

## BATTLE OF BRECHIN.\*

A.D. 1451.

THE old episcopal city of Brechin in Forfarshire was the scene of a bloody conflict, on the 18th of May 1451, between the respective forces of the Earls of Crawford and Huntly, but it ought to be observed that the precise year is variously stated, though that now given is preferred—the years 1452 and 1453 being also assigned as the periods of the conflict. King James II. had recently assassinated the Earl of Douglas with his own hand in the Castle of Stirling, to revenge the alleged injuries and treason committed by that nobleman and his powerful family and connections. He promoted to the office of lieutenant-general of the kingdom Alexander Earl of Huntly, who advanced at the head of a considerable force to oppose Alexander, third Earl of Crawford, surnamed *the Tiger* and *Earl Beardie*, who was in arms to revenge the death of the Earl of Douglas.

The contending parties met on a level muir at the north-east boundary of the parish of Brechin, on the road leading to the North Water Bridge. The forces of Huntly far outnumbered those of Crawford, yet the struggle for a long time proved doubtful, and might have terminated in a different manner, if, during the warmest part of the struggle, a gentleman named Colossie, who is mentioned as the proprietor of an estate called Bonnymoon, had not left Crawford's army, and gone over to Huntly's forces. He com-

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\* Tytler's History of Scotland; Douglas' Peerage; Drummond of Hawthornden's History; Memorie of the Somervilles; Sir James Balfour's Annals of Scotland; Abercromby's Martial Achievements of the Scottish Nation.

manded the left wing of the Angus bill-men, and had been irritated in a conversation held with the Earl of Crawford during the previous evening. This defection was fatal to that nobleman. His troops, dismayed at such an unexpected calamity, and regardless of the furious and desperate efforts made by him to restore their courage, took to flight in every direction. The Earl's brother, and nearly sixty gentlemen of rank, bearing coat-armour, besides numbers of persons of inferior rank, were slain.

On Huntly's side the loss did not exceed five barons and a small number of yeomen, but he had to lament the loss of two sons. The Earl of Crawford fled with Sir John Lindsay, one of his brothers, to the house of Finhaven, where it is said he uttered the following exclamations—“That he would be content to remain seven years in hell to have in so timely a season done the King that service which the Earl of Huntly had performed, and carry that applause and reward he would receive from him.” If these expressions are true, they must be held as grossly profane, but at the same time they prove that Crawford was no rebel in his heart, and that he acted in consequence of engagements with which he considered his honour involved. A different version of this incident, however, is related on the authority of Drummond of Hawthornden. “During the confusion and flight of Crawford's army,” says Mr Tytler, “a yeoman of the opposite side, riding eagerly in pursuit, became involved in the crowd, and, fearful of discovery, allowed himself to be hurried along to Finhaven Castle, to which the discomfited Earl retreated. Here, amid the tumult and riot consequent upon a defeat, the yeoman is said to have overheard with horror the torrent of abuse and blasphemy which burst from the lips of the bearded savage, who, calling for a cup of wine on alighting from his horse, and cursing in the bitterness of his heart the traitor who had betrayed him, declared that he would

willingly take seven years roasting in hell to have the honour of such a victory as had that day fallen to Huntly."

The Earl of Crawford, infuriated at the conduct of Huntly in plundering the fertile county of Moray, and razing to the ground all that part of the town of Elgin which was his property, attacked and *harried* the estates of those to whose "refusal to join his banner he ascribed his defeat, expelling them from their towers and fortalices, giving the empty habitations to the flames, and carrying themselves and their families into captivity." From this statement it appears that he was little weakened by his loss at Brechin. This battle was not immediately decisive in favour of the King, though it proved so in its consequences. The Earl of Crawford was forfeited, but he embraced an opportunity shortly afterwards, when James II. passed through the county of Forfar, to appear before the King meanly dressed; and in a posture of the deepest humility he made a long speech, during which the tears flowed abundantly, acknowledging his offences. He was pardoned, and entertained James most magnificently at his castle of Finhaven. The Earl became a loyal subject, but he did not long survive his pardon. Six months afterwards he was carried off by a fever in 1454, and was buried with his ancestors in the church of the Grey Friars at Dundee.

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