

SURPRISE OF DUMBARTON CASTLE. •

A.D. 1571.

THE Castle of Dumbarton, situated on a most remarkable insulated rock of a conical figure on the Clyde, and almost surrounded by water at full tide, was in former times one of the most important fortresses in Scotland. The extraordinary mass of basalt on which it stands is on all sides

* Richard Bannatyne's *Memorialles*, edited by Robert Pitcairn, Esq. ; Crawford's *Memoirs* ; Sir John Graham Dalyell's *Illustrations of Scotch History*, in which a part of the *Journal* of the same Richard Bannatyne, Secretary to John Knox, is reprinted.

very steep, and anciently it was considered impregnable. In fact, the appearance of the rock, accessible only on one side, which is the entry to the fortifications, evinces that before the use of artillery nothing could scarcely subdue the garrison except a surprise, treachery, or famine.

During the regency of Lennox, the successor of the Earl of Moray in that dangerous office, the Castle of Dumbarton was held by Lord Fleming for Queen Mary, and several persons of rank, among whom was Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, had taken refuge in it for safety. Lennox longed for the possession of this important fortress, and orders were given to Captain Thomas Crawford of Jordanhill, a brave and enterprising officer, to attempt to surprise the only fortified place in Scotland which remained in the interest of the Queen since the commencement of the civil war. The Castle, moreover, commanded the river Clyde, and it was considered the most advantageous locality in the kingdom for landing any foreign troops who might be sent to Mary's aid.

The strength of the Castle, which, it is already stated, was in the opinion of that age impregnable, rendered the governor, Lord Fleming, more secure than he ought to have been, considering its vast importance, and that the possession of it by the Queen's enemies would in all probability annihilate her cause in Scotland, or at least dispirit her friends. Crawford prepared for his enterprise with caution and resolution, assisted by a soldier named Robertson who had deserted from the Castle, and who is said to have proposed the scheme to the Regent, offering to go himself the first in the hazardous attempt. Four persons were at first only cognizant of the enterprise, namely, the Regent, Captain Crawford, the Laird of Drumwhassel, and this soldier. On the forenoon of the first day of April, the Regent ordered the Laird of Drumwhassel to secure all the passages by land and water between Glasgow and Dumbar-

ton, and to meet a select body of cavalry and foot about ten in the evening at the hill of Dunbuck, about two miles from the Castle on the banks of the Clyde.

The rendezvous was held at the time and place appointed, and here Crawford and his colleague declared the object of the enterprise to the soldiers. Exhorted by their leaders, and stimulated by promises of a liberal reward, the soldiers eagerly assented to the attempt, notwithstanding its dangerous and apparently hopeless nature. They repaired their scaling ladders and ropes, and having properly secured all the avenues to the Castle, that no intelligence of the design might reach the governor or the garrison, Crawford and his companion set forward at the head of a small but determined band at midnight.

The moon, by the light of which they had repaired their ladders and ropes, was by this time hid, and the sky which had hitherto been clear was obscured by a thick fog. About three hours before daylight the assailants began their operations where the rock is highest, knowing that there were fewer sentinels there, and hoping to find them less vigilant than those at the more accessible points of the rock. Here they fixed their first ladder, but the weight and eagerness of those who mounted soon brought it to the ground. None of them were hurt by the fall, nor were the garrison alarmed by the noise, or even attracted by a glare of light which is described as rising suddenly from the ground behind the assailants, and then "past suddenly away." Crawford and the soldier scrambled up the rock, and fastened the ladders to the roots of a tree growing in a cleft of the rock.

This spot was reached with the greatest difficulty, and they were still at a considerable distance from the foot of the wall. In the middle of the ascent a singular incident occurred. One of the soldiers, either from fear or some other cause, was suddenly seized with a fit, and clung to

the ladder apparently lifeless. This unforeseen difficulty put them at a stand. To pass him was impossible, and to tumble him down the precipice would not only have been barbarous, but might have hazarded a discovery. The ingenuity of Crawford did not forsake him. With the greatest presence of mind he ordered the soldier to be tied to the ladder, that he might not fall when he recovered from the fit, and, turning it, they mounted with ease over his belly. At length they succeeded in reaching the foot of the wall of the fortress, which they accomplished with great labour, "whiles up and whiles down, notwithstanding the calling of the watch."

Daylight began to break, and a cloud of mist encircled the immense rock, which prevented the assailants from being recognised by the sentinels. There still remained a high wall to climb, to which they soon placed their ladders, and mounted one after another as close as possible in silence. Captain Ramsay was the first upon the ladder. The sentinel was astonished to see a man's head appear above the outer wall, when the silence of the morning had not been interrupted by the slightest noise, and before he recovered his surprise, and had only time to give the alarm, Ramsay appeared on the parapet, from which he leaped, followed by his companions, into the fortress, exclaiming, "*God and the King! A Darnley! A Darnley!*" The sentinel was soon silenced, but he had given the alarm, and the officers and soldiers of the garrison were running out naked, solicitous for their own safety, and incapable of making any resistance against armed men. Ignorant of the number of their assailants they fled, and Crawford immediately took possession of the magazine, and seized the cannon, which he turned against the garrison.

Resistance was impossible, and Lord Fleming fled by the postern gate, near which he procured a boat, and escaped to Argyleshire. Among the persons of distinction found in

the castle were Lady Fleming, who was treated with great kindness, the Archbishop of St Andrews, the French envoy Virac, the Master of Livingstone, afterwards Earl of Linlithgow, and Fleming of Boghall. The Regent Lennox arrived from Glasgow at ten o'clock in the morning of the 2d of April, and had the satisfaction of finding the enterprise successful. He secured the unfortunate Archbishop of St Andrews, who was sent to Stirling, where he was soon afterwards most unjustly condemned and put to death. Only three of the garrison fell by the hands of the bold assailants, and Crawford was appointed to the command of the Castle as the reward of his valour.

Besides the cannon, which appear to have consisted of only eight pieces, found in the Castle by the assailants, there were several barrels of powder, and a good store of ammunition. As it respects provisions, the garrison had twelve chalders of meal, ten bolls of wheat, eight bolls of malt, nine entire hogsheads of biscuit, twenty tuns of wine, and four whole puncheons of *Balcone*.

Captain Crawford wrote an account of this enterprise to John Knox, which has been preserved. "After my hearty commendations," he says to the Reformer, "the Laird of Braid shews me that you are desirous to know the manner of the taking of Dumbarton, and what we found in it. The manner was this. I having knowledge of the mode of watching in the garrison, and where the sentinels were stationed, and having an yeoman, one who had been one of the sentinels, and who knew all the crag, where it was best to climb, and where fewest ladders would be required, without any farther intelligence I took on hand to make an attempt, and to do every thing that was possible. We departed from Glasgow an hour before sunset, having previously provided ladders and ropes, and *craws* of iron to put between the rocks for the fixing of cords; but before we left Glasgow we sent our horsemen to keep all the pass-

ages." He then narrates their rendezvous at the hill of Dunbuck, and their preparations—that to prevent discovery they made the attempt on the highest part of the rock—and that after entering the fortress with the loss of three soldiers belonging to the garrison, and wounding others, they succeeded in reaching the cannon, which they threatened to turn against the garrison. Crawford denies that he was in communication with or received intelligence from any of Lord Fleming's soldiers. The letter is chiefly curious, as showing that this daring and hazardous exploit caused a great sensation throughout the country, and it was certainly one of those enterprises which none but a man of great courage and resolution could undertake.