This imprudent step determined Angus to change his ground, and a dread of some counter revolution threw him upon new and more violent courses. By a successful stroke of policy, he procured the passing of an act of Parliament which annulled the authority of the secret council., the only power which stood between him and absolute dominion. At the same moment, the parliament declared that the minority of the young king was at an end, and that having completed his fourteenth year, he was to be considered as an independent sovereign. While the youthful monarch thus nominally assumed the government, that provision which entrusted the keeping of the royal person to certain peers in rotation, remained in force ; and as Angus had artfully summoned the parliament at that precise time, when it be­longed to himself and the archbishop of Glasgow to assume their periodical guardianship of the king, the consequence of this state manœuvre was to place the whole power of the government in their hands.

A new secret council was nominated, composed solely of the creatures of Angus ; the great seal was soon after taken from Beaton, the young king was watched with thé utmost jealousy, and compelled to give his consent to every thing proposed to him by his new masters. An act of parliament was passed, granting a remission to the heads and followers of this all-powerful faction for the crimes, robberies, or trea­sons, committed by them during the last nineteen years ; every office of trust or emolument in the kingdom was dis­posed of to the one or other of its supporters, and the an­cient tyranny of the house of Douglas once more attained ade- gree of strength which rivalled, or rather usurped the royal power. At this unhappy period, as has been observed in another work, “ the borders became the scene of tumult and confusion, and the insolence of the numerous vassals of this great family was intolerable; murders, spoliations, and crimes of varied enormity, were committed with impunity. The arm of the law, paralysed by the power of an unprincipled faction, neglected to arrest the guilty ; the sources of justice were corrupted ; the highest and most sacred ecclesiastical dignities became the prey of daring intruders, or were sold to the highest bidder ; and the young king, carried about through the country by Angus, apparently in great state, but merely a puppet in the hands of his masters, sighed in vain over a captivity to which there appeared no prospect of a termination.”@@1 An attempt indeed was made for his de­liverance, first by the laird of Buccleugh, one of the most powerful of the border barons, and afterwards by the earl of Lennox, who deserted the party of the Douglases, and to whom the young monarch was much attached. But Buccleugh was routed with considerable loss, and Lennox defeated and slain.

These unsuccessful attempts only strengthened the power of Angus. He entered into a more strict alliance with Henry the Eighth, obtained the friendship and support of Beaton, the archbishop of St. Andrews, and unchecked by ’any opposition, ruled all things at his will. Nothing in­deed could be more miserable than the picture presented by the country ; a monarch in captivity, a nobility in thral­dom, a people groaning under the most complicated oppres­sions, yet with their hands tied, and compelled by the mi­serable system under which they lived to serve their oppres­sors. It may be asked, what was the secret history of this enormous power, this degraded and implicit obedience? The answer is to be found in the fact, that the Douglases were masters of the royal person ; they could compel the king to affix his signature to any deeds or letters which their ty­ranny or their caprice might dictate. Angus, the supreme lord of all this misrule, was chancellor, and the great seal at his command ; his uncle, Douglas of Kilspindy, was trea­surer, and commanded the whole revenues of the country ;

the law, with all its terrible feudal processes of treason arid forfeiture, could be wielded by them at pleasure. So long as the king remained in their hands, this powerful machinery was all theirs ; the moment he escaped, the system broke to pieces, and their power was at an end.

Of all this James, who had now entered his seventeenth year, was perfectly aware ; and as every hour of his capti­vity made the Douglases more hateful to him, his mind be­came intently occupied with projects for his escape. Nor was it long Ere he effected it. With an address superior to his years, the king had either succeeded in lulling the suspicions of his keepers, or a continuance of unchecked power had made them careless. James was at Falkland. Angus, Douglas his brother, and Archibald his uncle, were absent on their private affairs; only Douglas of Pathhead,the captain of the royal guard, remained. The young monarch called for the park-keeper, and, as had been his wont, pro­posed to hunt next morning. Therefore, says a graphic old chronicler,@@2 he “ caused him to warn all the whole tenants and gentlemen thereabouts who had the speediest dogs, that they would come to Falkland wood on the morn, to meet him at seven hours, for he was determined he would slay a fat buck or two for his pleasure ; and to that effect caused warn the cooks and stewards to make his supper ready, that he might go to his bed the sooner, and to have his *desjeune* (breakfast) ready by four o’clock, and commanded James Douglas of Pathhead to pass the sooner to his bed, and caused bring his collation, and drank to James Douglas, saying to him, that he should have good hunting on the morrow, bidding him be early astir. Then the king went to his bed ; and James Douglas, seeing the king in his bed, wist that all things had been sure enough, and passed in like manner to his bed. When the watch was set,” continues Pitscottie, “ and all things in quietness, the king called on a yeoman of the stable, and desired him bring one of his suits of apparel, hose, cloak, coat, and bonnet, and putting them on, slept forth as a yeoman of the stable, and was unper­ceived of the watches, till he had passed to the stables, and caused saddle a horse for himself, and one led, and took two servants with him, namely, Jocky Hart, a yeoman of the stable, and another secret chamber boy, and leapt on horse, and spurred hastily his journey to Stirling, and won there by the breaking of the day, over the bridge, which he caus­ed to be closed behind him, that none without licence might win that passage. After this he passed to the castle, and was received there by the captain, who was very glad of his coming, and prepared the castle with all things needful. Then he caused shut the gates, and let down the portcullis, and put the king in his bed to sleep, because he had ridden all that night.”

Having thus regained his liberty, James’s first act was to summon a council., and issue a proclamation, interdicting Angus and the Douglases from all approach within six miles of the court, under pain of treason. Nor did they venture to disobey it. On discovering the flight of the king, An­gus, Archibald, and Sir George, had hastily assembled a few followers, thrown themselves on horseback, and were riding to Stirling, when they were met by the herald, who read the act, and commanded them in the king’s name to halt. For a moment they hesitated, but it was only for a moment. Their sovereign was free ; the weapons which but a day be­fore they had wielded with such irresistible force, were now ready to be employed against themselves. A single step forward, and they were guilty of treason, their property and their lives at the mercy of the crown. All this rose rapidly and fearfully before them ; and aware how vain it would be at such a moment to meet the power of their enemies, they retreated to Linlithgow.

The monarch, who now took the government into his own

**@@@1 Tytler’s History of Scotland, vol. v. p. 201.**

**@@@’ Lindsay of Pitscottie, pp. 218, 219.**