

THE SIEGE OF PERTH.*

A. D. 1310.

ROBERT BRUCE, having established his authority in Scotland, resolved to invade England, and he entered the Bishopric of Durham, which he ravaged without mercy. A distinguished writer observes, that the conduct of Bruce was marked “with that cruelty and licentiousness which disgrace the character of a brave man;” but it ought to be recollected, that this distinguished Scottish monarch was probably induced to commit severities on account of the state of the kingdom in the year 1310, for we are assured by Fordun that there was then so great a famine in Scotland, as to cause many persons to feed on horse-flesh. Bruce had other reasons to induce him in a fierce age to satiate his revenge, and he led back his army enriched with spoils.

Bruce at his return laid siege to Perth, then commanded by William Oliphant, and it is stated that the Earl of

* Fordun's *Scotichronicon*; Sir David Dalrymple's *Annals of Scotland*; *Traditions of Perth*

Strathearn was also with the English garrison. A contemporary poet describes the "Fair City" as appearing, in the eyes of a French gentleman who was with Bruce, little better than a "wretched hamlet," but this account is inconsistent with the dangers with which Bruce had to contend before he took the town. The garrison scornfully rejected the conditions offered by Bruce, and after having invested the place six weeks he raised the siege. But the King had no intention to abandon it. This was simply a *ruse*, to provide himself with suitable implements for scaling the walls, and he returned in a few days with ladders and a chosen body of infantry. The night appointed for the assault was dark, and favoured his enterprise. Bruce himself carried a scaling ladder, and was the first to enter the ditch which surrounded the city from the Tay. In passing this ditch it is stated that he stood in water to his throat. The French gentleman already mentioned, when he saw Bruce thus gallantly enter the ditch, exclaimed—"What shall we say of our French lords who spend their days in good cheer and jollity, while so worthy a knight hazards his life to win a miserable hamlet?" He instantly threw himself into the water, followed the heroic Bruce, and it is supposed first entered the town, the King being the second who took the wall. The city was taken, plundered, and burnt, and the walls levelled. The son of the Earl of Strathearn fought under the banners of Bruce, and made his father a prisoner.

The "Fair City" soon recovered from this misfortune. About two years afterwards the North Inch was the scene of a curious single combat. An Englishman named Hugh Harding challenged a Scotsman called William de Seintlowe for wearing his coat armorial, which was three yellow or gold greyhounds with blue collars on a red field. They fought at Perth to decide the controversy, in presence of Robert Bruce. Harding was the victor, and the

King, sitting in a chair of state, adjudged to him the coat armorial.
