

SIEGE OF LOCHLEVEN CASTLE.*

A.D. 1335.

THE Castle of Lochleven, situated on an island in the lake of that name, and said to have been the seat of Congal, son of Dongart, King of the Picts, is celebrated in Scottish history not only as the prison of Queen Mary, but as the scene of several remarkable transactions. Here Alexander III. resided after returning from an interview with his father-in-law, Henry III. of England, and here for centuries the Douglasses of Lochleven resided in baronial splendour, as lords of the beautiful and spacious lake, and keepers of this state prison. The ruins of this ancient castle are still of great interest, though the little island is now tenantless, and a few trees are the only ornaments of a pile, the appearance of which, with all its historical associations, reminds the spectator of the beautiful lines of Michael Bruce—

“ No more its arches echo to the noise
 Of joy and festive mirth. No more the glance
 Of blazing taper thro’ its windows beams,
 And quivers on the undulating wave :
 But naked stand the melancholy walls,
 Lash’d by the wintery tempests cold and bleak,
 That whistle mournful thro’ the empty halls,
 And piecemeal crumble down the towers to dust.
 Equal in age, and sharers of its fate,
 A row of moss-grown trees around it stand ;
 Scarce here and there, upon their blasted tops,
 A shrivelled leaf distinguishes the year.”

* Fordun’s Scotichronicon ; Annals of Scotland ; Tytler’s History of Scotland.

In the year 1335, during the wars of the English and the adherents of Baliol, Alan de Vipont held the Castle of Lochleven against the latter for Robert Bruce. Sir John de Strivelin, probably the same Sir John de Strivelin who had been made a prisoner at the battle of Halidown, besieged the island castle, which from its situation was of very difficult access to an armed force. A fortress was erected in the churchyard of Kinross, and from this point frequent boat attacks were made, in all of which the besiegers were repulsed. It is traditionally said, though little credit is to be attached to the statement, that at the lower end of the lake, where the river Leven issues from it, a strong and lofty bulwark, the remains of which are alleged to be still visible, was erected, with the design of laying the island under water, by stopping the discharge of the lake, and thus compelling the garrison to surrender. To the dismay of the garrison the waters gradually rose, and threatened to sap the foundations of their stronghold, when one night four of the soldiers approached the bulwark in silence, and after considerable labour succeeded in piercing it. The sudden discharge of the accumulated waters swept away their enemies encamped on that side, and the mighty torrent carried their bodies to its embouchure at the town of Leven on the Frith of Forth.

The more probable result of the enterprise was the bravery of the besieged in successfully attacking the fortress erected in the churchyard of Kinross, while Sir John Strivelin was absent at Dunfermline, attending the celebration of the festival of St Margaret on the 19th of June. Landing secretly on the shore they carried the attack, put part of the English garrison to the sword, and raised the siege. Vipont then returned to the castle, with his boats laden with various instruments of war, besides a considerable booty and many prisoners. Fordun, according to the superstition of the times, ascribes the success of the Scots

to the interposition of St Servanus or St Serf, the tutelary saint of that district and of the lake, who, it seems, chastised the impiety of Strivelin and his soldiers for erecting a fort on consecrated ground ; yet he should have considered that it was equally the duty of St Margaret to have protected the English, who had proceeded to Dunfermline to pray at her shrine. When Strivelin returned, he passionately swore that he would never desist from the enterprise until he had razed the castle, and put the garrison to the sword ; but, in defiance of his resolution, he was compelled to relinquish it, and to retire from the island fortress, the garrison of which, emboldened by their success, set at nought all his attempts to compel them to surrender.
