

CHAPTER VI.

JOHN, 6TH LORD FORBES.

Born, 1472. Succeeded, 1493. Died, 1547.

WITH John, the 6th Lord, who succeeded to his two childless brothers while still a very young man (and held the title for fifty-four years), a new era is entered. The chronicles of Scotland, as well as those of the family, are much fuller, the records of individuals will therefore be longer, and the life and actions of the heirs-apparent to those holders of the title who had very long innings will more fitly fall to be treated rather in their own lives than in those of their fathers. Moreover, as John, 6th Lord, had three wives and three families, and as his two eldest sons (successive Masters of Forbes) died in his lifetime, it is necessary *in this case* to depart from the usual plan and to give first his wives, and his children, of whom he had ten.

John, 6th Lord, was the third and youngest son of "Grey Willie," 3rd Lord Forbes, and of Christian, daughter of Sir Alexander Seton, Lord Gordon, who had married the Gordon heiress and was created 1st Earl of Huntly in 1445. (About 12 or 13 years after this, Huntly seems to have changed the family name from Seton to Gordon, for a deed of 7th March, 1457, calls his brother George Seton,¹ while shortly after that date all the family are called Gordons.) This marriage is the first actual connection between the families of Gordon and Forbes, who were to be for three centuries hereditary enemies.

The date of the birth of John, 6th Lord Forbes, is nowhere given but can be conjectured with accuracy. Arthur, his immediate elder brother, was a minor when he succeeded in 1491, therefore born not before 1471, and as John was apparently of age at the date of his own succession, his birth must have taken place in 1472. He married, *firstly*, Catherine Stewart, daughter of the 1st Earl of Atholl,² and had by her two children :

¹ Gordon Castle charters.

² James Stewart, 1st Earl of Atholl, was the son of the Black Knight of Lorn and Joan Beaufort, widow of King James I.; thus half-brother to King James II. His daughter Catherine, Lady Forbes, was first (half)-cousin to King James III. slain at Sauchieburn, though not of the blood Royal of Scotland. From her grandmother she derived the blood of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III. Joan was the daughter of

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1. James, 1st Master of Forbes, born before his father succeeded, died young and unmarried, to the great grief of his parents, probably in 1513. (See page 61.)

2. Elizabeth, who married, as his first wife, John Grant, 3rd of Freuchie (not yet Grant of Grant), and had four sons and three daughters. (John Grant's second wife was *Christian Barclay* who, after his death, married Arthur Forbes of Balfour and Putachie, his first wife's half-brother.) These two children of the first marriage of John, 6th Lord Forbes, were born before 1495.

John, 6th Lord Forbes, married *secondly* (while still Master of Forbes), Christian Lundin, sometimes called Lundie (both names occur in deeds), but her father was Sir John Lundin of that ilk. The marriage took place before February 10th, 1510.

Of this union there were at least three sons and three daughters.

3. John, 2nd Master of Forbes, born 1511 or 1512, and thus a contemporary, as he was at one time a personal friend, of the young King James V. (See page 65.) He was beheaded in 1537. (See page 69.)

He had married in 1535 Elizabeth Lyon, daughter of the 6th Lord Glamis, and great-niece of his Uncle Arthur's wife. (Her marriage settlement is quoted later.) After his death she married three times :

- 2nd Thomas Craig of Balmellie, son of Alexander Craig of Craigston and Fintray ;
- 3rd John Tulloch, portioner of Moncoffer, Banff ; and
- 4th Mr. John Abernethy.

4. William, afterwards 7th Lord Forbes, born 1513.

5. Alexander, not mentioned in any Peerage, but associated with his brother William in an accusation of complicity in the murder of Alexander Seton of Meldrum by their elder brother John in 1526. He cannot have been born before 1514, so was then a child of 12.¹

6. Margaret, who married or was contracted to Andrew Fraser of Muchalls, before July 21st, 1519,² when she was at most nine years old.

7. Elizabeth, married (1) Gilbert Keith of Troup, and (2) Alexander John, Earl of Somerset, eldest illegitimate son of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swinford whom he subsequently married. All the children born before marriage (who assumed the name of Beaufort from the place of their birth) were subsequently legitimised, but with the special proviso that they could not succeed to the Crown of England. Nevertheless the only drop of royal blood in the veins of Henry VII., proclaimed King after Bosworth, came from his mother, the niece of Queen Joan of Scotland, namely, Margaret Beaufort, who married the Welshman, Edmund Tudor, whence the successful house of that name on the throne of England.

¹ Matthew Lumsden does indeed mention " Mr. Alex. Forbes, parson of Forbes," and makes him older than William, but dead before the latter succeeded. This of course is possible, but in the exoneration of 1527 William's name is mentioned first, as if he were the elder of the two, and Alexander is not given anywhere else in the family papers.

² *Acta Dom. Conc. et Sess.*, IV., 17.

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Innes of Innes (by the kindness of the Earl Marischal she had the gift of the lands of Troup for herself and for her bairns, for ten years after the death of Gilbert. She being now the wife of Alexander Innes of that ilk.) (*Privy Seal of Scotland*, II., 194.)

8. Marjory, married to Alexander Forbes of Brux, the 5th Laird. The tomb of these two, with their full-length recumbent figures, is still to be seen in the north wall of the ruined aisle of Kildrummy church.

John, 6th Lord Forbes, being still Master of Forbes, married, *thirdly*, in 1515, Elizabeth Barclay, Berlay or Barlow, "an Englishwoman who had come to Scotland in the train of Margaret Tudor," and was the widow of Alexander, 1st Lord Elphinstone, killed at Flodden. In the numerous deeds in the Register House where her name appears with that of Alexander Elphinstone in 1507 to 1510 it is spelt Berclay (and Matthew Lumsden makes it Darles). She had two children.

9. Black Arthur of Balfour, afterwards of Putachie, perhaps the best known member of the Forbes family in the 16th century and one who was to cause a vast amount of trouble in the time of his half-brother, the 7th Lord Forbes. He was born about 1520 and killed at Tillieangus in 1571. He married Christian Barclay and had one daughter. (See page 100.)

(To Arthur Forbes of Balfour was granted in 1559 and 1560 the charter of the lands of Putachie, now the site of Lord Forbes' family seat. It was granted by the Earl of Huntly, no doubt [as appears from the terms of the charter], in the hopes of attaching to the Gordon party this prominent and belligerent member of the Forbes family. That such hope was vain, the life-histories of Arthur's brother and nephew will show.) (See next chapter, page 88.)

10. The youngest child of John, 6th Lord Forbes, was Janet, who married, *first*, the 2nd Earl of Atholl, brother of her father's first wife; *secondly*, Sir Alexander Hay of Delgaty, and was great-grandmother to the Sir William Hay, beheaded in 1650, the friend of Montrose; and *thirdly*, William Leslie, 9th Baron of Balquhain, with whom her brothers had feuds. He subsequently had two other wives.

John, 6th Lord Forbes, had also a natural daughter ("by one Helen Rutherford"), named Annabel, who married Matthew Lumsden of Tilliecairn, the first historian of the Forbes family (and the only one hitherto who has concluded his work, up to his own date). There is a Latin charter in favour of Lumsden of the "Lands of Tullicarne" [*sic*] granted by John, 6th Lord Forbes, to Matthew and his wife, Annabel Forbes, "my natural daughter." The charter is dated December 4th, 1540, and is witnessed by Arthur Forbes "meo filio," John Forbes, son of the late Alex. Forbes in Finzeauch,¹ John Cults, and Mr. Robert Simpson,

¹ Finzeauch was later acquired by the family of Wilson, though it subsequently became Forbes property again, and is called Harthill.

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Notary Public. (This is among Lord Forbes' papers though *not* quoted in the *Registrum*.)

In 1503 the lands of Tilliecairn and Ardeforke were bought by Thomas Fraser of Muchalls (father of Andrew, who married Lord Forbes' eldest daughter), but in 1512 they reverted to the Forbes family. They are now part of the estate of Cluny Castle, and the fine old castle of Tilliecairn is a ruin.

The first mention of John, 6th Lord Forbes, in the public records is on June 25th, 1495, when there was an action before the Lords of Council at the instance of

“Master David Lione, persone of Forbes, aganis Johne Lord Forbes for the wrangis vexation and stoppin of him (Lyon) in the peaceable broiking and joising of his said personage and for the wrangis withhelding fra him of the feu-itis and profitis of the said personage of a yere bigane, extending to an hundredth merkis as was allegit.” (*Acta Dominorum Concilii*, page 337.)

On the same day,

“in presens of the Lordis of Consale, Maister James Hendrisone, Advocat for our Sovereine Lord, askit note that John, lord Forbes producit a retour, mekand mensioun that the said Johne was nerrest and lauchfull ar to umquhile Alexander Lord Forbes and that the said Alexander deit last, westit and sesit as of fee of the landis and barony of Forbes and certane utheris landis. Howbeit that Arthure lord Forbes deit westit and sesit of the said barony and landis as was pressit be the copy of the Buk of Responsioun and tharfore protestit for remeid of law of the assise for that errour and of the melez and profitis of the saidis landis.” (*Acta Dominorum Concilii*, page 337.)

On the same day there was an

“actioun and caus persewit be Agnes lady Forbes, the spous of umquhile Arthure lord Forbes, aganis Johne Lord Forbes for the wrangis withhelden fra hir of the males and profitis of hir terce of the landis of the barony of Forbes of a yere bipast.”¹

The Lords of Council found

“that the said Johne Lord Forbes dois wrang in the detentiouns and withhelding of the saidis males and profitis of the said terce and tharfore ordinis him to content and pay the sammyne to the said Agnes, insofar as sche may preif thai ar of avele.” (*Acta Dominorum Concilii*, page 337.)

As already shown under Alexander, the 4th Lord Forbes, there is reason to believe that the 1st Master of Forbes, James, was among the killed at Flodden.

A contemporary English account of the battle, printed in London soon after the news of the victory had been received, contains the following :

¹ Thirty-four years later Dame Agnes was still claiming her rights. (See Appendix, page 73.)

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“ hereafter ensueth the names of sondry noblemen of the Scottes, slayne at the sayde batayle and feld called Brainston moore.

First ye kyng of Scotoes.

The Archebyssshop of Seynt Andrewes (illegitimate son of the king).

The Byssshop of Thyles (The Isles).

The Byssshop of Ketness (Caithness).

The Abbot of Ynchaffray (Inchaffray).

The Abbot of Kilwenny (Kilwinning).

Therle of Mountroos (William, 1st Earl).

Therle of Crawford (John, 6th Earl).

Therle of Argyle (Archibald, 2nd Earl).

Therle of Lennox (Matthew, 2nd Earl).

Therle of Lencar (Glencairn—Cuthbert, 3rd Earl—apparently *not* killed).

Therle of Castilles (David Kennedy, 1st Earl of Cassilis).

Therle of Bothwell (Adam Hepburn, 2nd Earl).

Therle Arroll, Constable (William, 4th Earl).

Lorde Lovett (Hugh, *son* of the 1st Lord Lovat, his father being alive).

Lorde forboos (probably James, *son* of the 6th Lord, his father being alive).

Lorde Elweston (Elphinstone, 1st Lord).

Lorde Inderby (Lindsay of the Byres—the 4th Lord—*not* killed).

Lord Maxwell (John, 2nd Lord).

MacKeyn ?

MacCleen (Lachlan MacLean of Duart).

John of Graume (*George* Graham, brother of the Earl of Montrose, was killed).

The Maister of Agwer (Angus, son of the 22nd Earl of Angus).

Lord Ross (John, Lord Ross of Hallhead—2nd Baron—His son, Ninian, was a Lord of Parliament. Title now extinct).

Lord Tempkyll (Sempill, the 1st Lord).

Lord Borthyke (Lord Borthwick was *not* killed at Flodden. He became Commander of Stirling Castle and Custodian of the young king).

Lord Askyll (Erskine, Robert, 4th Lord).

Lord Dawissi ?

Sir Alex. Setton (4th Knight of Touch).

Sir John Home.

Lord Colvin.

Sir Davyhome (Prior of Coldingham).

Cuthbert Home of Fascastell, and 11 or 12 thousand men.”

Lord Dawissi defies identification ; Colvin is Robert Colvill, gr.-gr.-grandfather of the first Lord Colvill.¹

Matthew Lumsden says “ James, Master of Forbes, died unmarried, which was a great pity and dolor to them that knew him.”

¹ There were at that period in Scotland, twenty-one Earls and twenty-nine Barons or Lords of Parliament, of whom were slain nine and eleven respectively, with many eldest sons, but “ not one title was thereby extinguished.”

The MS. history of the House of Forbes, before quoted, says—

“ The 6th Lord Forbes, a man both fortunate and yet unfortunate in his children, had by his first lady one son, James Master of Forbes who dyed in the flower of his age—unmarried—whose immature death was mightily lamented by all that knew him, being a gentleman of whom was conceived the greatest hopes of any of that age. Of so sweet a mien and so obliging a carriage, of so much candour and integrity, so sure and fast a friend to all had the honour of his acquaintance that he left a great desire of him behind in all men’s memories. Besides so much piety and moderation shone forth in him, even in that dangerous age, wherein youth is accustomed to be luxuriant and wantonize, that everyone expected most rare and singular fruits from his disposition when it should come to be mellowed with age and that he would prove one of the chiefest ornaments of his family. So that his death was a very smart and stunning blow to his good father.”

In 1504 the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer show “ Ane man to pass to Lord Forbes with writings,” and in 1505 letters and money received from “ Domino de Forbes, Coronatore principali vice comitatus de Aberdene.”

It has already been seen that William, 3rd Lord Forbes, had been granted this office of Crouner or Coroner of the shire, which was subsequently held by several of the Lords Forbes. (See page 11.)

But John, Lord Forbes himself, seems to have got into trouble with the Government very shortly after Flodden, for in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer there is a letter of date 1516 directed to “ stop the gadering betwixt the Erle Marischal and Lord Forbes in Aberdeen.” The purpose of the gathering was not mentioned, but it must have been in some way inimical to the Regent, Margaret Tudor, who was assisted by Archbishop James Beaton and the Earls of Arran, Angus and Huntly, some of the survivors of Flodden, as advisers.

Six years later, 1522, the same record chronicles that “ John, Lord Forbes, is summoned to be in Edinburgh by Mandate of the King’s Council and for the common weal.” This was on November 12th, 1522. On December 4th there is a further order “ to charge Lord Forbes to enter into ward within 8 days after this charge—under pain of rebellion.”

He seems to have been very dilatory in obeying these orders, for on January 1st he is again ordered to be in Edinburgh on 12th of February, 1523. He would, after this date, appear to have satisfied the authorities for his conduct, whatever it was, for in May, 1523, Letters to all the Lords summoning them to be in Edinburgh for the Convention, include one to Lord Forbes, no longer as an offender, but as a member. A similar letter was issued on December 18th in the same year.

In 1526 there was a remission to John, Lord Forbes, “ for killing of *John*

Leslie," of what family is not mentioned.¹ Papers at Castle Forbes show that a state of tension existed between the families of Castle Forbes and of Balquhane in spite of the fact that William Leslie, afterwards 9th Baron of Balquhain, married Janet, daughter of John, 6th Lord Forbes, by his third wife, but this must have been long after, as he was her third husband, and in 1526 she was a small child. In 1526 the Laird of Balquhain was another William, the 7th Baron, and grandfather of the 9th, who was to be Lord Forbes' son-in-law.

On January 27th, 1527, two of John Forbes' sons, William, afterwards 7th Lord Forbes, and another, Alexander, who is nowhere else mentioned, were indicted for participation in the killing of Alexander Seton of Meldrum, John Leslie *in* Kinawty, and Malcolm Leslie *in* Garioch.² William and Alexander Forbes can only have been boys of under 14 and were exonerated.

A month later Lord Forbes and the Laird of Balquhain entered into a mutual agreement to keep the peace. As to be seen (on page 66), Leslie would appear to have been on this occasion the original aggressor of the Forbes family against the person of some obscure member.

" 1529. 22 Feb. At Aberdene. Obligation by William Leslie of Balquhane to John Lord Forbes who had infeft him in Cultercullane, Pettimuk and 24 shillings of annual rent of the alehouse of Fudess, in fulfilment of a decret arbitral given at Aberdeen 11 Feb, 1527 insert in the books of Council and Session, and for security and keeping of kindness and eschewing of troubles and inconvenientes to rys betwix them, to remain with the sd William Leslie " gif the said Johne Lord Forbes or any uthor of his part takkars or assistars makes ony new braik or dois any harm to me, my sone, otheris of our part takkaris or assistaris," and if the doer of the skaith be not delivered up to the law within forty days or fugitate (and in that case the said Lord his part-takers and assisters sall hold him perpetually out of their rowmes and boundis and trewlie assist and tak pairt wt me, my part takkaris and assistaris yat gettis ye skaith, faithfully but (without) fraude or gyle and never to help the falter in the law nor by the law, quhilk if they do not, the said landis to be brukit ³ by me my heirs and assignees, as said is)—The said Wm Leslie binding himself notwithstanding his infeftment in those lands, to take up no profit of them till the fault be made, but all mails and profits to remain with the Lord Forbes.

" Witnesses George Earl of Huntlie, Robert Abbot of Kinloss, Alex. Irvine of Drum, knt. Gilbert Keyth of Troup, John Gordon of Botarie, Alex. Gordone of Strathdoune."

The judge arbiters in the case were John, Lord Erskine; Archibald Douglas of Kilspindie (then treasurer to the king, but afterwards disgraced, with all the other Douglasses); William Scot of Balwearie, knt. (who

¹ He was apparently only a tenant in Kynawty, and Malcolm Leslie was another tenant.

² See Appendix, page 73.

³ Enjoyed.

exonerated the two boys, sons of Lord Forbes ¹); the above-named Gilbert Keith, who afterwards married another of Lord Forbes' daughters, and Walter Scot. The seal of William Leslie, attached to the parchment, though broken, still shows quite clearly the three buckles.

A letter from John, 6th Lord Forbes, to the Bishop of Aberdeen in 1520 shows the difficulty of obtaining fuel, there being no moss on the lands of Druminnor :

" My Lord, I commend me to your Lordship as hartily as I can. Please be the samen to wit I hef na peatis nor fuel in mine ain ground to serve my place of Drumenor, but what I haf borrowit this monie yeiris at your lordship's predecesours, my Lords of Aberdeen. Whairfor I pray your Lordship gif me your leif to cast peats in your lordships land of Newbigging and Auchinmenny. I shall borrow the lave at my Lord Lindores and other my nybours about me, so that I sall not be inreasonable to your lordship. . . . I had all my fuel of your Lordships ground when I plesit to request for them—as your L. may get informacion. I traist your Lordship sall be as hartily to me Furder pleas give credence in this matter to the bearer

" and the blesset Virgin conserve your Lordship

" Wrytten at Forbes and subscriyvit

" Yours at power

" Jhone, Lord Forbes."

There are occasional other mentions of this Lord Forbes in State Papers and Public Records.

In 1530 there is a note in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of a payment of 3/- to " a boy that ran furth of Dundee to Edinburgh for a ane summondis to the Lord Forbes."

And in the same year " ane apprizement of his lands." (One of those confusing occasions on which a man's lands were temporarily assigned to someone else, who lent him money.)

On December 30th, 1531, Lords Forbes, Huntly, and others were warned to convene in Edinburgh for their parliamentary duties.

According to a charter under the Great Seal in 1532, and repeated in 1533 and 1534, the lands of Fiddes were sold, or assigned (but became again the property of Lord Forbes in 1539, when William, the Master, and his wife, Elizabeth Keith, has a fresh charter of them).

On February 16th, 1535, Lords Findlater and Forbes were summoned " to join the King's hosts"; James V. was preparing himself against the hostility of his uncle, Henry VIII.

From a charter under the Great Seal, June 30th, 1535, it appears that the marriage of the unfortunate John, Master of Forbes, took place in that year; when " John, Lord Forbes infeft Elizabeth Lioun, in her virginie " with Fintray and certain other lands as her dower.

¹ See page 57, and Appendix, page 73.

The first document in the charter chest in connection with the property of John, 6th Lord Forbes, is of date April 29th, 1494, and is in the form of a notarial instrument from Alexander Skene of Skene for a debt owed by Skene. [34.]

John, Lord Forbes, had next a charter, on December 1st, 1505, of the lands of Mickle Fintray and others in the Barony of King Edward in which Alexander Forbes, his great-great-grandfather had been infeft by John Stewart, Earl of Buchan, and another charter in favour of him and his heirs of the site and castle of King Edward (or Cwnneddard)¹ with leave to build a new castle: April 26th, 1509. (*Reg. Mag. Sig.*)

There is a sasine in his favour and that of Christian Lundin, his second wife, of the barony of Fiddes, February 26th, 1510, and another of the lands of Whitefield from Archibald, Earl of Angus, March 6th, 1511-12, as well as a sasine of the barony of Fiddes to himself and Elizabeth Barclay, his third wife, July 29th, 1515.² This would seem to prove that her name was really Barclay.

Lord Forbes had a fresh charter under the Great Seal on July 18th, 1532, "of the Kirktoon of Forbes, Culhay, Balfour, Stranalak, Easter Forbes, Ardgathin, Carnaverane, Auchbalacht, Carynyndard, Slavethy, Castlehill, Edinbanquhry, Logie, Blacktown, and Backeris vic Aberdein,"

which charter is still in the charter chest, but the Royal Seal is missing. [39.]

He was at perpetual feud with the Earl of Huntly and with the town of Aberdeen over the fishing rights, which the Forbes family traditionally protected and received in return a tun of wine. Negligence on the part of Lord Forbes was alleged and the wine in one year being withheld, a quarrel arose. The following quaint letter (abridged from *Kennedy's Annals*, and modernized in spelling) was received by Lord Forbes from the Council, May 20th, 1530:—

"My Lord we commend us to your Lordship with all hearty service. We have seen a Letter sent by your Lordship to the Provost to be shewn to us—

"In it yr Lordship desires the tun of wine we promised to your Lordship . . . Please your Lordship give us your bond and your Lordship's seal and subscription to cause the black fish to be keipit (preserved), in undue (that is, "out of") season and to punish the slayers thereof by justice and our Sovereign lords authority, which your Lordship has. And your Lordship shall have our bond, which was promised and is lying in our Clerk's hands, and thankful payment yearly.

"But my Lord, where your Lordship desires that the granting of this wine gives you a title to a half nets salmon fishing on the Don—in good faith we know not that your Lordship ever had such a right or title.

¹ See page 72.

² These sasines and charters are not given in full, as they are printed elsewhere—and the Forbes' family charter chest is so rich in *original* documents of the period. (See Appendix to this chapter and the next two.)

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" We are too small men to hold anything from your Lordship to which you have a right, but we will never give you any right or title to water among us.

" And whereas your Lordship desires us to be kind to you, as you have been to us in times past, we thank your Lordship for kindness bygone and pray you to persevere in time coming for we shall ever deserve the same from you, by God's grace, Whom have your Lordship in His keeping at your most noble hearts desire. Given at Abirdeen

20 Day of May" (*from the Council Register*).

On July 29th, 1530, it is recorded in the *Council Register of Aberdeen* that the Council charged the Provost and baillies

" to make ready all the artillery of the town and lay the same to the ports and other necessary places and that powder and all things necessary be furnished and made ready for the defence of the good town ; and if it should happen the Lord Forbes or his friends to come to the said town with convocation of the King's lieges in any great number, that the common bell be rung incontinent and call all the neighbours and stop them to enter within the said burgh except they leave their multitudes and come with their daily train."

However, Lord Forbes and his followers, assisted by John Forbes of Pitsligo, Arthur Forbes of Brux, and " Evil Willie," successfully invaded the town of Aberdeen. The citizens made a stout resistance, drove the Forbes party to take refuge in the Grey Friars, and completely defeated them. One of the Forbes' adherents and several citizens were killed, and the assailants were eventually allowed to retreat.

An attempt on the part of Alexander Forbes of Brux to make the Provost and citizens responsible for this breach of the peace failed, as they were acquitted by the High Court of Justiciary at Linlithgow. The town of Aberdeen was thereafter put in a posture of defence and Lord Forbes was obliged on December 12th, 1530, to give a bond to the Council by which he became bound for himself and his sons that the magistrates and citizens of Aberdeen and their ally, Alexander Fraser of Philorth, should be harmless at the hands of himself and his sons, under penalty of £5000 to be paid to the king. (See page 74.)

Peace was thus established for a time—Lord Forbes had his wine, and the salmon were protected in spawning time. The description of salmon as " black fish " ¹ seems to be intended to distinguish them from the white fish, caught in the sea. The Council Minutes of Aberdeen contain frequent references to *White* fishers and *Lax* fishers, the latter the Norwegian name for salmon, which are also sometimes (very naturally) called the *Red* fish.

It is time to deal with the second Master of Forbes, John, the eldest son by the second wife, who had a most chequered career. In his youth he seems to have been on affectionate terms of intercourse with the young

¹ Which refers to fish out of condition after being in the river for a considerable period.

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King James V., and in the *Exchequer Rolls*, 1532, it is recorded that "The Master of Forbes gives ane tartan gal coat to the king (*then 20 years old*). Price thereof LV.s. (apparently 55 pounds Scots, £2 15s.).

(The next item in the account is—"Money disbursit be the king's sundrie precepts. To the Master XL" — £40, but there is no necessary connection between the two.)

Later, the Master of Forbes had a quarrel with Alexander Seton, laird of Meldrum, and murdered him under circumstances of great cruelty, in the house of Menzies of Pitfodels in Aberdeen.

The beginning of the story of this slaughter would appear to be found in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer in 1526, when there is a remission to Alexander Seton of Meldrum, William Leslie of Balquhane and complices, for the slaughter of Gavin Murray, Andrew Stalven [*sic*] and *William Forbes* (it is not known who he was). (See page 72.)

The following from *Kennedy's Annals* also shows Alexander Seton to have been a most turbulent person, though it gives no special ground for vengeance by Forbeses (unless it refers to the slaughter mentioned above) :

"1525. A tumult at this time occurred in the town, which strongly characterised the relaxed state of the government of the kingdom. Alexander Seton of Meldrum, John Leslie of Wardhouse, and William Leslie of Balquhain, 3 potent barons of the Garioch, impatient of revenge for a supposed injury done to them or to some of their friends, by the citizens, entered the town on Sunday the 1st of October, under silence of night, along with their confederates, to the number of four score men, armed with spears and other warlike instruments. They wreaked their fury on the inhabitants, who flew to arms. A bloody conflict ensued, and the invaders were repulsed by the bravery of the citizens, and driven out of the town : but this was not accomplished without considerable slaughter on both sides. In the course of this fray, 80 of the inhabitants were either killed or wounded, among whom were several of the magistrates."

For the murder of Seton and other crimes the Master of Forbes obtained a remission under the Great Seal, October 10th, 1530.

A remission for which his father had to pay heavily, as seen by the following document. [37].¹

"Payment for Remission to John, son of John VI. Lord.
Rex.

"We be teeno^r herof grauntis us content and pait be oure cousing Johnne, lord forbes anent ye some of five hundret li. usuale money of oure Realmes for compositioun anent oure Remissioun gevin and grātīt to Johnne maister of forbes and utheris contenit y^rn, And be these presents Dischargis oure said cousing of ane act maid to us be him In presence of oure lordis of counsale At Dundee ye X day of October Instant anent ye soume of ane thousand li. money forsaid specifeit in ye said act Subscrivit wt. oure hand and under oure Signet At oure burgh of

¹ (See illustration.)

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Per^t ye XXII day of October, ye yere of God J m V^e and XXX yeris And of our Reyne ye XVIII yere.

(22nd Oct. 1530.)

Jamis."

(*The seal has gone.*)

This is a remarkably interesting document of a most unusual type, being actually a receipt signed by King James V., then 18, for money received for the pardon of a subject.¹ It is still at Castle Forbes.

The next year the family required further forgiveness.

A remission to John, Lord Forbes, and William, his son, for their connection with the evil deeds of John, Master of Forbes, for which he had been granted the above remission, was issued on July 3rd, 1531. Signed by the Abbot of Lincluden, the Abbot of Arbroath, John, Lord Erskine; and James, Dean of Aberdeen. [38.]

On July 12th, 1532, a further penalty of £2000 was incurred by Lord Forbes, since an undertaking he had given not to break the peace nor molest the town of Aberdeen had been violated by John, Master of Forbes, Alex. Forbes of Brux, Ninian and Duncan Forbes and their "complices." A portion of the lands of Forbes was pledged to the king for payment of this sum—which was eventually discharged. [39.]

The bond which John, Lord Forbes, had failed to keep will be found in the Appendix (page 74).

Another crime was laid to the charge of the Master. In Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials*, under date July 29th, 1533, it is noted that a summons or indictment in the Court of Judiciary had been issued against John, 6th Lord Forbes, and his eldest son, the Master, William, the second son (afterwards 7th Lord Forbes), and others for "fire raising and destruction, under silence of night, of poynding falds and other crimes in the Forest of Coriny, belonging to George, Earl of Huntly." ²

The following exculpatory letter was written by John, Master of Forbes, to Lord Huntly on July 12th, 1533:

"My Lord, I commend my service to your lordship in the maist hearty manner I can. Please y^r lordship to wit I haf hard of ane summons rasi^t as I am informit, on my lord my father, me and our servands and frends for ye displeiseir done in yr lordship's forrest of Corryne. Upon ye quhilk I haf callit my Lords tenents inquiring yame if ony of yame was gilty yrof, quhilk are content—all wtane assent, to enter and thole ane assise in your lordship's court of cluny, sae yt yr lordship may know yr part in yat and ony uther thing yt is allegit to yr lop. upon yame.

"Yr lop knows my fader is out of ye countrie and was, in ye time of ye allegit displeasure, and as to me I sal do fully in yt behalf as my frends to yis effec—

¹ Some of the Master's associates in the horrid deed had no such remission, for it is noted "At Stirling, 7 March, 1536 (six years after the crime) Ane letter maid to John Hall and James Edmestown of the goods and geir of Duncan and Ninian Forbes and others, at the horne for the cruel slaughter of umquh^l Alex. Setoun of Meldrum."

² It will be noted that there is no mention here of a son Alexander.

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I and my friends requires yr lop respectfully tak yis mater before yr lop to give credence to my cusing and your servand Thomas Duncanson and yr lordship's answer hereupon.

“ Ye Glorious vergin conserve yr lop.

at Aufurd the 13 day of Julie

In ecclesia parochiale de Aufurd.

hora quasi quinta post meridium

Presentibus honorabilis vires [*sic*]

Willielmo Forbes de Corsinday

Thoma Stratachin de lenturk (see
next page).

Thoma Duncanson de Achampis

Jacobo Gariauch de Kinstare.”

It is not known why John, 6th Lord Forbes, was “ out of the country ” in the year 1533, nor whether the expression actually means “ forth of Scotland ” or not.

The exact division of the forest of Corennie between the Lords of Huntly and Forbes was long a fruitful source of contention.

In 1536 Lord Forbes and his son John were accused of treason against the king, and both were imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. Further broils with Huntly had preceded this sinister event and it was surmised at the time that “ the false Gordon,” George, 4th Earl of Huntly, who had succeeded in 1524, had poisoned the king's mind against the Forbeses, father and son. Lord Forbes was, after a long imprisonment, released, by the following letter :—

“ To the Capilate of our Castell at Edinburgh. It is our will and we charge you that, incontinent efter the sycht hereof, ye deliver our cusing, John, Lord Forbes furth of ward and hold his son and air still in free ward as of before, the said lord byndand him his lif landes and heritage in our bukis of counsale that his said sone sall nocht eschew furth of our said ward—Kepand this our writing for your warrant.

“ Subscrivit with our hand and under our signet at Sanctandros the 5 day of March and of our reignne the 25 year.

James.” (*State Papers.*)

Three months later the son was brought to trial and by a majority of the judges on the Assize was found guilty on three counts.

“ 1. That of conspiring to compass the King's death by shot of culverin (when the latter was to visit Aberdeen).

“ 2. Of conspiring to compass the destruction of the Scots army at Jedburgh.

“ 3. Of conspiring with England.

“ On Saturday the 14 July 1537 John the Master of Forboose (son and heir of Lord Forboose) was attainted of treason for matters of which he declared at his death he was sacklesse (though he acknowledged the slaughter of Alexander Seton of Meldrum. For this he had had a remission).

“ He was that day beheaded and quartered in Edinburgh.”

*Letter of Sir Thomas Clifford to Henry VIII. from Berwick,
July 26th 1537. (Letters and Papers of Henry VIII.)*

JOHN, 6TH LORD FORBES

John Forbes was first condemned to be hanged. The beheading was a concession to his noble blood. He confessed on the scaffold that, though innocent of any treason against the crown, he deserved death for the slaughter of Seton—ten years before.

“That unfortunate gentleman, John, Mr. of Forbes who came to be accused of treason in the reign of K. James the 5, lost his head upon that score., But this was one of the blackest forgeries that Hell could plot—to take away his life, so that all our Writers unanimously agree that he fell a deplorable victim to the malice of a subtle and formidable enemy. This was so well known that immediately after his death the King, discovering the Knavery, was exceeding sorrowful for the tragical end of this young nobleman—banisht his accuser, restored his successor to all his lands and honours and being deeply touched with remorse for the Injuries done to this family, in compensation thereof out of his princely bounty, heaped new favours upon his nearest relatives and enriched them with new lands, which the Lord Forbes hold to this day.”

(From the MS. History before quoted.)

The attainder and forfeiture of goods incurred by the sentence of high treason under which he was executed was thus, almost immediately, reversed.

In 1544 a fatal quarrel arose between the Forbes and the Strachans of Linturk on this subject.

The latter were accused of betraying to the Earl of Huntly the supposed conspiracy of the Master of Forbes against the life of King James V. Nicholas Ross of Auchlossan made common cause with the Strachans and was killed by the Forbeses. He had been a member of the Assize which had found the Master guilty of treason, June, 1537, and there had been no doubt some suspicious behaviour on the part of John Forbes. The Strachan family had certainly been concerned with him in the murder of Seton of Meldrum. (See page 75.)

In 1542 the *State Papers* again allude to Lord Forbes—

“We have also understand that the erle of Huntly and Lord Forbes has foughten in the north part of Scotland and many men slayne between them and the erle of Huntlie put to the worse.”

It is not quite clear to what particular fight this alludes, but it must have been an *unusual* one, for the Gordons being more numerous and fiercer, generally got the better of their Forbes neighbours in battle. In 1535 there was an ominous entry—

“A gift to George Erle of Huntly of all the goods of 14 Forbeses including the master of Forbes, as rebels.” (*State Papers*, Vol. II., page 287, see Appendix, page 74.)

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The feud between the families of Gordon and Forbes lasted for centuries. Possibly in revenge for the death of the Master in 1537 the Forbesees joined Moray's forces which defeated Huntly at Corrichie, October 22nd, 1562, a defeat which led to the death of the gallant old "Cock of the North" on the field, and that of his second son, John of Findlater, by the executioner's sword in Aberdeen.

That round was to the Forbesees. The next was distinctly against them. Adam Gordon (Edom o' Gordon), Huntly's son, defeated them several times. (See next chapter.)

On February 7th, 1543, Lisle, King Henry's Warden of the Marches, wrote to Lord Suffolk that "Lord Forbes was with the Governor's party, against the English,"¹—this was three months after the death of James V. and the accession of the week-old Mary, Queen of Scotland. The "Governor" was the Earl of Arran, formally appointed Regent a month later.² Lisle was the gallant soldier who, on receiving the news of the Scots king's death, had, on his own responsibility, ceased hostilities; deeming it beneath the dignity of the English king "to make war on a dead body, on a widow woman, or a young suckling," but by February activities had been resumed.

On July 24th, 1543, Lord Forbes' eldest son, William, Master of Forbes, signed the secret bond drawn up by Cardinal Beaton against sending the infant queen to England. (See Appendix to next chapter, page 96.)

On July 30th, 1546, William, Master of Forbes, undertook to keep the peace with Huntly, a somewhat barren undertaking. On this occasion his bond was guaranteed by his brother, Arthur of Balfour. (*Privy Council*, Vol. I., 32-33.)

He would appear *not* to have kept his word, and to have been incarcerated in the Castle of Edinburgh, from which he was liberated the next year on his giving an undertaking to abide in free ward in the North "wherever the Erle of Huntly should direct."

He narrowly escaped imprisonment in England also, as shown by the quotation from the papers of Henry VIII. in the next chapter. (Page 78.)

John, 6th Lord Forbes, was certainly on the Scottish side against all English aggression, and he and his followers formed part of the "gathering" alluded to in this letter from one of those English spies whose activities

¹ "My messenger saithe that the partie of the Erle of Arran, and therles of Anguishe, Casseles, Glencarne, Murton, and Marshall with the Lordes Flemyng, Maxwell, Forbus, Glamus, Grey, Seton, Yester and dyvers other lordes with theym, be of a strong partie." (*Hamilton Papers*, Vol. I., p. 406.)

² In the Parliament which met on March 13th, 1543, James, Earl of Arran, was proclaimed:

"Secund persoun of this realme and narrest to succeed to the crone, falzing of our sovirane lady, and Governor of this realme."

JOHN, 6TH LORD FORBES

were well maintained by Lord Protector Somerset in the name of the young King Edward VI. (*Cal. State Papers Scot.*, Vol. I., 1547. July 5, Edinburgh.)

"Ye WAIT QUHA (*you know who*) (Maitland, a spy, to Lord Wharton). All manner of men coming forward. The Earl of Argyle has landed near Glasgow with 4,000 men, and is waiting for others. Huntly keeps his day with 8,000 on Roslyn Muir. Earl Marischal, Lord Forbes and all the North are marching forward and will encamp about Peblis (Peebles) on Sunday the 10th. The Ordnance passes from Edinburgh on the 8th. An English herald has been with the Governor to stop this gathering, and has gotten his answer—a sharp one, as men judge."

Two months after this date occurred the battle so disastrous to the Scottish nation, of Pinkie Cleugh, September 10th, 1547.

The actual date of the death of the 6th Lord Forbes is nowhere chronicled, but it is known to have occurred in the autumn of 1547, between August 23rd, 1547 (when his son was still Master of Forbes) (next chapter, page 78), and the end of September of that year, when he was Lord Forbes. John is known to have been gathering troops to oppose the English invasion which culminated at Pinkie on September 10th, and it is permissible to conjecture that, though an old man of 75, he may have been present at the battle and perished there. The flower of the nobility of Scotland of all ages lost their lives in this fight, the ominous name of which appears, like that of Flodden, in almost every family tree.

For the sake of uniformity, the family of John, 6th Lord Forbes, is briefly recapitulated here. He married, first, Catherine Stewart, daughter of the Earl of Atholl, and had issue.

1. James, Master of Forbes, died unmarried, and
 2. Elizabeth, married John Grant of Freuchie.
- He married, secondly, Christian, daughter of Sir John Lundin, and had
3. John, Master of Forbes, executed 1537.
 4. William, 7th Lord Forbes.
 5. Alexander, died young.
 6. Margaret, married Andrew Fraser of Muchalls.
 7. Elizabeth, married Gilbert Keith and Alex. Innes.
 8. Marjory, married Alex. Forbes of Brux.
- He married, thirdly, Elizabeth Barclay or Barlow and had
9. Arthur of Balfour and Putachie, married Christian Barclay, see p. 57.
 10. Janet, married (1) the 9th Earl of Atholl, (2) Sir Alexander Hay of Delgaty, and (3) William Leslie of Balquhain.

APPENDIX FOR JOHN, 6TH LORD FORBES.

DOCUMENTS.

As already seen, John had to deal with some of the delinquencies of his second brother, Arthur, the 5th Lord.

One debt of his eldest brother apparently pursued him also, for on July 10th, 1494, the Lords of Council ordered

“ James Richardsone burges of Edinburgh to preif sufficiently that the chapellane quhilk has subscrivit his hande on his buk for *umquhile Alexander lord Forbes* for the soume of XXV pundis XI penneis of a rest of a mare soume, was factour and doare for the said umquhile Alexander in bying and selling, clamit now be the said James Richardsone apone John lord Forbes the brother and air of the said umquhile Alexander and that he was award the sammyn.” (*Acta Dominorum Concilii*, page 370.)

Licence to build a new castle at King Edward.

P. 64. *Reg. Mag. Sig. 713. 21 Jac. IV.*

“ Apud Edinburgh, 26 Apr. 1509.

“ REX, pro bono servitio, &C, necnon pro reparatione et edificatione per ipsum faciendis in incremento poletie, concessit JOHANNI, DOMINO FORBES, et ejus heredibus,—montem castris et *le stede* de Kynedwarde, cum bondis, lapidibus et calce corundem, super quibus ipse Joh. edificare intendebat prope terras suas de Blaktoun, in baronia de Kynedward, vic. Abirdene, regi pertinen. tanquam heredi quondam Johannis com. de Buchane baronis de Kynedward : REDDEND. unum denarium argenti, nomine albe firme :—cum licentia edificandi et sustinendi castrum, turrim seu fortalitium prout magis videretur expediens, cum propugnaculis viz. *barmkyn*, et *le Machcolin* pontibus vehectis viz. *le draw-briggis*,” etc.

P. 66. Fines and consequent remissions to Lord Forbes for killing a Leslie and to Alexander Seton for killing a Forbes—

A/CS Lord High Treasurer Scotland 1526.

Vol. 5—p. 251.

“ et de LXXXij li xij s iii d compositionis remissionis Johannes domini Forbes et certarum aliarum personarum in dicta remissione contentarum pro interfectione quondam Johannis Leslie.”

“ Et de LXXXvij li xij s iij d, compositionis remissionis Alexandri Setoune de Meldrum, Willelmi Leslie de Buchquhane, cum suis complicitibus, pro interfectione quondam Gavini Murray, Andrae Stratoun, et *Willelmi Forbes*.”

One of the Master of Forbes' assistants in the cruel murder of Alexander Seton was Alexander Forbes, commonly called “ Spangare,” and he was himself slain a few days later, “ on a Sunday,” by three of the Leslies, for which deed they obtained a remission under the Privy Seal, February 9th, 1527.

The feud between Forbesees and Leslies dated from a century earlier when the Castle of Balquhain, having been sacked and burnt by the former, the head of the house of Leslie was compelled to take up his residence on the top of Bennachie, as the only spot safe from his enemies. (The remains of the ancient fortress which he occupied are still to be seen there but, of course, date from a much earlier period.) The cause of the quarrel was said to be "Balhagarty's daughter, the Fair Maid of Kemnay," once betrothed to Sir John Forbes of the Black Lip, but carried off and married by a natural son of Sir Andrew Leslie of Balquhain, *circa* 1400. (See page 27.) Epitomised from the *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*.

EXONERATION OF THE SONS OF THE 6TH LORD FORBES.

January 27th, 1527. William, afterwards 7th Lord Forbes, and a hitherto unknown brother, Alexander, sons of the 6th Lord, were also indicted for complicity in the murder of Alexander Seton of Meldrum and of John and Malcolm Leslie, but were exonerated. (See page 62.)

"William Scot de Balwery miles Justiciarius supremi Domini nostri Regis ex parte borealiaque de Forth generalitus constitutus Universis et singulis ad quorum notitias presentes lettres pervenerint salutem noveritis et Compēn coram nobis in curia Itinere Justicie supreme domini nostri regis tenta et inchoata apud burgū de Aberdene die lune XXVII^o die mensis Januarii Anno Dñi millesimo quingentesimo vicesimo septimo. Willelmus Forbes et Alexander Forbes filii dn̄i de Forbes, Indictati et per Rotulos regis calumpniati de arte et parte crudelis Interfectionis quondam Alexandri Seytoun de Meldrum Item de arte et parte crudelis Interfectionis quondam Johannis Leslie in Kynawty Item de arte et parte crudelis Interfectionis quondam Malcolmi Leslie in Gareocht. Quasquidem calumpnias prefati Willelmus Forbes et Alexander Forbes in facie Judicie omnes denegarunt et per condignam assisam quitti facti fuerunt penitus et Immunes, Et hoc omnibus quorum Interest notificamus per presentes In cujus Rei testimonium sigillum officii Justicie supreme domini nostri regis presentibus est affixum, Anno mense die et loco supradictis."

Apud Edinburgh.

July 24, 1529. Agnes Lyon, Lady Forbes,¹ afterwards Craigie (Ross) suing for her rights 34 years after her husband's death—

"... terras extenden. ad 8 portas sive rigas ex parte occidentali torrentismolendini de Cragy, vulgariter *le Criggis* quas quondam Agnes Lyoun domina Forbes et Cragy ratione sue tertie habuit . . ." (*Reg. Mag. Sig. 808*).

P. 66. REMISSION FOR THE KILLING OF SETON OF MELDRUM.

"1530. *Apud. DUNDE, 10 OCT. REMISSION TO THE MASTER OF FORBES.*
"REX. ex gratis et favore specialibus, remisit JOHANNI MAGISTRO DE FORBES, 'latori presentium,' rancorem animi sui et sectam regiam pro ejus proditoria

¹ Widow of Arthur, 5th Lord.

THE HOUSE OF FORBES

remanentia ab exercitu suo apud Sulway et Werk, et pro interfectione Alexandro Seytoun de Meldrum, et pro omnibus aliis offensis quibuscumque usque in diem date commissis,—proditoria traditione in personam regiam, homicidio et mutilatione (a die acti quod nulla remissio daretur propter homicidium aut mutilationem) tantum modo exceptis :—dum modo partibus damna passis satisfaceret :— et dictum Joh. sub suo protectione suscipiens, inhibuit ne quis ei ob dict. offensas molestiam in ferre presumeret &c :—literis pro tempore vitæ dicti Joh. duraturis.” (*Reg. Mag. Sig.*, 971.)

BOND OF 1530.

P. 65. “I, John Lord Forbes becomes surety for my son John Maister of Forbes and remanent sonnys, that Gilbert Menzies, Provost of Abirdene, Alexander Fraser of Philorth, Thomas Menzies, Andrew Menzies and all the other said Gilbert’s sonnys and the baillies, counsall and communitie of the said borough of Abirdene, shall be harmless and skaithless of me and my saidis sonnys and our servandis. Under pain of 5000 pundis to be paid by me to the Kingis Grace and his successoris in case I, my said sonnys or our said servandis or any that we may latt, happen to break the said lawborowis in tyme to cum etc.” (*Council Register of Abirdene*, Vol. I., pages 131-9).

GIFT TO HUNTLY OF THE GOODS OF VARIOUS FORBESSES.

“ 1535. At Stirling 11 Mar.

“ Ane lettre maid to GEORGE EARLE OF HUNTILIE, his airis and assignais, of the gift of all gudis movable and unmovable, cornis, catale, obligations, dettis, takkis, stedingis, money, gold, silver, cunzeit and uncunzeit (coined and uncoined), jowallis and utheris quhatsumever, quhillkis pertemit to John Forbes of Petslego, Alexander Forbes of Kynnaldy, his son and apperand are, Johne Forbes, William Forbes, Alexander Forbes of Dalmanoch, Johne Forbes his bruther, Johne Forbes in Ardequhone, William Forbes in Nether Bonze, Alexander Forbes, sone to David Forbes, Patrik Forbes, sone to Johne Forbes, Johne Forbes, son to George Forbes, Andro Schand in Tormare, John Cawdale, sone and apperand are to James Cawdale of Asloune, Johne Farar, servand to the lord of Petslego, Duncane Farar his sone, Thomas Haggis, Johne Haggis, and Alexander Makfersane ;¹ and now perteyning to our soverane lord as his eschete throw being of the saidis personis his rebellis, and at his horne as fugitive fra his lawis for art and part of the cruell mutilatioun, hurting and wounding of Michael Fraser and John Fraser upown auld feid and forthocht felony, and als of the gift of the unlawis in the quhillkis *Johne Maister of Foybes* was adjudit for nonentre of the said Johne Forbes of Petslego, and the said Johne for nonentre of the said Alexander his sone and the utheris personis rebellis forsaidis, and of Johne Schand, servant to Andro Schand, Schir Gilbert Hunter, chaplane, and divers utheris personis, and als of the gift of divers utheris unlawis, eschetis, pains of lawborris, and soumes of money, as at length is contenit in the said lettre, etc. Per signaturam X.S.

“ Compactio IIII^m Merkis ”

¹ They “ were denounced rebels and put to the horn ” on the 26th of the preceding January (*Pitcairn’s Criminal Trials*, I., 172).

JOHN, 6TH LORD FORBES—APPENDIX

From the books of Justiciary, April 26th, 1536.

“And in the north partis also thair was in the shyre of Aberdene gryt and sharp weres betwix the two sirnames of the Leslie's and the Forbesses, and thair friendis and assistaris and sundry scharp skarmishes with great slauchter both of barones, gentlemen and commons quhill contenewit mony yeiris almaist during the Kingis lesage, quhill at last thay were aggreit be the labours of the principalle noble men of the realme and lordes of the counsall. Yit after the same agrement the lard of Meldrum, quha was of the Leslie's friendes was treasonable slain in the toun of Aberdene be the Maister of Forbes and the Larde Linturk, quhairupon the deadlie feud was walkynned againe. Bot the Lordis of the counsall maid thame to be aggryit thaireftir, sua that the same continewit still in quyetnes to this dayis.”