

1619-74

MIDDLETON, JOHN, EARL OF MIDDLETON.—This man, although neither good nor great, demands, like the Duke of Lauderdale, a place in Scottish biography, in consequence of the pernicious influence he exercised upon Scottish events, and the destinies of better men than himself. He was the eldest son of John Middleton, of Caldhome, in the county of Kincardine, the descendant of an ancient Scottish family, that derived its name from the lands of Middleton, in the same county, which had been a donation to the founder of the race by the "gracious Duncau." John, the future earl, like many of the nobly-descended, but scantily-endowed young Scots of this period, appears to have devoted himself to the profession of arms, and "trailed a pike" in Hepburn's regiment during the Huguenot wars in France. Returning from that country during the civil wars of his own, he took service in the parliamentary army of England, and, in 1642, commanded a troop of horse, with the rank of lieutenant-general, under Sir William Waller. After this he returned to Scotland, and obtained a command, first under Montrose, while still a Covenanter, and afterwards under General Lesley; and with the former of these he saw hot service at the Bridge of Dee, and had a considerable share in the defeat of the Gordons, who were in arms for the king. When the Marquis of Montrose abandoned the ranks of the Covenanters for the service of the king, he afterwards found in Middleton one of his most determined opponents; and for this, indeed, according to all Scottish reckoning, there was but too good a cause, for his father had been shot by the soldiers of the marquis in 1645, while sitting peacefully in his hall in the mansion of Caldhome. Middleton soon obtained both revenge and honour, for he greatly contributed, as Lesley's lieutenant-general, to the defeat of Montrose at Philiphaugh, on the 13th September, during the same year; and so highly were his services valued on this occasion, that the Scottish parliament voted him a gift of 25,000 marks. When the formidable marquis raised a fresh army, and renewed the war, Middleton was sent against him as commander of the Covenanters; and so well did he acquit himself in this charge, that he raised the siege of Inverness, and pressed so vigorously upon Montrose as to compel him, in July, 1646, to sign a capitulation, by which he agreed to leave the kingdom, on condition of an indemnity being granted to his followers.

The change of political events now threw Middleton into a new course of action, and prepared him for that life of apostasy and persecution by which he was afterwards signalized. The Scottish parliament, that had done so much

not to destroy, but repress royalty, and confine it within due limits, found it time to interpose when the life of Charles I. was menaced, and the throne itself overturned; and, accordingly, when the Duke of Hamilton was about to be sent into England as commander of the Scottish army, Middleton was appointed major-general of the cavalry. But while the army was in the act of being assembled for their march, tidings arrived at head-quarters of a formidable muster of not less than 2000 foot and 500 horse at Mauchline, composed of malcontents hostile to the movement in behalf of royalty, and resolved to oppose it, upon which Middleton was detached with six troops of horse to break up the meeting. If, however, we are to believe Wodrow, who had his account from some of the parties engaged in it, this gathering on Mauchline moor was nothing more formidable than a sacramental meeting of the peasantry, who were not only few in numbers, but peaceable, and entirely unarmed. Still, following the royalist accounts, which afterwards obtained the ascendancy, Middleton charged and routed this army with his wonted courage and success; but, in turning again to the simple covenanting story, it appears that he had agreed to permit the people to depart peaceably, and that, while they were doing so, hard words had passed between them and the soldiers, and that the latter, in consequence, had driven them off the moor with unnecessary bloodshed. After this, Middleton accompanied the expedition into England, and was present at the battle of Preston (August 17, 1648), but, being wounded, and his horse shot under him, he was taken prisoner, and sent to Newcastle, from which, however, he contrived to make his escape. Next year he appeared in the Highlands at the head of a body of royalists; but his rising in favour of the royal cause was as unseasonable as that of Montrose at the same period, and was attended with the same untoward result; for, in 1650, his handful of troops were dispersed by Colonel Strachan. It is probable that the arrival of Charles II. from Breda, and the necessity for mustering every good sword in his cause, allowed Middleton to escape the fate of Montrose, and even caused his trespass to be overlooked. His restless spirit, however, and rash zeal for royalty, soon involved him in fresh difficulty, so that, in the conspiracy which was formed to detach the young king from the Covenanters, and invest him with unlimited rule, in defiance not only of Scotland, but England to boot, Middleton was to assume the command of the emancipating army in the Highlands, and wage the war of absolutism in the true Montrose fashion. It is well known how this blundering scheme was strangled in the outset, when Charles and his compeers were pursued and led back to head-quarters like runaway schoolboys. Although Middleton, on this occasion, escaped the civil penalties of the trespass, in consequence of a general indemnity, he did not

escape the censures of the church, by whose decree he was excommunicated, the Rev. James Guthrie executing the sentence to that effect in the church of Stirling. This sentence was soon relaxed, but Middleton never afterwards forgave it. During the same year (1651) he marched with the Scottish royalist army into England, and behaved gallantly at the battle of Worcester, where the chief resistance was attributed to his bold charges and persevering efforts; but here he was severely wounded, taken prisoner, and sent to the Tower of London. As he was too dangerous an enemy to be spared, his end now seemed certain, more especially as he had held a commission in the parliamentary army, so that Cromwell resolved to proceed against him as a traitor; but here Middleton's usual good luck prevailed, for he managed to escape from prison, and even to find concealment for some time in London itself, notwithstanding the vigilant espionage which the Protector had established over the metropolis. At length he reached Paris, where Charles II. resided, and by whom he was sent to Scotland, in 1653, to attempt a diversion in his favour at the head of the Scottish royalists in the Highlands. But Monk, who exercised a watchful rule over Scotland, attacked and routed him at Lochgeary, on the 26th of July, 1654, and Middleton, after vainly lingering and shifting a few months longer in the country, escaped in the following year to Cologne, where Charles at that time resided, and with whom he remained in exile till the Restoration.

Hitherto the career of Middleton had been that of an unscrupulous and successful soldier of fortune, veering with the changing wind, and adapting, or at least trying to adapt, every mutation to his own advancement. He was not, therefore, slow to avail himself of the advantages which the Restoration promised, more especially to those who had amused the king in his exile, as well as fought for him in the field. Accordingly, in 1660, he was created Earl of Middleton, and Lord Clermont and Fettercairn; appointed commander-in-chief of the forces in Scotland, governor of Edinburgh castle, and royal commissioner to the Scottish parliament. Perhaps it was not without a deep purpose on the part of the king, or the counsellors by whom he was directed, that such a man as Middleton should have been thus invested with almost unlimited power over his native country. "The commissioner, the Earl of Middleton," says Wodrow, with his usual shrewdness; "his fierce and violent temper, agreeable enough to a camp, and his education, made him no improper instrument to overawe Scotland, and bring us down from any sense of liberty and privilege, unto a pliant submission to arbitrary designs, absolute supremacy and prerogative. And this was the more easily accomplished, that this nation, now for ten years, had been under the feet of the English army, and very much inured to subjection." Let Middleton, too, rule as despotically as he might, there was no lack

of instruments with which to execute his wildest purpose. For during the late civil wars, a new generation of Scottish nobles and gentlemen had sprung up, whose finances were exhausted and estates incumbered, but whose thirst for pleasure, under the new state of things, was only the more keen, in consequence of their former abstinence, and who were ready, for pay and plunder, to second the commissioner, let him violate the laws as he pleased. These men were little likely to care either for Presbyterianism or patriotism, more especially when it interposed against their career of unlimited indulgence. It was out of such wretched elements, too, that the Scottish parliament was chiefly constituted—men who hated alike the strictness of the national church, and the rebuking lives of its faithful ministers, and were therefore ready, in their official and collective character, to pass laws for the coercion of the former and persecution of the latter, without examination or scruple. Such was the ominous state of unhappy Scotland when Charles II., one of the worst and most depraved of its royal house of the Stuarts, ascended the British throne.

As Middleton was no politician, his first proceedings went in soldier fashion to the mark, which was the suppression of Presbyterianism, and the overthrow of everything that opposed the absolute rule of his master. This was apparent in his first opening of parliament, upon the 1st of January, 1661, an opening accompanied with an amount of pomp and splendour to which Scotland had long been unaccustomed. The deed was prefaced by the appointment of ministers, not by the General Assembly, as heretofore, to preach during the sittings of parliament, but by the king's advocate, who selected men that would prophesy smoothly; and, accordingly, their sermons were laboured condemnations of solemn leagues, national covenants, and rebellion, and eulogiums on passive obedience and the divine right of kings. Then came the oath of parliament, modelled in new fashion upon the English oath of supremacy, and so worded that it acknowledged the king to be "only supreme governor of this kingdom, over all persons, and in all causes;" thus making him not only a supreme civil, but also ecclesiastical power. To this the oath of allegiance succeeded, by which the subject was bound to acknowledge the supreme power of the king in all matters civil and religious, and making it high treason to deny it. In this way they established the kingly power in its fullest latitude, and could bring every religious assembly that might displease them within a charge of high treason. But this process of rescinding the established order of things piece by piece, and the necessity of devising cunning pretexts for so doing, and clothing each enactment in words that had either a double meaning, or a deeper meaning than met the ear, was too slow for such impatient legislators, and they resolved to end such a war of skirmishes at once by a decisive onslaught.

"Accordingly," says Wodrow, "in the 15th Act, they came at one dash, to rid themselves of all the parliaments since the year 1633." All that had been done since that period they stigmatized as "troubles, upon the specious but common pretext of REFORMATION, the common cloak of all rebellions," and declared that his majesty held the crown "immediately from God Almighty alone." Such was the famous, or rather most infamous of all the measures that had ever signalized a parliament, perhaps, since the days of Odin—"a most extravagant act," says Burnet, "and only fit to be concluded after a drunken bout." And that it was passed under some such inspiration, he makes but too probable, from his account of Middleton and his compeers. "His way of living," he tells us, "was the most splendid the nation had ever seen; but it was likewise the most scandalous, for vices of all sorts were the open practices of those about him. Drinking was the most notorious of all, which was often continued through the whole night to the next morning; and many disorders happening after those irregular heats, the people, who had never before that time seen anything like it, came to look with an ill eye on everything that was done by such a set of lewd and vicious men." Such were now the legislators of Scotland, and such the trim in which they repaired to their places in parliament. As for the all-sweeping measure commonly called the "Act Recissory," which was proposed half in jest, as something that the jaded members might make themselves merry withal, but passed in earnest after a single reading, it still remains unrepealed in our statute book, as if to astound all posterity with the humbling fact, that wise, cautious, deliberative Scotland had once, during her national existence, been actually ruled by a senate of bedlamites.

These wild specimens of legislation were soon to produce most disastrous fruits. And first in the list of victims was the Marquis of Argyle, whom Middleton hated, and whose rich estates he coveted, and who was sent down from London to stand trial for high treason before this Scottish parliament, with the commissioner at its head. The proceedings of such a tribunal could be neither slow nor doubtful; and, in the same year, the marquis perished on the scaffold. Another victim, not to Middleton's cupidity, but his revenge, also behoved to be sacrificed; and he, too, perished, only five days after, upon the same scaffold. This was James Guthrie, minister of Stirling, who, in 1650, had pronounced the sentence of excommunication upon the earl, and who was now condemned to die the death of a traitor under those new laws from which no man could be safe. Having thus gratified his resentment, Middleton now turned his attention more exclusively to his personal interests, which he resolved to further by fine and confiscation; and, accordingly, in the second sitting of parliament, held in 1662, a list was drawn out of those who were to be excepted

from the act of indemnity now about to be reluctantly granted to Scotland, although England had enjoyed its full benefit since the commencement of the Restoration. It was a monstrous list, constructed chiefly with an eye to the wealth and means of the proscribed, and included seven or eight hundred noblemen, gentlemen, burgesses, and others, whose fines, it was calculated, would amount to one million, seventeen thousand, three hundred and fifty-three pounds, six shillings, and eightpence. True, indeed, this money was in Scottish, not English coinage, and therefore scarcely a tenth of the usual sterling amount; but the imposition of such a fine upon so poor a country, implied the infliction of such destitution and suffering, as to render it one of the heaviest of national calamities. In this decree it was also stated, "that the fines therein imposed were to be given for the relief of the king's good subjects who had suffered in the late troubles," while Middleton resolved that these "good subjects" should mean no others than himself and his dependents. Little was he aware that this harvest of iniquity, which he so diligently sowed, he was not destined to reap: the fines, indeed, were afterwards levied to the full, but only to pass into other coffers than his own; even as in war, the wretched camp-followers, who have kept at a wary distance during the battle, rush down upon the spoil while the conquerors are securing the victory.

But wilder, baser, and more mischievous, if possible, than this purpose of wholesale spoliation, was his tour to the west for the establishment of Episcopacy. He knew that this was his master's prevailing wish; and therefore, although originally himself a Covenanter, and an honoured one, he now seconded the royal desire with all the zeal of a place-hunter, and all the rancour of a renegade. A favourable opportunity, as he thought, had now occurred. Although the Presbyterian church courts had been arbitrarily closed as illegal meetings, the pulpits were still open; and it was indignantly complained of by the newly-made Scottish bishops, that these recusant ministers, who were thus permitted the free exercise of their office, would neither recognize the authority of their diocesans, nor give attendance at the episcopal court-meetings. Middleton, accordingly, designed a justiciary progress for the purpose of enforcing the authority of the bishops; and as the west of Scotland was the stronghold of recusancy, he resolved to make Glasgow his head-quarters. And never, perhaps, went such a troop of mortal men upon so sacred a commission; it was a procession of Silenus and his bacchanals, of Comus and his rabble rout. On Middleton's arrival in Glasgow with his motley array of senators and councillors, Archbishop Fairfoul repeated his complaints of the refusal of these Presbyterian divines to acknowledge his authority, and proposed that an act should be passed banishing all those ministers from their manses, parishes, and districts, who had been

admitted into office since 1649, when patronage was abolished, unless they consented to receive presentation from the lawful patron, and collation from the bishop of the diocese. In this way it was asserted Episcopacy would be fully established, and that not even so many as ten ministers would consent to forego their livings by refusing compliance. It was a mad decree, which none but madmen would have passed; but, says Burnet, "Duke Hamilton told me they were all so drunk that day, that they were not capable of considering anything that was laid before them, and would hear of nothing but executing the law, without any relenting or delay." This impetuous haste was fully shown by the fact, that though the enactment was proclaimed on the 4th of October (1662), the 1st of November was specified as the last day of grace, beyond which all submission would be fruitless—thus allowing their victims little more than three weeks for deliberation upon a step in which their all was at stake. The national stubbornness of Scotland, even in the absence of a better motive, would have fired at such an insult, and confronted it with a dogged resistance; but what was to be expected when conscience, and principle, and every high and holy inducement were called into full exercise? The answer was given on the 1st of November, when nearly four hundred ministers, with their families, forsook their homes, and abandoned all except their trust in God, and hope of a life to come. Is it strange that after this Episcopacy could take no root in Scotland, or that Presbyterianism should be endeared to her people not only as the best of creeds, but the most patriotic of national distinctions?

In this way the Earl of Middleton showed his utter unfitness whether for civil or religious government. He had awoke a spirit of resistance in Scotland which abler men than himself could not allay, and utterly damaged the purposes of his master by the means with which he hoped to advance them. But retribution was at hand, and it was to be imbibited tenfold by coming from a sovereign whom he had so unscrupulously served, and through the machinations of a rival whose overthrow he planned, and hoped soon to accomplish. Although he had ruled "every inch a king," it was with a sore misgiving that he had a "viceroy over him" in the person of the Earl, afterwards Duke of Lauderdale, who, as secretary for Scotland, had, when he pleased to exercise it, the chief influence at court in the direction of Scottish affairs. Middleton was eager to remove this unwelcome associate, before whom his spirit stood rebuked; but in the struggle that followed between these unscrupulous rivals, the blundering, hot-headed soldier was no match for the learned and wily politician. On finding that his credit with the king was failing, he repaired to London in 1663, hoping by his presence to recover the royal favour; but, on his arrival at court, he was severely accused by Lauderdale of mismanagement in the government

of Scotland. This, and the mischievous consequences that had accrued from it, he could not deny; and his only plea was, that he was a soldier, and therefore ignorant of law and its forms, and that all he had done was designed for his majesty's service, and the establishment of the royal authority. This last apology, although so boundless in its extent, fared as it generally does in such critical emergencies, and his deposition and disgrace followed, although Monk, Clarendon, and the English bishops interposed in his behalf.

After having been thus blighted, the earl retired into obscurity, living for that purpose at a mansion called the Friary, near Guildford, which belonged to a Scottish gentleman named Dalmahoy, who had married the widow of the Duke of Hamilton; and to requite the kindness of his host, the earl built a large and handsome bridge across the river that flowed through the estate, which was called after his own name, "Middleton Bridge." At length the government of the fort of Tangier in Africa having become vacant by the death of Lord Rutherford, this poor appointment was bestowed upon Middleton, to requite, as was alleged, his services in establishing Episcopacy in Scotland, but in reality, as was generally thought, to remove him from the court and country by a sort of honourable banishment. To Tangier he accordingly repaired, where his life was soon brought to an abrupt and miserable termination. In falling down stairs, he broke his arm, and at the next tumble the broken bone was driven into his side, inflicting a mortal wound, of which he soon after expired. A report had been current in Scotland, that in his better days, when he subscribed the covenant, he had declared to the gentlemen present that this was the happiest day he had ever seen; and holding up his right arm, he wished to God that that might be his death if ever he did anything against the blessed work to which he had thus pledged himself. Men trembled at the recollection when tidings of his tragic end arrived from Tangier. This event occurred in 1673. He was succeeded in the earldom by his only son, Charles, second earl of Middleton.

CHAMBERS, R. A biographical
dictionary of eminent
Scotsmen. New ed. 5 v. 1855.