

SIEGES OF WARK CASTLE.*

THE Castle of Wark in Northumberland, which is in the view of the traveller entering England by Coldstream Bridge for several miles of the journey down the banks of the Tweed, stands on a circular eminence formed by art.

* Hutchinson's View of Northumberland; Ridpath's Border History; Scott's Border Antiquities; Buchanan's History of Scotland; Pinkerton's History of Scotland.

A small part of it now remains, having the form of a rude pillar, which at a distance appears of some importance, but the present ruins do not impress the beholder with the idea that it was such a formidable fortress as it assuredly was for many centuries. Being on the Borders, Wark was subject to repeated assaults. It is not known when it was dismantled and destroyed, though it may have been one of those frontier strongholds ordered to be demolished by James VI. on his accession to the crown of England. A platform extends to the west of the castle, with a trench called *Gully's Niche*, and a mean village lies on the east, by which the ruins are approached. Near are several intrenchments, the silent memorials of former strife, some of which are defended by mounds of earth. There is a spot adjoining called the *Battle Place*, but the particular event which obtained for it that appellation is forgotten.

In the reign of King Stephen of England, the Scots under David crossed the Borders, and amongst other exploits laid siege to Wark. A truce followed, but in 1137 the Scottish King again invaded Northumberland, and part of his army, commanded by William, the son of his illegitimate brother Duncan, assaulted the Castle of Wark. The King and his son Prince Henry soon afterwards joined this William with the rest of their forces. The Governor of Wark was Jordan de Bussy, nephew of the renowned Walter L'Espece, the proprietor of large estates in Yorkshire, and founder of the Abbey of Rievalee, then also Lord of Wark. During a siege of three weeks the garrison sustained the most vigorous assaults, and every attempt to gain the fortalice, or to reduce it by famine, was unsuccessful. The Scottish King was at last obliged to raise the siege after a considerable loss, and his standard-bearer among the slain. Exasperated at this repulse the Scots wasted the western parts of Northumberland, spreading desolation and ruin as far as the Tyne.

Stephen advanced to Wark at the head of a numerous army to oppose the Scots, and compelled David to retire from Northumberland, threatening an invasion of his territories ; but fearing a plot laid to ensnare him at Roxburgh, he returned without attempting any military operations against the Scots. When David perceived that the English forces had abandoned the Borders, he again entered Northumberland, a county which he claimed in right of his son Prince Henry, and marched against Wark, to revenge an insult which the garrison had committed by seizing some of his baggage, and annoying some of his forces. But this second siege was as unsuccessful as his former one. He exerted all his strength, and persisted in the siege with much bloodshed, till he at length turned it into a blockade by a body of troops under two of his banners, and marched southwards with the main body of his army.

The battle of the Standard, fought on Cutton Muir, in the neighbourhood of Northallerton, followed, in which David was completely defeated. The Scottish King retreated with the remains of his shattered army to Carlisle, and during the march thither the exasperated peasants revenged on his stragglers the barbarities which the invaders had committed. His defeat on Cutton Muir, however, was not so disastrous in its consequences as might have been expected, and the English were in no condition to benefit by the victory they had gained. After a short stay at Carlisle David marched against Wark, the siege of which he ordered to be resumed. He employed newly invented machines and engines, but the fortalice withstood all his assaults. The garrison made a terrible slaughter, while they only lost one knight, whose intrepidity in attacking a machine exposed him to numbers of assailants.

The brave defence by the garrison, and the havoc they committed, was to the King a source of humiliation and sorrow, but he was resolved to obtain possession of the

Castle, and he issued orders to form a strong blockade. The garrison were in consequence soon reduced to the greatest extremities for want of provisions. In their distress they killed their horses, and salted the flesh for food; and as that was their last resort, they resolved, as soon as all their provision was exhausted, to cut their passage through the Scots or die sword in hand. But they were prohibited from attempting this act by the command of the lord of the castle, Walter L'Espece. Wishing to preserve this brave band, he sent the Abbot of Rievale with his positive orders to surrender the place. A treaty was concluded, and the garrison were permitted to march out under arms, with twenty horses provided by the Scottish King. Wark was immediately demolished, and the fortifications rased.

The Castle, however, was ordered to be restored by Henry II., to strengthen the frontiers of England against the Scots. In 1318 it was taken by assault by King Robert Bruce. His son, David II., when returning from an expedition into Northumberland in the summer of 1342, where he had committed the greatest ravages, was attacked while passing the Castle laden with spoils by the governor, Sir William Montague. The Countess of Salisbury, to whose husband Wark then belonged, resided in it. Montague, with only forty horsemen, made a most successful sally on the Scots, attended with considerable slaughter, and brought into the Castle one hundred and sixty horses laden with plunder. Enraged at this insult David led his army against the Castle, and made a general assault, in which he was repulsed. He then prepared to fill the ditches, and bring his engines to play upon the walls. At the sight of these preparations the garrison took the alarm, and their danger rendered it necessary to send information of their situation to the English King, who was then marching to the Borders with a considerable army. The attempt was

perilous on account of the vigilance of the besiegers, but it was achieved by Sir William Montague himself, who, taking advantage of a dark and stormy night, passed through the Scottish lines on a fleet horse, and carried intelligence to King Edward, who redoubled his speed to relieve the Castle. Unwilling to risk the loss of their spoils, the Scottish leaders persuaded David to raise the siege, and they passed the Tweed only six hours before the van of the English army appeared. Edward was hospitably entertained in the Castle, and it is traditionally said that the Countess of Salisbury, overjoyed at the relief of the fortress, was so captivating in the eyes of the King by her beauty and pleasing deportment, as to be the cause of the institution of the *Order of the Garter*.

Wark was besieged by the Scots in 1383, in the reign of Richard II. of England, and part of the fortifications destroyed; but the assailants on this occasion were the Borderers, and the expedition a Border foray, for in July that year, in the reign of Robert II., the Duke of Lancaster and the Earl of Carrick met, and the latter agreed to a compensation for damage done to the Castle of Wark and other places in England by the Scottish Borderers. In 1399, while the English were occupied with the deposition of Richard II. and the elevation of Henry IV., the Scottish Borderers made another incursion into Northumberland, and took the Castle during the absence of the governor, Sir Thomas Grey. After holding it a short time they dismantled it, and ravaged the adjacent country. But the fortress was of too much importance to be neglected, and it was soon restored and put in a proper state of defence. During the reign of Henry IV. it sustained many shocks, with various degrees of fortune. In 1419, during the absence of Henry V. in France, and while Robert Duke of Albany was Regent of Scotland—James I. being then detained a prisoner in England—hostilities commenced on the Borders,

and Wark was taken by William Hallyburton of Fastcastle, who put all the garrison to the sword. The capture of the fortress must have been achieved by stratagem, as Hallyburton appears to have had only twenty-three followers. Robert Ogle, the governor, happened to be absent, but when he was informed of the seizure of his stronghold, he collected some English troops, and marched to effect its recovery. He deceived Hallyburton by proposing a compensation for the delivery of the castle. While the negotiation was in progress his soldiers contrived to surprise the place, and all the Scots, overpowered by numbers, were slain.

In 1460, after the demolition of Roxburgh Castle, where James II. was killed, the Scots marched into England, and among many other castles which they assaulted, that of Wark was taken and demolished. It was again repaired by the Earl of Surrey, who probably put it in the condition in which it is described by Buchanan, who says that "in the innermost area a large and strong tower rises to a great height; it is surrounded by two walls, the outermost embracing a wide space, into which the country people are accustomed to flee for refuge, and bring their cattle and corn; the space between the inner wall and the fort being much smaller, but more strongly secured with ditches and towers."

Such was Wark in 1523, during the reign of James V., when a Scottish army was mustered on the Boroughmuir of Edinburgh, under the Regent Duke of Albany, to the number of 60,000 men, to encounter the Earl of Surrey. The Castle could then have stood a siege of ten days, and it had a strong garrison, an ample supply of artillery and ammunition, and of other things necessary for defence; but it is stated in a dispatch from Surrey to Cardinal Wolsey, that the outer walls could not have resisted two days. The English commander remained at Belford till Albany entered

the English territory. The latter slowly conducted his troops from the Boroughmuir to Melrose, where he arrived on the 28th of October, after suffering much inconvenience by cumbersome artillery, and encountering roads, at all times wretched in those days, rendered still more difficult by recent falls of snow and rain. Albany remained in the neighbourhood of Melrose two days, after which he marched down the Tweed, and arrived at Eccles, on the side of the river opposite Wark. The Scottish army encamped near Coldstream, while Albany lodged in Home Castle. He ordered part of the artillery to be conveyed to Berwick, but afterwards he resolved to attempt the destruction of Wark.

On the last day of October the Regent advanced some artillery against the fortress, and sent the French auxiliaries, of whom he had a considerable body in his army, over the Tweed, placing more confidence in them than in the Scots. The whole force sent against the Castle consisted of four thousand men, including the French, and all were commanded by Ker of Fernihirst. On the following day, which happened to be Sunday, a vigorous fire was commenced by the Scots and French, the latter carrying the outer enclosure at the first assault, but they were dislodged by the garrison setting fire to the corn and straw laid up within the walls. Nevertheless the besiegers soon recovered it, and effected a breach in the inner wall by their cannon, notwithstanding all the efforts of Sir William Lisle, captain of the Castle. The French with great intrepidity mounted the breach and entered the precinct, when they were encountered sword in hand by Lisle and the garrison, and were driven out with the loss of ten men.

Darkness came on, and both parties were compelled to desist. The Scots and French resolved to renew the assault on the following day, but during the night there was

a heavy fall of rain; the Tweed was swollen by the mountain torrents, and the besiegers, alarmed by the intelligence that the Earl of Surrey was advancing from Alnwick with a large force, were afraid that the state of the river would cut off their retreat to the main army. Under these circumstances Albany withdrew his artillery and sounded a retreat, and "there was never man," says Surrey to Henry VIII., "departed with more shame, or with more fear, than the Duke has done this day." The Regent retired to Eccles, from which he rapidly marched towards Edinburgh when he heard that the English were approaching; his retreat having the appearance of a flight, the disorder of which was increased by a tempest of snow. Albany writhing with shame, and conscious of having, as Henry VIII. wrote to Surrey, "cowardly raised his siege and fled," yet affected to ascribe his disgrace to sundry peers who would not advance into England, and he even charged Arran, Lennox, and others, with a design of delivering him up to the English army.

In 1549 Wark received the English army after an expedition into Scotland, which is the last event of any consequence previous to its final demolition. The castle was long the property of the Lords Grey of Wark, and is now in the possession of their descendants by the female line, the Earls of Tankerville.