

THE ROMANCE OF "THE KILLING TIME."

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I.

SOME years ago, when the Rev. Thomas Guthrie, of Ragged School fame, was in the heyday of his renown, a meeting in the interests of his work was held in Edinburgh, and was addressed by the Duke of Argyle. In his introduction of the Duke, Mr. Guthrie remarked that this was not the first time that an Argyle and a Guthrie had spoken in Edinburgh from the same platform in a worthy cause." His allusion created the greatest enthusiasm, being greeted with round upon round of applause. He referred, as every Scotchman knows, to those stirring times, over two centuries since, when Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyle, and the Rev. James Guthrie, minister of Stirling, were executed within a few days of each other upon the same scaffold, the first-fruits of Scotland's harvest of martyrs in the cause of the Covenant.

Argyle had carried the king's crown at Scone, a dozen years before, and had placed it on the royal head. Guthrie, too, had been a staunch royalist, and had pleaded the cause of Charles I. against Cromwell. But they represented the head and front of the Covenanting movement, and that movement Charles II. had determined to destroy. He cherished a grudge against the Covenanters for the surrender of his father to the forces of the parliament. But his enmity was more largely due to his discernment that the claims they asserted, and the spirit they manifested, were directly antagonistic to the dearest

desire of his heart. A nominal Churchman, in reality a Catholic, and that, too, from political rather than religious motives—Catholicism supported the divine right of kings—a man apparently utterly without moral conviction, an unblushing sensualist, the veriest of triflers, he had one serious purpose, to attain to absolute power in Church and State. This purpose he prosecuted with a tenacity and a disregard for truth and honour characteristic of the house of Stuart, and followed it with a subtilty and cunning far exceeding that of any of his predecessors.

In his extremity, he had subscribed the Covenant, but in his prosperity he utterly repudiated his oaths. He was thus, by promise and consent, the champion and defender of the Presbyterian cause, but the first Scotch parliament of his reign—known by the unenviable sobriquet of the Drunken Parliament—passed an act declaring the king supreme in all matters alike civil and ecclesiastical. It formulated an oath of allegiance, and promulgated an Act Recessory, undoing at a stroke all the hard-won victories of twenty years in the struggle between presbytery and prelaticism.

On his way to the scaffold, Argyle, who had been a man of varied and gifted parts, declared, "I could die like a Roman, but choose to die like a Christian;" and Guthrie, whom Cromwell called "the short man that could not bow," when the napkin had been placed about his face, raised it to cry, "The Covenants, the Covenants shall yet be Scotland's reviving."