

*Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Steuart Denham,
Baronet.*

By the Right Hon. the Earl of Buchan.

SIR JAMES STEUART DENHAM, Baronet, was the son of Sir James Steuart of Goodtrees, Bart. Solicitor General for Scotland, by Anna, daughter of Sir Hugh Dalrymple, Bart. Lord President of the College of Justice in Scotland, who was the third son of the illustrious and learned Lord Viscount of Stair.

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He was born on the 10th of October, *old stile*, 1713, and remained, during the years of his infancy, at Goodtrees, his father's seat, in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh. His first public education was received at the school of North Berwick, in East Lothian, where the first dawns of his genius and abilities were observed to be rather of a firm and permanent, than of a light, showy, and figurative nature. His attention to the elements of language was diverted by the want of perception, at that early period, of their connection and utility; and there were few, if any eyes at that time sharp enough to foresee the resplendent and beautiful blossom of his faculties, in the contracted bud.

The consideration of this circumstance, which is not uncommon in the experience of schools, ought to incline the protectors and conductors of them, to wait with patience and perseverance for the later fruits of the human understanding; and the appearance of early and promising blossoms ought, on the other hand, to be observed with moderate expectation, as often arising from premature exertion, and giving birth to no future greatness or ability.

Sir James, having imbibed the elementary part of classic education at the school of North Berwick, was removed to the university of Edinburgh, at the age of fourteen, his father being now dead*, and his mother intrusted with the care of his education.

At this university our Author went through a complete course of the sciences and languages there taught, and studied the Roman and Scottish law there also, with the occasional assistance of Professor Hercules Lindfay, an eminent Civilian in the university of Glasgow. This laborious institution being happily accomplished, he went to the
Bar

* Died anno 1726.

Bar as an Advocate before the College of Justice, and published an acute and ingenious Thesis on that occasion, having before submitted himself, as is usual, to a public examination by the Faculty of Advocates.

A few months after this introduction to the practice of his profession, Sir James set out upon his travels. He made the tour of Holland, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy, not to import the fashions and fopperies which are to be found in all countries, but to imitate the example of the wise Ulysses, to study the laws, manners, and desirable improvements of the countries and cities through which he passed, or in which he resided.

He returned from these well-employed travels, in the year 1740; and became the general object of esteem and attention in his own country; not only on account of his excellent qualities, but by the elegance of his manners, and the beauty of his person.

His return to the Bar was anxiously expected by his friends and countrymen, and his absence from it was imputed to the influence of certain connections, of a political nature, which he had formed abroad, and particularly at Rome.

In the year 1743, Sir James married the Lady Frances Wemyss, eldest daughter of James Earl of Wemyss, a lady of great merit, who afterwards accompanied him, in all his troubles, with a constancy and affection that endeared her not only to her husband, but to the public.

A few months after this happy marriage, a vacancy happened in the representation in parliament, for the county of Edinburgh, when

Sir James took an active part in opposition to the interest of Robert Dundas, Esq; of Arncliffe, one of the Senators of the College of Justice, who, happening to preside at the meeting of the electors for the county of Edinburgh, omitted to call over Sir James's name, on the roll of the electors, on account of an alleged insufficiency of right to vote on that occasion.

On this account, Mr Dundas became the object of a legal prosecution by Sir James, as having disobeyed the injunctions and rules laid down and enforced by an act of parliament relating to the rolls of electors of members of parliament for counties in Scotland.—When, in the course of litigation, this cause came to be heard before the College of Justice, Sir James pled his own cause, with so much eloquence, and in so masterly a manner, that Mr Dundas (commonly called Lord Arncliffe) though a Judge, came down from the bench and defended himself at the bar. An appearance very uncommon, and demonstrative of the high sense he had of the abilities of his opponent.

This extraordinary appearance of our author gave the greatest hopes of his professional abilities, and inspired all his friends with fresh zeal for his continuance at the bar; but the sentiments and engagements formerly mentioned, did, in all probability, prevent Sir James from availing himself of so brilliant an introduction.

After this struggle, he passed near two years at his seat, in the country, surrounded at all times by the most learned and accomplished of his countrymen, and rendering himself continually the delight of all his guests and companions, by the charms and variety of his conversation, and the polite animation of his manners and address.

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Among those were many of the illustrious persons who afterwards engaged in the attempt to place prince Charles Edward on the throne of his ancestors, in the name of his father.

The time is not yet come when it would be proper to give an account of the share Sir James had in the political events relating to that unsuccessful attempt.

It is certain that Sir James was the person of the greatest talents who was suspected of giving counsel and aid to the promoters of this intended revolution; and, on that account, he was the more subject to the ill offices of those who viewed him as a dangerous rival in political abilities, and were afraid of being supplanted by him in the career of professional promotion. His name was transmitted to government, as privy and aiding to the Rebellion; and those who sent up his name were not patriots.

The fame of such persons, if they had or have any, will hardly survive even that of this simple and unaffected monument of Sir James's reputation.

If spirit is superior to brute matter, and moral misfortunes to natural, the loss of Sir James Steuart's talents to his country, must be reckoned among the heaviest losses sustained by that unhappy rebellion.

Thus Sir James became a fugitive and an exile from that country which ought to have cherished him, and pointed him out for elevation with the finger of public applause.

But the mind of this illustrious man was not to be soured by disappointment; nor was he to imitate a Coriolanus or a Duke de Ripperda,

perda, by becoming an enemy to his country: He employed the years of his banishment for the good of that country, the instruction of mankind, and the illustration of the republic of letters, at that time, unhappily, the only commonwealth of which he was a member.

He resided long in France, and particularly at Angoulesme, where, having nothing else to occupy his active mind, he applied himself to study; a great part of the fruits of which are to be found in his acute and elaborate works. It was by studying the language of the finances, without which nobody can ask a question concerning them, so as to be understood by those who have knowledge sufficient to answer it, that Sir James was enabled to collect that amazing magazine of facts relating to the revenue, which laid the foundation for some of the most curious and interesting chapters of his Principles of Political Oeconomy.

As soon as Sir James could ask questions properly, he applied in familiar conversation to the intendant and his substitutes, in the province where he lived, whom he found of course exceedingly curious to learn the state of British finances, under the branches of land-tax, customs, excise, and other inland duties.

This led him to compare the state of the two nations. The information he was enabled to give, was an equivalent for the information he received, and both were mutually instructed.

The department of the intendants in France is confined to the taxes which compose the *recettes generales*, namely the *Taille*, the *Capitation*, and the *Vinçtiemes*. But as all intendants have been *maîtres des requetes*, and bred at Paris, they could not fail to have
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some knowledge of the general farms, and other branches of finance.

He carefully noted down at all times the answers he got; and when he came afterwards to reside at Paris, he got more ample information, both from gentlemen of the finance, and from persons of the Parliament of Paris, who to the number of 25 had been for 15 months exiled in the province where Sir James had lived a long time. In a word, with long study and application, he was enabled to compose the 6th chapter of the 4th part of the 4th book, which gives so clear and succinct an account of the French finances as they stood at that time.

With respect to Sir James's elaborate and useful discussion of what relates to money, he had had occasion long before the publication of his Principles of Political Oeconomy, to write and publish concerning the principles of money as applied or applicable to the coin and money of the empire, which performance had met with much approbation. It was written in High Dutch and published at
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In the year 1757, Sir James published at Francfort sur le Mein, his *Apologie du sentiment de Monsieur le Chevalier Newton, sur l'Antienne Chronologie des Grècs, contenant des reponses à toutes les objections qui y ont été faites jusqu'à présent.*

This apology was written in the beginning of the year 1755, when the author proposed to have caused it to be printed, but was prevented by other engagements. Some time afterwards, a correspondence took place betwixt M. L. R. Desh. P. R. and Sir James, on this subject, and a letter of that gentleman's was published in the
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French Mercure for December 1755, which letter was answered by Sir James, and printed also, but not for some time after.

This work of Sir James has great merit; as for the great work, the Political Oeconomy, it is needless to praise it, for the public will do ample justice to it, when it has thrown from its literary meal, the high seasoned cookeries of the plagiarists; who have obtruded Sir James's facts, principles, and reasonings, on the world, without acknowledging from whence they were derived.

While Sir James resided abroad, during the late war betwixt France and Great Britain, he had the misfortune to have some letters addressed to him, proceeding on the mistake of his person and character, whereby he became innocently the object of suspicion, as furnishing intelligence to the enemy, which occasioned the imprisonment of his person until the mistake was discovered:—Of all men the worthy Sir James was the most incapable of stooping to such a meanness, and breach of the laws of hospitality, as to betray the secrets of any nation from which he received protection, and where he had spent so many happy years of safe and learned leisure. Sir James, some time after the peace of Paris, was permitted to come *incognito* to London, where a *noli prosequi* and pardon was solicited for him, through different channels, and particularly through that of the great Mr Pitt, by the interposition of Sir James's nephew, the Earl of Buchan, the writer of this memoir, then Lord Cardross; but, through the malevolence of some unknown persons, it became abortive at that time. In the year 1767, Sir James was fully restored to his native country, and to his citizenship, with the gracious approbation of his humane and discerning Sovereign. He then retired to his paternal inheritance, and continued still to exert his faculties for the benefit of his country. He repaired the mansion of his ancestors, improved his neglected acres, set forward the
improvements

improvements of the province, in which he resided, by promoting high-roads, bridges, agriculture, and manufactures; publishing at this time, for the use of the public, an anonymous plan for the construction of an act of Parliament to regulate the application of the statute labour of the peasants and others upon the public roads, the greatest part of which treatise has been since adopted in the framing of acts for the different counties in Scotland.

In the year 1771, he was employed, on the generous offer of his gratuitous services, by the East India Company of Great Britain, to consider the most likely methods of regulating the coin in their settlements; and, in the year 1772, at their request, he published the results of his labours on that subject; the title of which treatise is, 'The principles of money applied to the present state of the coin of Bengal.'

About this time he also was engaged in a critique on the celebrated performance entitled *Systeme de la Nature*, which he wrote out and prepared for the press; but which has not hitherto been published.

In a letter to Lord Buchan, he conveyed a plan for a general uniformity of weights and measures, a work of great ingenuity and learning, which was intended to have been laid before the Congress, previous to the late peace. It was written at Tubingen in Swabia, and finally corrected and enlarged at Coltness, his seat in Clydesdale in Scotland, in March 1778, and transmitted to his nephew the writer of this memoir.

In the summer of the year 1779, he set himself to inquire minutely into the state of the distillery and brewery, and the revenue arising from it, which was suggested by the complaint which had
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proceeded from an act of Parliament, enlarging the lawful size of vessels for the distillation of malt spirits, and the imposition of a tax in Scotland, equal to that in England on malt spirits: The general result of this inquiry he anonymously published in the Edinburgh Evening Courant of October 2. 1779, and the particular discussion, with the materials he had used, he transmitted to a friend in Parliament.

This publication had the effect to prevent the counties in Scotland from entering into crude resolutions on a subject of so much importance, and so likely to shagreen the minds of ignorant persons.

There is no society which refined address and well judged information will not improve, nor any subject of nature, in northern climates, which industry and taste will not adorn.

In the year 1780, in the beginning of October, Sir James was attacked by an inflammation in his toe, in consequence of the too near cutting of a nail, which, from the ill habit of his body at that time, terminated, towards the beginning of November, in a mortification. The progress of this disorder was arrested by the copious use of the Jesuits bark; but, on the 19th of that month, he was seized with a fever, which put an end to his useful and valuable life on the 26th, being Sunday, at two o'clock in the afternoon.

On Tuesday the 28th, his remains were conveyed to the burial place of his family in the church of Cambusnethan, where they were interred on Wednesday the 29th; his Grace the Duke of Hamilton and several of Sir James's illustrious friends assisting at this mournful ceremony, and mixing their tears with those of his afflicted relations.

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It is with uncommon satisfaction that we find it in our power to adorn the account of this celebrated author, by adding the just encomium of his domestic virtues, an accompaniment too often wanting, at least with truth, in the biography of illustrious characters. As a husband, father, master, companion, and friend, Sir James's life was distinguished; and to all these excellent qualities, that rare one of public spirit, and unwearied attention to the interests of the state, were eminently conjoined.

Sir James had, by the Lady Frances Steuart, a daughter, who died soon after her birth, and the present Sir James Steuart Denham Baronet, who is Lieutenant-Colonel of the 13th Regiment of Dragoons, in the service of his Britannic Majesty.