I.


The following letter of Queen Elizabeth to Anne of Denmark, Queen of James VI., is interesting, not so much from any information contained in itself, as from the circumstances under which it was written and sent to Scotland.

A few years previously, the great Spanish Armada, which was intended by Philip II. to conquer England, and crush the Protestant religion there, had caused great excitement in Scotland. King James (although he had many tempting offers from Philip, among which was an alliance with his daughter, the Infanta Isabella) joined with Elizabeth, and rejected all Philip's overtures. That prince, however, sent emissaries to Scotland, who were so successful that, with the help of the Catholic noblemen there, they originated a party that openly espoused the cause of Spain. James at first contented himself with writing a treatise on the Apocalypse, proving the Pope to be Antichrist, in order to convert them, and save himself further trouble, but he afterwards prepared to assist Elizabeth with all his forces.

After the defeat of the Armada, the Roman Catholics spread reports that a new armament was to be fitted out by Spain, and, in 1594, James found himself with an empty exchequer, threatened with a rising of the Roman Catholic earls, Huntly, Errol, and Crawfurd, and he then looked to Elizabeth to assist him in his emergency. He found, however, that neither arguments, embassies, nor promises could prevail on Elizabeth to give him subsidies to put his army into a suitable condition. At this he was so incensed, that the English ambassador, Sir R. Bowes, came in for a
share of his resentment, and finding himself placed in a disagreeable position, he withdrew from Scotland altogether.

At the beginning of the year 1595, however, Elizabeth began to be alarmed at a threatened rebellion in Ireland, and, as there were rumours that Philip had again collected an immense force to renew his attempt, she bitterly repented of her neglect of King James, and looked to Scotland for assistance and recruits. James, at this time (January 2d) issued a proclamation enforcing the necessity of making common cause with England, and charged the inhabitants of the Borders to desist from all hostile attempts against England, and assiduously to cultivate friendship with their neighbours. Elizabeth then deemed it necessary to send Bowes again to Scotland, as her ambassador, with a letter to the Scottish King, in which she assured him of her unalterable friendship. Bowes was also entrusted with a letter to Queen Anne, whom he was to greet with every expression of courtesy.

The letter now printed is the one presented to the Queen on that occasion, and is as follows:

"Right Excellent right high and noble princesse our dearest Sister and Cousin, By a servant of ours of such trust as is this gentleman well knowne to you, (whome now we doe returne to exercise his charge of our ambassador towards the King our Brother) We would not omit to salute you with assurance of the contynuance of such kyndnes as we have alwaies professed towarde you, although the good intilligence heretofore offered on your part haue of late passed under greater silence then we could have expected. And yet, such is our inclynation still to hold a firme correspondencie with you vppon all occasions whereby we may demonstrate our care either towards your selfe or the King our brother as we have giuen in charge to this our faithfull seruant sincerely affected to the preservation of perfect amitie between both kingdoms both freely to impart with you and carefully to delyuer over to us such things as you shall at anie tyme thinke meete for our understanding who neuer will be founde behynde with anie offices of true kyndeness and affection. And so

"Right Excellent, right high and noble Princess our dearest Syster
and Cousin we cease further to trouble you save with our prayers to the Almighty for your long health and prosperous estate.

"Given at our Manor of Richmond the xxviii day of January in the xxxviiith yere of our reign 1595.

Your very affectionate Sister,

Elizabeth"

"To the Right Excellent, right high and noble Princess our dearest Sister and Cousin the Queene of Scottes."

Bowes was well received by the Queen, who first expressed her readiness to correspond more frequently with Elizabeth. She then referred to the differences between the King and herself, about the custody of the infant prince, Henry, and his removal from the care of the Earl of Mar. Lastly, the ambassador entered on a more delicate topic, which was the rumours that had reached Elizabeth of the Queen’s having been instigated to change her religion. She, however, assured Bowes that she remained a Protestant, and that all the attempts made for that purpose had failed.

The account of his visit was given by Bowes, in a letter to Elizabeth,
dated 24th February 1595, still preserved in the State Paper Office, London, of which the following is a copy:

"It maye please your moste excellent Maiestie, Vppon deliuerye of your Maiesties letter to the Q. of Scotts, and after that she had redd the same I entred first to confirme thassurance of your Maiesties kyndeness professed towards her, with the continewance of your Maiestie care for the welfare of the K. and herself. And, noting that thintelligence before offred on her part had not passed to your Maiestie from her in frequent manner expected, I tendred my redynes to convoye to your Maistie suche lettres or advertisment as she lyked at anye tyme to address. Wherevppon she yeelded to your Maiestie verie hartie thanks, bothe acknowledging that by strate obligation she was bound aboue all others to your Maiestie, and also promising to holde correspondencye in advertisments by lettres or messuages as occasion serued, sayeing therewith that she woulde seeke and followe your Maiesteis especiall advyse, as gien by one whom she most honoured, loved, and trusted.

"Secondlie I proceeded to recount to her theeffects of your Maiestie message gien me in chardge, letting her vnderstand that in the late differences betwixt the K. and her for the custodie of the bodye of the Prince her sonne, your Maiestie found it straunge that she had not imparted to your Maiestie her mynde that thereon your Maiestie by your great experience and affectionate loue to her might haue aduysed and warned her to avoyde the danger of subtile counsellours pressing her (for ther own advantages) to sewe to the K. to remove the Prince from the keeping of persones best trusted by the K. and authorysed by parliament, and to committ him to hands of others, at the appetytes of those deciuing counsellours possessed with no sinceritye of mynde or intention to please the K., to preserve the Prince, or to leave the custodie of the prince at the Q. pleasure, but to be reserved for ther practyses, and with dangers as hathe beyne seene and put in experience in former tyme in sondrey nations, and most often and wickedlye in Scotland. To this she answered that the matter was soddaine and full of perill, and she found no fitt convoye to your Maiestie. She acknowledged that the late Chancellour seking to recover her fazour towards him firste brake this matter to her, layeing before her suche stronge reasons provinge it convenient not onely for her

to have the keeping and bringing up of her own child and Prince of the realm, but also very beneficial to her and son as thereby he embarked her in action with his friends and such as he comended to her. And albeit that the Chancellor craftily opened the cause to the King and courteously wrought with him to think that the removal of the Prince should endanger the King's person and estate, yet he delved so betwixt the King and herself, and with the persons interested herein as the surprise of the body of the King was plotted, practised, and to have been effected at his coming to Edinburgh, which being discovered to her, she warned and stayed the King and prevented this danger against the King who otherwise (she said) had been captive, and to have remained in captivity. These secrets she desired to be commended by my letters to your Majesty's only hands, view, and secrecy, and as none other should know the same. In which respect (and to accomplish her request and desire therein) I have presumed to trouble your Majesty with this immediate address to your Majesty, right humbly praying your Majesty graciously to accept my boldness taken by the cause mentioned.

"Lastly, I lay before her that your Majesty had good cause to think that she is abused by some of these persons provoking her to seize the removal of the Prince from the persons and place appointed by the King. For it hath been made certeuly known to your Majesty that some of those persons have assured the Pope by her own speeches that they doubted not to move her to change her religion contrary to the King's mind. Further that some of them have also secretly reported that she hath in her own heart changed her religion, and is secretly reconciled to the Church of Rome, wherein although your Majesty is loathe to give that credit to this latter report, as there is cause to be given to the former, yet to shew the fruits of your Majesty's true friendship to her, and in regard that she is a stranger in this realm (albeit she be a Queen here) having no part of her own blood or of convenient quality to deal with her in such difficult matters, therefore your Majesty could not but inform her likely wise of the abuses remembered. To this she said that some purpose was intended to have drawn her from the religion professed by her and this church, and which still she holdeth, with full resolution to persevere therein. But the matter was not prosecuted, and she liked not to reveal the names of the practitioners or practises any
further, promising directlie that if any person shall hereafter deale with or tempte her to any such change that she will acquainte your Maiestie with all ther attempts and of her owne doings therein. In which promise and mynde I lefte her, with offer of my service to convoye with safetye to your Maiestie her lettres or credit to be committed to me. Thus in all humillitye I praiie God longe to continew your Maiesties raigne with all perfect parts of true felicitee. At Edinburghe the xxiiiith of Februarii 1595.

"Your Maiesties faithfull servaunt with all
loyaltie and obedience,
ROBERT BOWES."

[Dors.] "To the Queenes moste excellent Maiestie."

The letter of Queen Elizabeth now brought to light forms part of the Drummond collection in the Library of the University of Edinburghe, and, along with several other papers, after being for half a century in the possession of the family of the late Mr R. Bower (the historian of the University, and who was at one time assistant-librarian there, but who died suddenly of heart disease) has recently been found and restored to the library.

Drummond seems to have had access to several of Queen Elizabeth's letters to King James VI., and a volume in his handwriting, in the possession of Mr D. Laing, contains copies of eight of them. Of these, two have been printed by Tytler, in his History of Scotland,¹ and a very remarkable one in which Elizabeth excuses herself for having caused the death of Queen Mary is given in a modernised form in the translation of Buchanan’s history of Scotland.² The other five, so far as I am aware, are unprinted.

² Hist. of Scot., by Aikman, vol. iii. p. 144.