

THE BATTLE OF OTTERBURN.

IN the summer of the year 1388, a Scottish army of between 30,000 and 40,000 men assembled in Teviotdale to make an inroad into England. The occasion of their meeting was neither peculiar nor remarkable, but only formed an ordinary link in the chain of national animosity and Border warfare. They purposed at first to march in one mass, but afterwards saw cause to separate into two divisions,—the greater to pass toward Carlisle under the command of the King's two sons, the Earls of Fife and Strathearn, and the smaller to pass into Northumberland under the command of the Earl of Douglas. They had little resistance to expect in this invasion,—the English at the time being fully occupied with the civil dissensions between Richard and his parliament; yet the smaller division, more on account of its own boastfulness and wanton display of daring than for any other reason, got itself briskly involved in hostilities, and fought with a powerful foe the famous battle of Otterburn.

The Earl of Douglas's mission was entirely to his mind, and afforded wide scope for the outburst of his roistering and raiding disposition. He is said by some authorities to have had with him one-half of the army, or about 15,000 men,—but by others, only 300 horse, 300 light infantry, and 2,000 heavy infantry,—and by others, 4,000 chosen horsemen; and this last estimate accords best with the general known facts of his expedition, and with the extraordinary celerity and

vigour of his movements. His chief officers and aids were the Earls of March, Moray, Crawford, and Errol, the Gordons, the Lindsays, and the Grahams; and he commenced his devastations in part of Roxburghshire which was then in the possession of the English, and careered through Northumberland and across the Tyne in a track of fire and smoke, and was away past Durham, with a great accumulation of rich spoils, before any chief of English troops had notice or opportunity to call out a force to dispute his progress.

“ It fell about the Lammas tide,
 When the muir-men win their hay,
 The doughty Earl of Douglas rode
 Into England, to catch a prey.

He chose the Gordons, and the Græmes,
 With them the Lindesays, light and gay;
 But the Jardines wald not with him ride,
 And they rue it to this day.

And he has burn'd the dales of Tyne,
 And part of Bambrough shire;
 And three good towers on Roxburgh fells,
 He left them all on fire.”

The Earl of Northumberland, then an old man, felt roused at the insult which Douglas was practising, and sent his two sons, Henry and Ralph, fiery and valiant warriors, to Newcastle to intercept him; and commanded all the men of the country under his sway to repair thither and support them. Douglas came back from Durham under a load of booty, and recrossed the Tyne about three miles above Newcastle; and, either elated by the high success of his raid, or ashamed to have hitherto assailed only hamlets and villages, or wishful to win the fame of overwhelming a powerful foe, or possibly

affected more or less in all these three ways, he marched to Newcastle, filled the ditches before it with faggots and hay, and either made an assault upon the town with the view of taking it, or offered such taunts and provocations as might draw out the enemy to the open field. He remained two days before it, and got up a series of skirmishes, but could not achieve any higher exploit than to procure and win a personal combat with Henry Percy, commonly known as Hotspur.

“ And he march’d up to Newcastle,
 And rode it round about;
 ‘ O wha’s the lord of this castle,
 Or wha’s the lady o’t ?’

But up spake proud Lord Percy then,
 And O but he spake hie!
 ‘ I am the lord of this castle,
 My wife’s the lady gay.’

‘ If thou’rt the lord of this castle,
 Sae weel it pleases me !
 For, ere I cross the Border fells,
 The tane of us shall die.’

He took a lang spear in his hand,
 Shod with the metal free,
 And for to meet the Douglas there,
 He rode right furiously.

But O how pale his lady look’d,
 Frae aff the Castle wa’,
 When down, before the Scottish spear,
 She saw proud Percy fa’.

‘ Had we twa been upon the green,
And never an eye to see,
I wad hae had you, flesh and fell;
But your sword sall gae wi’ mee.’ ”

Douglas, in fact, bore Percy out of his saddle in knightly encounter; and, though unable to come at himself, in consequence of a rescue by his people, snatched away his lance, with his pennon or guidon attached to it, and, shaking it aloft, swore that he would carry it as his spoil into Scotland, and plant it upon his Castle of Dalkeith. “That,” answered Percy, “shalt thou never!”

Newcastle, at the time, was unusually crowded; for it contained not only its ordinary inhabitants, but also the gatherings of the Percy’s forces and some incomers from Yorkshire. On the night following the encounter, Douglas set a strict watch; and on the next day, he decamped, and moved slowly toward the north, and, sending on his heavy loads of booty before him, assailed and demolished the Castle of Pontelan, and took its knightly proprietor, Sir Aymer of Alphel, prisoner. He then marched onward, and encamped at Otterburn, about twelve miles from Newcastle; and there, though most of his officers wished to move on to a junction with the army under the Earls of Fife and Strathearn, and to avoid all risk of battle till that junction should be made, he resolved to remain a sufficient number of days to allow Hotspur ample time and opportunity to attempt the recapturing of his lance. He therefore fortified his camp on a side where it was exposed,—the other sides being naturally defended by marshes; and, in order that his soldiers might not cool down in their ardour, or lose anything for want of raiding and foraging, he led them out in parties to sack the neighbouring castles and mansions.

Hotspur would gladly have given Douglas instant chase from Newcastle, but prudently abstained from fear of an am-

bush ; for he thought it not at all likely that so small a body of Scots would have behaved so boldly, under the walls of so large a town, unless they had known of some powerful succour being at hand. But ascertaining in two days that no other Scottish army was near enough to be feared, and having got together so many as 10,000 men, and aware that another force was advancing at no great distance under the Bishop of Durham, he set off, without waiting for that force, to seek out Douglas, and give him battle. The avant-couriers arrived at Otterburn late in the evening, while some of the Scots army were at supper, and after others, who were fatigued with foraying through the day, had gone to rest. The English van made a prompt and fierce attack, and were valiantly received by a party of footmen and lackeys and grooms, who, having the advantage of the fortification which had been made, sustained the charge till the rest were armed and ready. The Scots at their encamping had espied a little hill, which they meant to make use of, in the event of an attack ; and now, while the English assailed the entry of the camp, the Scottish horsemen, fetching a compass round this hill, charged them in flank at the far side, and slew many of them, and threw the whole of their army into tumult and panic. But the English brought up fresh supplies, restored their ranks, and made ready to renew the fight ; and in the meantime, the Scots took advantage of the pause to put themselves into the firmest and strongest array. Night now drew on, and was unwelcome to both ; but as it was very short, the time being in July, and was also lighted up with a clear moon, it did not hinder the fight from being instantly and toughly renewed. The armies rushed into collision, far more careful of fame than of life. Hotspur strove hard to repair the disgrace which he had suffered at Newcastle ; Douglas strove equally hard to keep the honour which he had won ; and the soldiers on both sides fought with zeal and might to support their masters. The armies fought during most of the night, and

were induced at last to draw off from each other and take a little repose only in consequence of the sky becoming so darkened by clouds that they could no longer discern friend from foe.

The conflict was resumed as soon as day-light set in ; and very soon the Scots were driven back, and Douglas's standard imperilled, by a furious onset from the English. Douglas was now all wrath and energy ; and leading on one party in person, while two of his officers of the name of Hepburn, father and son, led another, he pushed through the field to the point where the assault was most disastrous, and, at the expense of much carnage, restored his wavering and retiring ranks to steadiness and order. The battle continued to rage till noon, without any very decided advantage to either side, but with more injury and discouragement to the Scots than to the English. Douglas now became impatient, and rose like a tiger from his lair ; and, aided by only a handful of his nearest supporters—the general accounts say only by three, Robert Hart, Simon Glendinging, and Richard Lundie—he rushed into the middle of his enemies, and laid about with such strength and fury as to spread havoc upon his path. “ It was a wonder,” says Godscroft, “ to see the great vassalage that he wrought. Major, in describing it, can make no end, nor satisfy himself ; his comparisons are high, like a lion of Libya. His description of his body is, that it was fair and well-compacted ; his strength huge, which he yet amplifieth with greater hugeness, saying that he fought with a mace of iron which two ordinary men were not able to lift, which notwithstanding he did wield easily, making a great lane round about him wheresoever he went. His courage and confidence appeareth in his so valiant insisting, as though he would have slain the whole English army himself alone ; and seeking to find Henry Percy amongst the midst of them, he was entered far within the ranks of the enemies. Holinshed confesseth, that with a great mace in his hand, he laid

such sad strokes about him, that none came within his reach but he went down to the ground. And Boetius saith plainly, he fought with a mace heavier than any man is able to bear in those days, and that rushing into the midst of his enemies, he made such a slaughter, that it was chiefly attributed to his valour that the Scots won the field. But, while he is thus fighting in the midst of them, before his friends could come at him, though they pressed forward to have seconded and assisted him with all the force and speed that might be, they found him lying on the ground with three deadly wounds. There was lying dead by him Robert Hart,—and the priest, called Richard Lundie, who was after made archdean of Aberdeen, that had ever stood fast by his side, defending his fainting body with a halbert from injury." To three of his kinsmen who now pressed up to him, he said, "I die like my forefathers, on a field of battle, and not on a bed of sickness. Conceal my death, defend my standard, and avenge my fall. An old prophecy says that a dead man shall win a battle; and I hope it will this day be fulfilled in me." He immediately expired; and his kinsmen covered his body with a cloak, and rushed back to the conflict.

Some accounts say that Douglas was slain by Hotspur, in personal combat with him, in the midst of the battle,—and others, that he fell by the hand of a faithless page, whom he had struck on the preceding day with a truncheon, and who left a part of his armour behind unfastened, and came up, in the conflict, and pierced him through the unfastened part with a poniard; but it is far more probable that he sank beneath a series of blows and wounds, received in the course of the murderous "muck" which he ran through the throngs of the enemy. The old ballad, from which we have already made two quotations, tries to combine all the accounts; and puts "the prophecy" to which he alluded in his dying speech into the form of a dream of the preceding night; and represents his kinsman Montgomery as having been sent for to the

decisive parts of the battle are touched as follows in the old ballad, though with the anachronism of night for day, and with some other poetical licenses ;—

“ The moon was clear, the day drew near,
 The spears in flinders flew,
 But mony a gallant Englishman,
 Ere day the Scotsmen slew.

The Gordons good, in English blood,
 They steep'd their hose and shoon ;
 The Lindsays flew like fire about,
 Till all the fray was done.

The Percy and Montgomery met,
 That either of other were fain ;
 They swapped swords, and they twa swat,
 And aye the blood ran down between.

‘ Yield thee, O yield thee, Percy!’ he said,
 ‘ Or else I vow I’ll lay thee low !’
 ‘ Whom to shall I yield,’ said Earl Percy,
 ‘ Now that I see it must be so ?’

‘ Thou shalt not yield to lord nor loun,
 Nor yet shalt thou yield to me ;
 But yield thee to the braken bush,
 That grows on yon lilye lee !’

‘ I will not yield to a braken bush,
 Nor yet will I yield to a briar ;
 But I would yield to Earl Douglas,
 Or Sir Hugh the Montgomery, if he were here.’

As soon as he knew it was Montgomery,
 He struck his sword’s point in the gronde ;

And the Montgomery was a courteous knight,
And quickly took him by the honde.

This deed was done at Otterbourne,
About the breaking of the day ;
Earl Douglas was buried at the braken bush,
And the Percy led captive away."

" This," says Godscroft, " is the battle at Otterburn, memorable not only for the magnanimity, courage, perseverance, tolerance of travel, and (in victory) modesty of soldiers and captains, but also for the variable event, where the victor, in high expectation of glory, prevented by death, could not enjoy the fruit of his travel. Froissart, a stranger, and favouring more the English, concludeth touching this battle, that in all history, there is none so notable, by the bravery of the captains, and valour of the soldiers, fought so long, so hardly, so variable, the victory inclining diversly divers times, and at last obtained, not by the cowardice of the overcome, but by the valour of the overcomers. Neither is that virtue of valour only remarkable in this place, and marked by him, but their modesty, when they had overcome, rare and wonderful to him, (as it is indeed to others,) but common enough to the Scottish nation, practised by them often in their victories, and almost every where when some great enormity hath not irritated them, contrary to their nature and custom ; yet here very singularly ; for in the heat of the conflict no men ever fought more fiercely ; in the victory obtained none ever behaved themselves more mercifully ; taking prisoners, and having taken them, using them as their dearest friends with all humanity, courtesy, gentleness, and tenderness, curing their wounds, sending them home, some free without ransom, some on small ransom, almost all on their simple word and promise to return at certain times appointed, or when they should be called upon ; so that of 1,000 prisoners scarce 400 were

brought into Scotland, the rest all remitted in that same manner with Ralph Percy ; and by his example, who because of his wounds, desired this courtesy of the Earl of Moray, and obtained it, and was sent to Newcastle, on his naked word to return when he should be called for.

“ But what courage and confidence was it, that they durst adventure with so great perils to be so courteous as they were ? When the Bishop of Durham approaching to invade them the next day with 10,000, as some say, with 7,000, as others, of fresh men ; yet they would not kill their prisoners that were within their camp, equal almost to the half of their own number, but on their own promises to remain true prisoners, however the field went, and with a small guard, having only pinioned them together with small cords, suffered them to live in the camp, and went themselves to encounter the Bishop, full of confidence and scorn, that after the defeat of the flowers of Northumberland, with their so worthy leaders as the Percys, that a priest (so they called the bishop) should dare to set upon them, or but to abide them three marked strokes, as their leader said to them in his exhortations ; as it came indeed to pass without any strokes ; for they affrighted him only with the sound of their horns, as it seems Major would say, which they winding against him, and the hills redoubling the sound thereof, he was afraid, and durst not invade them, finding them ready and resolved to fight ; whom he thought to have found weary because of their former travel, or negligent because of their victory. And, considering, saith Froissart, there was more to be lost than to be won at their hands, the captain distrusting his host, and the host their captain, it was thought best not to give battle, and so he retired without assaulting them.

“ Their leader, after the Earl of Douglas’s death, was the Earl of Moray, saith Buchanan ; but I should rather take it to be the Earl of March, for he was the elder brother ; and Major saith it was March, However our Scottishmen’s cour-

tesy and courage is exceedingly to be commended, who, notwithstanding that they looked for nothing but to have fought with the Bishop of Durham, yet did they spare their prisoners, which, and the like actions, when I consider, I would gladly understand of such as delight to reproach our nation with all the calumnies they can invent, and amongst the rest style them barbarous. What is it they call barbarity? And if cruelty and inhumanity be not the special points of it? whereof they shall never read that any nation were more free, or that ever hath been more courteous, humane, gentle, in peace and in war, even at all times and in all places. I wish all men would acknowledge the truth as it is. If they will not, yet shall it be truth, and truth shall never want a witness; it will be acknowledged, and must prevail to their great reproach that seek to hide or impair it."

The humanity, generosity, and good faith, however, were not all on the side of the Scots; but seem to have been common stock on both sides, to a degree surprisingly and most pleasingly out of keeping with the mutually murderous spirit of the border warfare; and were displayed on the part of the English, on the very occasion of Otterburn, as largely as could well be expected from their limited opportunities. An instructive instance of the reciprocal exercise of these good properties between Scot and Englishman occurred in the case of Sir Matthew Redman, the governor of Berwick and Sir James Lindsay, one of the Scottish leaders. When Redman was fleeing from the field among the rest of the scattered host, Lindsay, hot in the pursuit, judged him from the beauty of his armour to be a person of great eminence, and singled him out for his prey, and chased him hard for three miles, till Redman's horse became spent with fatigue, and could no longer run with sufficient speed. Redman alighted and stood at bay; Lindsay in an instant alighted also, and approached on foot; and the two fought fiercely and stiffly, till the latter became victorious. Redman yielded

himself prisoner, but got leave to depart on giving his parole that he would return in twenty days. But Lindsay, after dismissing his captive, was captured in his turn by the advanced guard of the Bishop of Durham's army, and sent in custody to Newcastle ; and there Redman found him out, treated him with great kindness, and dismissed him free to his own country. "So strangely," remarks Redpath, "was the ferocity of these warriors blended with generosity and good faith ; and indeed, were it not for the mixture of these opposites, war would soon destroy its own resources."

The banner of Douglas was borne at Otterburn by his natural son, Archibald Douglas, ancestor of the family of Cavers, the hereditary sheriffs of Teviotdale ; and is still preserved among the archives of that family,—whose present representative, however, has shed immeasurably more glory over his country by his literature and philanthropy and religion than all the Douglasses of olden times put together did by their arms.—A cross, erroneously called Percy's Cross, now stands on the spot in the battle-field of Otterburn, where the Earl of Douglas is supposed to have fallen.
