was in this period, eight times invaded by a foreign force ; it was betrayed and deserted by David the Second, the un­worthy son and successor of Bruce ; it saw, on many occa­sions, the most powerful of its nobles enlisted under the banner of its enemies ; it had to struggle against the mili­tary genius and political talents of Edward the Third, and Henry the Fourth and Fifth ; and yet, with limited resources, and divided councils, so tenaciously did the people cling to their liberty, that, though sore oppressed, they were never conquered. Amid almost constant war, and its dreadful accompaniments, famine and the pestilence, they still pre­served their freedom, preferring the prospect of living in a country reduced by repeated invasion to a solitude or a desert, or even the last alternative of being totally exter­minated, to the most flattering offers of being united to England, when coupled with the condition that they should renounce their national independence.”@@1 We have above al­luded to the degeneracy of David the Second, whose long reign of forty-two years was divided into a minority, the greater part of which was passed in France ; a captivity in England, the result of his calamitous defeat in the battle of Durham ; and a train of subsequent reverses all occasioned by his headstrong character and devotion to his selfish plea­sures. But the darkest stain upon David, was his intrigues with Edward the Third, in which he hesitated not to sacri­fice the independence of the country, to swear homage to the English prince for his kingdom of Scotland, and even to propose to his parliament, that the order of succession solemnly settled by his heroic father, should be altered in favour of an English prince. It is needless to say that so degrading a proposal was indignantly repelled, and that the death of the prince who had offered the insult was regard­ed as a national deliverance.

In Robert the Second, who succeeded him as the first of the house of Stewart, and his son, Robert the Third, the nation, though still exposed to the repeated attacks of Eng­land, experienced a short breathing time, owing to the death of Edward the Third, and the incapacity of Richard the Se­cond ; but neither of these Scottish princes possessed the vigour or the talents requisite to wield the sceptre with suc­cess, in the midst of the difficulties by which they were sur­rounded. The second Robert came to the crown when age had chilled his vigour ; and his son and successor, Robert the Third, was of too indolent and gentle a character to hold his part against a fierce feudal nobility, led by his brothers, the Earls of Fife and Buchan, the first a man of great ambi­tion, the second a monster of crime, who gave himself up to every species of lust and rapine, and has been traditionally remembered as “ the Wolf of Badenoch.”

All this led to great disorder. The king, unwilling to burden himself with the cares of government, devolved the administration upon his son, the duke of Rothsay, a young man of violent passions, though of considerable ability, who had made himself particularly obnoxious to his uncle, the earl of Fife. This led to a fatal collision. Fife, whose au­thority was increased by his being made duke of Albany, proved too strong for the young prince. His father, the king, was persuaded that the excesses of his son required restraint, and the unhappy youth was hurried to Falkland, and shut up in a dungeon, where he was intrusted to the care of two ruffians, who starved him to death. It was at first reported that he had been cut off by a dysentery ; but the horrible tale of his sufferings soon after transpired. “ A poor woman in passing through the palace garden, had been attracted by his groans, and had found means to support him by thin cakes which she slid into the grated window of his prison, and it is said by her own milk, conveyed through a reed ; but she was detected, and put to death by his keepers ; and after fifteen days, the body of the miserable

captive was found in a state too shocking to be described. In the extremities of hunger, he had gnawed and tom his own flesh.”@@2 Robert, depressed by this calamity, and inca­pable of exertion, committed the whole cares of the govern­ment to the duke of Albany ; and the power of that daring man was increased by another event which completely broke the spirit of the king, and was probably the cause of his death. This was the seizure by the English of his eldest son James, then a youth in his fifteenth year, and on his passage to France. The consequences were very fatal to the country. The prince was carried to the Tower; the father did not long survive the captivity of the son ; and on his death, which took place in 1406, his brother, the duke of Albany, succeeded to the prize which had long been the object of his ambition, the undisputed regency of the king­dom.

The young king, James the First, was a captive, and Henry the Fourth knew too well the value of the prize to part with him. For nineteen years he was detained in England ; and, during this long interval, Albany became the uncontrol­led governor of Scotland. It has been suspected that the in­trigues of this able and unprincipled man with the English monarch, had led to the seizure of the young king. That they prolonged the period of his captivity, there can be no doubt.

It was clearly the best policy of the regent to cultivate peace with England, and to conciliate Henry the Fourth, as this prince could at any time put a termination to his au­thority, by restoring James to his kingdom ; and the same desire to retain the power which he had so nefariously usurp­ed, induced Albany to cultivate the friendship, and overlook the crimes and excesses of the great feudal barons. All this led to dreadful confusion in Scotland, which, although freed for a time from the incessant invasions of its more powerful neighbour, was torn by private war, whilst the lives and property of its people were exposed to the attack of every unprincipled feudal baron who sheltered himself under the protection of the regent.

This miserable state of things was at length terminated by the return of James to his dominions ; a prince whose character presented a striking contrast to that of his father and grandfather. During the nineteen years in which he had been unjustifiably detained in that country’, he enjoy­ed advantages which almost repaid him for his captivity. Henry the Fourth, a prince who well understood the art of government, had made it his generous care that James should receive an excellent education ; and he had the advantage of being instructed in war, by accompanying his victorious successor, Henry the Fifth, to France. On his return to his own dominions, he was in the prime and the vigour of manhood. His character, formed in the school of adversity, was one of great power. He found his kingdom a scene of lawless excess and rapine ; a condition to which it had been reduced from the want of a firm hand to restrain oppression and enforce the laws. Since the death of Bruce the power of the aristocracy had been on the increase, while that of the crown had proportionally lost ground, and fallen into contempt. His object, as can be clearly discerned through the history of his brief reign, was to restore the kingly authority, to rescue the commons from oppression and plunder, to give security to property, encouragement to the industry and pacific arts of his peo­ple, and to compel his barons to renounce their ideas of in­dividual independence, and become good subjects.

The regency of Albany, his uncle, and of his son Mur­doch, who had succeeded him, was naturally and justly re­garded by James as little else than a long usurpation. He was mortified that Albany, against whom, as the murderer of his brother, he entertained the deepest resentment, should have escaped his merited punishment ; and the royal

@@@1 Life of James the First, pp. 203, 204, in Lives of Scottish Worthies.

@@@s laves of Scottish Worthies, vol. ii. p. 212.