436 and 1560; and during this period of more than a century, the extraordinary increase in the power of the nobles, the diminished respect for the crown, and its proportionate weakness against attack and encroachment, are too promi­nent features to escape notice. We see events, the same in character, and merely varied in name and minor inci­dents, occurring during the whole time : a monarch of greater or of less energy, emerging from his minority, and making an effort to recover the power which he had lost ; a band of turbulent and selfish nobles leagued against him, and only detached from their brethren, and persuaded to act with the crown, by an appeal to their interest and their fears. These remarks were strikingly exemplified in the scenes which took place during the minority of James the Second.

Immediately after his coronation, a struggle commenced for the possession of the chief power in the government. In a parliament held at Edinburgh, the queen-mother was entrusted with the custody of the young king, while Archi­bald earl of Douglas and duke of Touraine, was ap­pointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom, a title probably including all the powers of a military governor. In civil matters the chief authority seems to have fallen into the hands of the chancellor Crichton, who had the command of Edinburgh Castle, in which the queen-mother, with the young prince, had taken refuge soon after the murder of her husband. This princess, however, soon found that Crichton turned the possession of the royal person into an engine for his own advancement, and refused to her that frequent intercourse with her son which she had expected, and to which she was entitled.

Having combined therefore with Sir Alexander Living­ston, a baron who had been in favour with the late king, she contrived, by stratagem, to possess herself of the person of the young king, whom she shut up in a large wardrobe chest, and carried as her luggage to Leith, from whence she hastened to Stirling Castle, which had been assigned to her as a jointure-house.

The kingdom was now divided between three factions, that of the queen and Livingston, who possessed the per­son of the king, Sir Alexander Crichton the chancellor, and thirdly, the earl of Douglas, whose immense estates in Scot­land, and his foreign wealth and influence as duke of Touraine, rendered him by far the most formidable baron in the coun­try. From this moment to the period when James, having attained majority, began to act for himself, an interval of thirteen years, the history of the nation presents little else than one uniform scene of civil anarchy and of unpunished crime. “ The young monarch beheld his kingdom con­verted into a stage on which his nobles contended for the chief power ; whilst his subjects were cruelly oppressed, and he himself handed about, a passive puppet, from the failing grasp of one declining faction, into the more iron tute­

lage of a more successful party in the state.” In this me­lancholy drama the chief parts were played by Crichton and Livingston, who, deeming it for their interest to crush the overgrown power of the house of Douglas, inveigled the young earl and his brother into the Castle of Edin­burgh, brought suddenly against them a charge of treason, and put them to instant death.

It was fortunate for the country, that when thus torn by domestic factions, its foreign relations were of a pacific character, England, France, and the Netherlands, being all animated with the most friendly dispositions, while the young king, as he advanced from boyhood into maturer years, developed a character of prudence, vigour, and in­telligence, which appeared destined to restore a better state of things to his kingdom. Having married the daughter of the duke of Gueldres, he assumed the government, and selected as his principal councillor, Kennedy, bishop of St. Andrews, a prelate of great wisdom and integrity, whose rank as head of the church, invested him with an authority to which the people, amid the general corruption, looked with much reverence and affection. It was probably by his advice, that James, whose passions were naturally vio­lent, and who viewed with indignation the arrogance of the earl of Douglas, engaged in a systematic plan for the reduction of his overgrown power. Without attempting at once, and by any arbitrary exertion of strength, to de­prive this potent chief of his high offices, a measure which might have been followed by extreme commotion, he gradually withdrew from him his countenance and employ­ment ; surrounded himself by able and energetic council­lors, whom he promoted to the principal places of trust ; and thus weakened the authority of the proud baron, rather by the formidable counterpoise which he raised against it, than by any act of open aggression. This con­duct was attended with the best results. The earl of Douglas, finding his consequence decreasing, and his power on the wane, retired for a while from Scotland, and respect for the character of the monarch increased with the feel­ing of security derived from an improved administration of the government. During the absence of the chief, James had time to reduce the minor barons who were his dependants, to attach his own friends more powerfully to his interest, and to concentrate a strength, which, on Dou­glas’s return from Italy, convinced him that he must consent to play a second part to his prince. The result was what might easily have been anticipated. A collision took place between this haughty potentate and the young sovereign whose commands he had so often defied. Douglas, natu­rally rash and fearless, had consented, under a safecon- duct bearing the royal signature, to visit James in the Castle of Edinburgh. After the royal feast, the king remonstrated with his guest ; disclosed to him the proofs he possessed of his combinations against the govern­ment ; reproached him for the frequent murders of his sub­jects committed by his order ; and condescended to intreat him to forsake such dangerous courses, assuring him of his pardon and favour. Douglas, instead of embracing the offer, replied to it with haughtiness and insolence ; and James, losing all command of himself, and braved to his face, drew his dagger and stabbed him to the heart. Fall­ing at his feet, he was instantly despatched by the nobles, who, hearing the commotion, rushed into the apartment.

This atrocious murder was followed by a struggle be­tween tire royal party and the friends and vassals of the un­fortunate baron, in which the king was completely success­ful. Sir James Douglas, who succeeded his brother in the earldom, attempted to brave the monarch, renouncing his allegiance, and throwing himself into the arms of England ; but his projects against his country were defeated. He was equally unfortunate in his alliance with the Lord of the Isles, whose naval force he directed against the west of Scot-