

**THE ABBEY CLASSICS-  
I, MEMOIRS OF HIS  
OWN LIFE**

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The Abbey Classics-I, Memoirs of his own life by Sir James Melville

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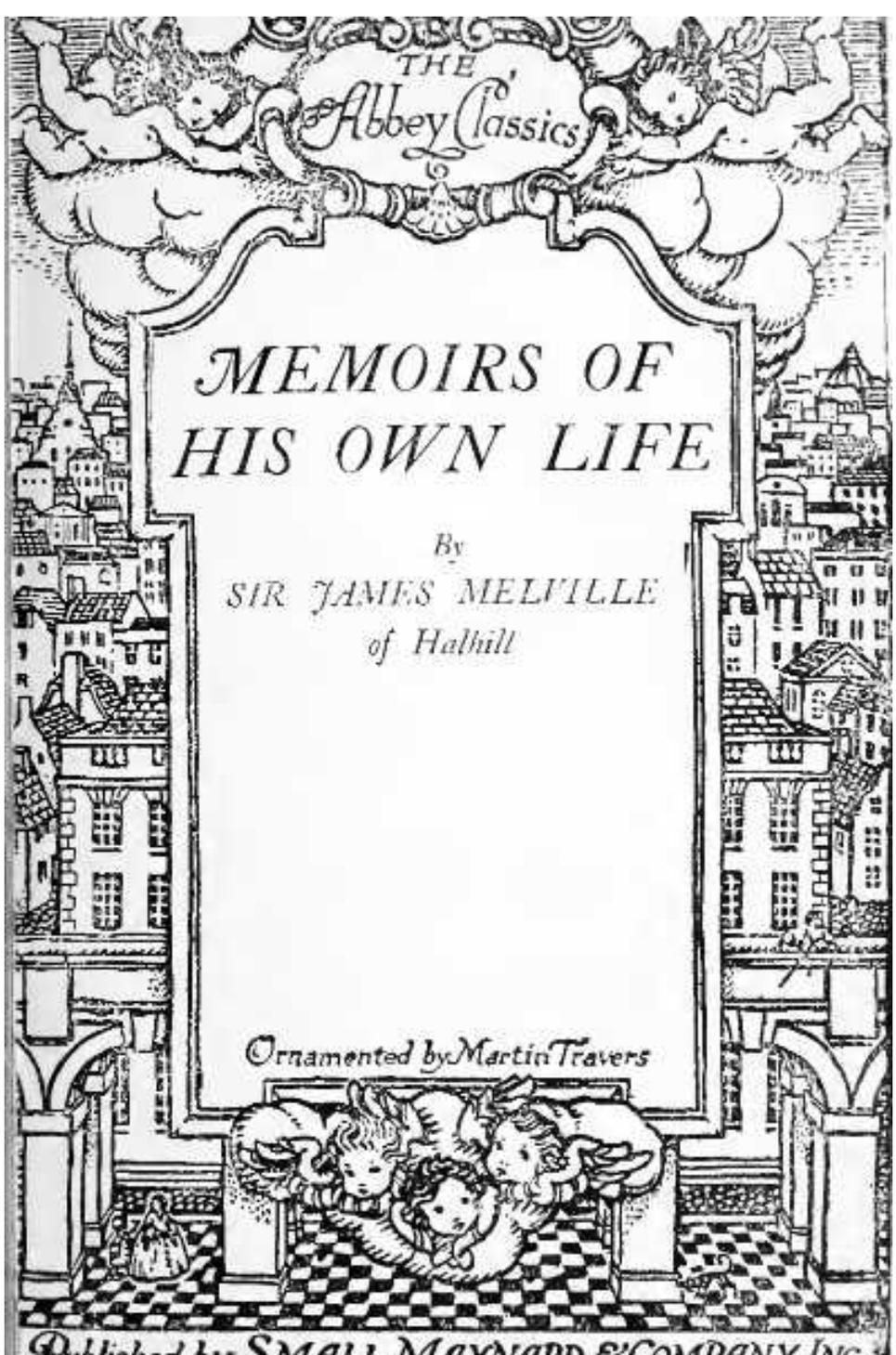
*THE ABBEY CLASSICS—I*

*SIR JAMES MELVILLE  
OF HALHILL*

*MEMOIRS OF HIS OWN LIFE*







THE  
*Abbey Classics*

*MEMOIRS OF  
HIS OWN LIFE*

By  
*SIR JAMES MELVILLE*  
of *Halhill*

*Ornamented by Martin Travers*

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

SIR JAMES MELVILLE (1535-1617) of HALHILL, was the third son of Sir James Melville of Raith. At the age of fourteen he was appointed page to Mary, Queen of Scots, in France. Three years later he entered the train of the Constable of France, under whom he saw service against the Emperor and was wounded at the Battle of St. Quentin, 1557. In 1559 he was sent by Henry II. of France as secret agent to Scotland, with the purpose of discovering the supposed designs of James Stuart, Queen Mary's half-brother (and later regent of Scotland), against the throne. He returned to France; but after various other missions he finally came back to Scotland and settled at the Court of Queen Mary, by whom he was appointed Privy Counsellor and Gentleman of the Bedchamber. He was also employed by the Queen as envoy to the court of Queen Elizabeth in the matter of the Darnley marriage negotiations. Thereafter during the troublous period of the Rizzio and Darnley murders, until after the Battle of Carberry Hill, he maintained a neutral position between the Queen and the rebellious Protestant nobles, but after Queen Mary's confinement he threw in his lot with the Regent's party. Later, on the personal accession to the Throne of James VI., he was again appointed Privy Counsellor and Gentleman of the Bedchamber, and was knighted. However, on the succession of James VI. to the English throne in 1603 Melville declined to follow his Sovereign to England and retired to his estate of Halhill, in Fife, where he remained until his death on 13th November, 1617.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The "MEMOIRS OF HIS OWN LIFE" were first published in 1683 in London. A second edition appeared in 1735, a third in 1751, while in 1827 the Memoirs were reprinted privately for the Bannatyne Club from the original MSS. The present edition has been reprinted from that of 1735, with, however, many corrections and emendations suggested by the 1827 edition.

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## INTRODUCTION

OF 16th century politicians and diplomats none had such a peculiar range of experience or variety of acquaintance as Sir James Melville. He was never a resident ambassador, like his brother Sir Robert in London, nor did he merely serve one court in different countries. He had been the agent of different courts. And his patrons, too, had been diversified in character. Jean de Montluc, Bishop of Valence, was neither strict Catholic nor proper Protestant; though condemned for a heretic at Rome he kept the favour of Catherine de Medicis and so has been called an "amphibious creature." Melville thought the Bishop had been divinely inspired to befriend him, but he was not quite the sort of channel one would expect. Anne, Duke of Montmorency, Melville served in his day of opposition to the family of Guise; as a soldier the Constable was a "French Fabius," and as a politician so far the same, a temporiser. Equal in Melville's admiration was his next patron Frederick, Elector Palatine, the most sympathetic figure among the German Protestant princes, but more Calvinist than Lutheran, another amphibian. It is from an official source that we learn how Frederick's last commission to him was to confer with the rulers of France on the religious situation in that country. Other types like Catherine de Medicis with her "Italian tricks," Maximilian the future Emperor, who was particularly anxious to keep him, and Anthony de Bourbon, King of Navarre, came within the circle of Melville's special activities. In the early summer of 1559 Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, the English ambassador in Paris, wrote of him as "well liked by the Constable," and later on informed Cecil that "Though he had talked with many men of divers nations, finds none so trusty as James Melville . . . the Constable's servant, a man of good capacity," urging that an effort should be made to use him in the service of Queen Elizabeth. This seems to have been done, on that Queen's own instruction, while he was with the Elector Palatine. It was thus as a highly "experimented" politician that he tried to restrain Queen Mary, fenced in diplomacy with Elizabeth, and lectured the self-sufficient James VI. Such a man was obviously in a unique position to make a contribution to the history of his time.

The fate of his *Memoirs* was somewhat akin to that of their author. In the form which follows they were first issued in London (1683), and within a dozen years a French translation appeared in Holland, followed by a reprint in

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France, another in Holland, and by a new improved French version as late as 1745. There was no publication in Scotland till 1735.

### I

Melville does not write as a systematic historian. He professes merely to supply the historian proper with "parentheses" on matters in which he himself was directly concerned, or which came under his own personal observation. The opening section of his book is not on this footing. When James V. died Melville was only seven years old. But Sir James Grange, the Treasurer, who has so prominent a part, was his brother-in-law. That Melville prefaces a lesson or moral need not rouse any suspicion in the reader. He is not tied to it, though it certainly directs his interest; and it is anyhow neither subtle nor new. He had started out with what, quoting from a kindred spirit, he calls "the daft opinion," that in his political service he could "stand by honesty and virtue," and so would inevitably achieve preferment and prosperity. He secured neither to the extent which he thought justified; but that is a very old story. As Renan has said, "History is the opposite of virtue rewarded." Nevertheless Melville kept to his straight groove, because it was his "duty," or, as he puts it with more psychological frankness, because it was his "nature" to do so. This unbending quality probably brought him some reputation of being perverse or unp'casant. He would be neither corrupted nor cajoled, and, as Bothwell said of him, he "had a pin for every bore." A letter exists from him to Thomas Randolph, dated March, 1572, in which he already adopts the tone of one who has withdrawn from the political world and its "combersome occupations," and signs himself, "Your crabit auld and constand affectioned frend." A man who confesses to being "crahit" or cross-grained is rarely so in essence, but one of Melville's disposition lays himself open to the taunt.

A result of Melville's outlook is that he is concerned with personalities and their interactions, with personal motives and impulses of character, not so much with massive general factors. He was himself a Protestant and a devout one—he may even be called a puritan. The more strange, then, the small part which the reformed Kirk plays in his narrative. He has much to say about the treatment of the Danish mission to James VI., but never a word about prelacy or the conflict of spiritual and secular jurisdictions. Possibly these finer issues did not come within his scope. He was not of enthusiastic temper or absolute in anything except personal integrity; but always for clemency and a generous accommodation in party oppositions. He may have preferred, as in the case of the Reformation war in Scotland, to leave the conflict of King and clergy to those who would write