

BATTLE OF STIRLING BRIDGE.*

-A.D. 1297.

AMONG the famous victories obtained by Sir William Wallace, that of Stirling Bridge, on the 13th of September 1297, is one of the most splendid and remarkable. Edward I. was then in France, engaged in a war to subdue that kingdom, but he sent an express commission to John de Warren, Earl of Surrey and Sussex, and Hugh Cressingham, a military ecclesiastic, constituting the former Lieutenant in Scotland, and the latter High Treasurer, with full power to suppress what was termed the Scottish insurrec-

* Hemingford's History; Chronicle of Lanercost; Chalmers Caledonia; The Bruce and Wallace; Langtoft's Chronicle; History of Stirlingshire.

tion. An army of 50,000 foot and a considerable body of horse were employed for this purpose, commanded by the Earl of Surrey and Hugh Cressingham, who advanced in quest of Wallace, then engaged in besieging Dundee. Leaving the conduct of that siege to a chosen band of followers, Wallace, who had received timely notice of the formidable armament advancing to annihilate him, collected 10,000 men, and marched with the utmost speed to dispute with the English the passage of the Forth.

The bridge across the Forth at Stirling was then of timber, and was about half a mile above the old stone bridge. Some remains of the stone pillars which supported the wooden beams are still to be seen. It is described as having been so narrow, that only two persons could walk abreast along it, yet the English generals absurdly proposed to undergo the tedious operation of passing it with their numerous army. An officer named Sir Richard Lundin strenuously opposed this measure, and pointed out a ford at no great distance, where sixty men could have passed abreast, but no regard was paid to his suggestions, and the issue proved the headstrong folly of the leaders.

The Earl of Surrey was by no means anxious to encounter Wallace, and wished to avoid a general action. He was either superseded in the government of Scotland at the time by Brian Fitzallan, or expected to be so, and he was less zealous in the enterprises of the English to subjugate the country than he would have otherwise been. When the English came in sight of the Scottish army, the latter were encamped near Cambuskenneth Abbey, on the hill well known as the Abbey Crag, and both armies continued a short space in full view of each other separated by the river. Warren attempted by negotiation to induce Wallace to lay down his arms and submit. Two Dominican friars were employed for this purpose, but the answer of Wallace was sufficiently explicit and decisive.

“ We came not here,” he said to the friars, “ to negotiate ; we are resolved to fight, and were even your masters to come and attack us, we are ready to meet them at the point of the sword, and show them that our country is free.” This intimation, according to the ancient poem, entitled *The Bruce and Wallace*, was the result of a council which the Scottish hero held at Sheriffmuir, near Dunblane, with “ Sir John the Graham and Ramsay that was wicht.”

“ He said to them—‘ This is my purpose richt,
 Our mekill it is to proffer them battaill
 Upon a plaine field, bot we haif sum availl.’
 Sir John the Graham said—‘ We have undertayn,
 With less power, sic thing that weill is gayn.’
 Then Wallace said—‘ Where sic thing cummys of neid
 We suld thank God that makes us for to speid,
 But near the brig my purpose is to be,
 And work for them some subtle jeopardy.’
 Ramsay answered—‘ The brig we møy keep weill,
 Off way about Southron has little feill.’”

When the answer of Wallace to the proposals for negotiation was intimated to the English leaders, Cressingham exclaimed—“ Why do we waste the King’s treasure by protracting the war ? Let us fight as the best economy.” The English army, clamorous for the contest, were ordered to pass the river, and continued to cross by the bridge from the dawn till about eleven o’clock without any impediment being offered. It is said that Wallace had ordered the main beam of the bridge to be sawn so artfully that the removal of a single wedge could cause the downfall of the whole fabric ; and that he had stationed a man beneath it in a basket in such a manner as, without any danger to himself, he could execute the design when the signal was given, which was the sound of a trumpet from the Scottish

army. This, however, is generally admitted to be a mere tradition, either invented by Boece, or originating from some accident which occurred.

When about the half of the English had crossed the Forth the Scots advanced to the attack, having previously sent a strong detachment to stop the passage at the ford mentioned by Sir Richard Lundin, if it should be attempted; Sir Marmaduke Twenge, a gallant knight belonging to the North Riding of Yorkshire, assisted Cressingham in leading the van, and the royal standard of England was displayed amid the cry of "For God and St George!" The banner of the Earl of Surrey was surrounded by his numerous vassals. When nearly the half of the English had cleared the bridge, an attempt was made to dislodge the Scots from their position near the Abbey Crag, and Sir Marmaduke Twenge impatiently charged them up hill with a body of heavy armed cavalry; but the Scots drove their assailants headlong with their long spears, and succeeded in cutting off all communication between the bridge and the van of the English army. In the meantime, an incessant discharge of arrows and missiles was kept up by the Scots, who now pressed so hard upon the English that many upon the bridge, in attempting to return, fell into the river and were drowned.

The English army were soon put into irretrievable confusion by the bold and masterly charges of the Scots led by their heroic leader. Numbers were either borne down by the victors or driven into the Forth. The Earl of Surrey observed the destruction of the flower of his army from the opposite side of the river with the utmost anxiety, and unable to render any assistance. The Earl of Lennox and the Stewards of Scotland were seen approaching with a body of horse, and they assisted their countrymen in pursuing and killing those who were attempting to save themselves. The English were at last entirely routed, and five

thousand of them were slain or drowned in the Forth. The nephew of Sir Marmaduke Twenge, a gentleman generally beloved by the English soldiers, was among the slain, and that gallant knight with difficulty cut his way to the bridge and escaped. Being advised by some of his attendants to throw himself into the river, he exclaimed, "It shall never be said of me that I voluntarily drowned myself. God forbid that such a dishonour should fall upon me or any Englishman." He set spurs to his horse, and rushed into the thickest of the battle, killing many of his opponents, and was fast making his way to the bridge when his nephew, severely wounded, called to him to save him, but there was no time for delay.

Cressingham, a man odious to the Scots, was amongst the slain, and the victors disgraced themselves by their treatment of his body. They flayed off the skin, and cut it in pieces. The Earl of Surrey fled precipitately to Berwick, and this victory placed the whole country in the hands of the Scots. Surrey took the precaution to burn the bridge, but the victors crossed the river at the ford pointed out to Cressingham by Lundin, and harassed him in his flight. The historians of those times have been careful to inform us, that when he arrived at Berwick his horse was so fatigued as to be unable to eat. The loss of the Scots was inconsiderable, and the only person of distinction who fell was Sir Andrew Murray of Bothwell. Wallace was recognised by his countrymen as their General and Protector. It is said that after the battle he went with sundry of his friends into the Castle of Stirling.

The scene of the battle appears to have been about the place now called Corntown, in a plain north of the river, and opposite the Castle of Stirling. The burgesses of the town and the tenants of the abbey lands of Cambuskenneth were particularly active on this occasion, and it certainly was the most complete victory which Wallace ever

gained in a regularly fought field; yet such was his modesty, that he allowed the name of his friend Sir Andrew Murray to stand before his own as the leader of the Scottish army. A writer mentions that “the ancient seal of the town of Stirling seems to commemorate this important victory. We may see on the obverse of it the wooden bridge, on which stands a crucifix; on the south of the bridge may be seen soldiers with their bows—the characteristic weapons of the English, who are attempting to pass; on the northern side are soldiers with spears, the national weapon of the Scots, who defend the passage.” An inscription in Latin was upon the bridge, which Bellenden has strangely translated:—

“ I am free to march, as passengers may ken—
To Scottis, to Britons, and to Englishmen.”
