

THE BATTLE OF SAUCHIEBURN.*

A. D. 1488.

JAMES III. was a monarch whose untimely fate marks in a peculiar manner the characteristic features of the age in which he lived. The Scottish nobles, fierce and powerful, utterly disregarded the authority of their sovereign, and con-

* History of Stirlingshire; Pinkerton's History of Scotland; Lindsay of Pitscottie's History; Statistical Account of Scotland.

sidered the reigning prince as a mere machine, with whom the administration of the government ostensibly rested, but who depended on them for co-operation and support. James, on the contrary, to adopt the quaint language of Drummond of Hawthornden, "conceived that noblemen, like the coin, were of his predecessors' making, and why he might not put his stamp upon the same metal, so when those old metals were defaced, he might not refound them, and give them a new print, he could not well conceive." On many points the Scottish nobility differed from their sovereigns, but none exasperated them more than additions to their ancient order, and the elevation of persons whom they considered obscure minions, to a participation of their rank and privileges. A series of intestine broils ensued, for the most part caused by the imprudent conduct of James, which ended in the nobles appearing in arms against their sovereign near a spot illustrious in the annals of Scottish History—where their ancestors boldly encountered the English host—where Bruce, the great restorer of the monarchy, obtained his signal victory. Near this spot—the well-known field of Bannockburn—the indignant nobles of Scotland were successful with less bloodshed than when Bruce rode triumphant over the tented field won by his skill and the valour of his warriors.

The disastrous termination of the reign of James III. forms the subject of the present narrative. After successive misfortunes, collisions, and fruitless negotiations, the insurgent nobility took the field, having obtained possession of the King's eldest son, afterwards James IV., by the treachery of Shaw of Sauchie, the governor of Stirling Castle, to whose custody the young prince had been committed by James, with strict orders that no one of the disaffected should be allowed to approach him, and that he was on no account to be suffered to go out of the fortress. Ignorant of Shaw's conduct, the King saw no other alternative than

to reduce his refractory nobles to submission, and summoned the Highland chiefs to attend his standard. The place of rendezvous is not mentioned, but it was probably at or near Stirling, whither the King, then at the Castle of Edinburgh, intended to proceed, and join those chiefs who were advancing from the north with their followers. The insurgents were actively employed in assembling their forces in the same direction, and indeed all they wanted was to draw the King into the field.

The King arrived at Stirling by the way of Blackness, on the southern shores of the Forth, and when he appeared before the Castle he was astonished to find that he was not only refused admittance to his own royal residence, but that the gates were shut, and that the few guns it contained were pointed against him. He inquired for his son, and the governor at first declared that the young prince could not be seen at that time; but he soon learned that he was with the insurgents, and when he upbraided Shaw for his perfidy, the latter pretended that the prince had been carried off by the rebels against his inclination. The King perceived the treachery. "Fie, traitor!" he said, "thou hast deceived me; but if I live I shall be revenged, and reward thee as thou deservest."

In this extremity, and, according to some writers, after crossing and recrossing the Forth, and making another attempt to gain admittance into the Castle, James lay that night in the town of Stirling, where he was speedily joined by all his army. While deliberating on the measures to be adopted, he received intelligence that the insurgents were then at Falkirk, and were advancing with their forces to the Torwood, at that time a forest of considerable extent. The King was now in a peculiar situation. The Castle of Stirling was held out against him, the only place in which he would have been secure, and the insurgent army could easily intercept him in any attempt to retreat to Edin-

burgh. The celebrated Sir Andrew Wood, his admiral, had indeed sailed up the Forth as far as Alloa, and he would have proceeded farther up the river if there had been sufficient depth of water for his vessels. James could have easily embarked on board the admiral's ship, but as this might have been interpreted by the insurgents as the result of timidity, it would have increased their boldness, and done material injury to the royal cause. Situated as the King was, he had no other alternative than either to betake himself and followers to the admiral's fleet, or to decide the contest by a battle, and after calling a council of the chiefs who followed his standard, it was resolved to hazard the latter.

It was in the month of June, and the forests of Stirlingshire were clothed with their summer foliage, when this fatal contest was decided. Different indeed were the motives which stimulated this array of the Scottish nobles from those by which their gallant ancestors were actuated under the banners of Bruce. The insurgents, who soon understood the intentions of the King, also prepared for battle, and passed the Carron, which falls into the Forth near Falkirk. Famous as the scene of many a strife in the olden time—as the alleged locality where Oscar, the son of Ossian, signalized himself as a hero, and where his ancient warriors contended with the heroes of the streams of Caros, the Carron now rolls along no longer disturbed by the din of arms, and coloured by the blood of the dying and the dead.

The insurgent nobles had encamped at the bridge over the Carron, near the Torwood, when the King led his army against them, and encamped at a small brook named Sauchieburn, a mile south from the famous field of Bannockburn. According to Lindsay of Pitscottie, on the night before the battle another attempt was made to effect a negotiation, which was unsuccessful. The contending armies met on a tract of land now designated Little Canglar, on the east

side of Sauchieburn. The forces of the insurgents were greatly superior to those of the King. They consisted chiefly of hardy Borderers inured to war, well armed and well disciplined, and were most unequally opposed by the Lowlanders. The exact number of the insurgent army is not ascertained. The royal army, it is said by some writers, consisted of 30,000 men, that of the insurgents 180,000 ; but there can be no doubt that these numbers are greatly exaggerated, and it is generally admitted that the royal forces were very inferior in every respect.

James appeared in complete armour on horseback at the head of his army, which he divided into three lines. The first was commanded by the Earl of Menteith, Lords Erskine, Gray, Ruthven, Graham, and Maxwell, and consisted chiefly of Highlanders armed with swords and bows ; the second line was headed by the Earl of Glencairn, and consisted also of Highlanders and retainers from the western counties ; the third, in which was the greatest strength of the army, was commanded by Lords Boyd and Lindsay ; and the main body, in which was the King, was led by the Earl of Crawford, and consisted of men from Fife, Strathearn, the district of Stormont, and Forfarshire.

The insurgents also divided their forces into three lines, and they had the advantage of displaying a strong array of mounted troopers. The first line was composed of men from East Lothian and Berwickshire, led by Lord Home and the Baron of Hailes ; the second consisted of men from Galloway and the Borders ; and the third, under the nominal command of the Duke of Rothsay, though the prince was completely under the control of the insurgent noblemen who belonged to this division, was composed of men from the midland Lowland counties.

The insurgents advanced with great boldness, presuming too well on the King's want of military experience. James felt considerable alarm when he saw them approaching with

the royal banner displayed, and his own son at their head. A prediction which had formerly preyed upon his mind now recurred, and it is more than probable influenced his subsequent conduct. It had been intimated in a mysterious manner, that he would be put down and destroyed by one of his own kindred. This announcement, which, considering the times, any politician might have made, was deemed a prophecy of the most ominous nature, and filled the unhappy monarch with despair.

The leaders of the royal army, desirous of the King's safety, and afraid that his timidity might dispirit the soldiers, wished to remove him from the lines, but they were interrupted in their arrangements by the commencement of the action. A dense shower of arrows from the men of West Lothian, and a keen attack by the Homes and Hepburns, announced the opening of the contest. They were, however, successfully resisted by the first line of the royal army, and beaten back with considerable loss; but they were instantly supported by the Annandale and other Border moss-troopers, who with loud shouts compelled the King's first and second lines to retire to the third. This advantage was decisive, though it is not accurately known how long the battle continued, or how many fell. Victory declared for the insurgents, and the royal army fled in all directions. Glencairn, and other persons of distinction, who acted as leaders of the royal forces, were slain, and many were wounded. Such was the result of the disaster at Sauchieburn, fought on the 11th of June 1488.

The King, whose courage had never been remarkable, put spurs to his steed and fled. It was his object to ride across the Carse of Stirling to Alloa, where Admiral Wood's fleet lay at anchor, the distance being only a few miles from the field of battle. As he was passing the rivulet of Bannockburn near the village of Milltown, about a mile eastward of the scene of contest, a woman happened to be

filling a pitcher with water from the stream. Alarmed at seeing a man in armour, and riding furiously as if towards her, she threw down the pitcher and fled for safety. The noise startled the horse, and the excited steed, leaping over the Bannockburn at one spring, threw his rider. The King was so stunned and bruised by the weight of his armour that he fainted, and seemed to all appearance dead. This accident happened near a mill, the occupants of which, consisting of the miller and his wife, ran to the assistance of the unfortunate horseman. Ignorant of his rank, they carried him into their house, laid him on a couch in a corner of their apartment, and covered him with a cloth to conceal him from any pursuer. Having administered to him the remedies they possessed, the King revived, and called for a priest to hear his confession. The rustics inquired the name and quality of their guest, and James incautiously said, "I was your King this morning." The miller's wife, overcome with astonishment, wrung her hands, and hastily ran to the door in search of a priest as the King desired.

It happened that at the very moment the miller's wife came out of the house some of the insurgents passed, who were following the route of the King. One of these persons was a priest named Borthwick, connected with Lord Gray's retainers, and the pursuers, having discovered the object of their search, failed not to improve the opportunity. One of them exclaimed to the woman—"Here, I am a priest, lead me to the King." He was accordingly admitted, and kneeling at the side of James heard his confession. He then asked the King if he thought he would recover. "I might," replied the unfortunate monarch, "if I had the attendance of a physician, but give me absolution and the sacrament."—"That I shall readily do," said the villain, and pulling out a dagger, he inflicted several mortal wounds on the King, who instantly expired. The perpetrator of this atrocious act was never discovered.

Some of the King's forces retreated towards the Torwood, and others took refuge in the town of Stirling. The insurgents retired to Linlithgow, after resting all the night succeeding the battle on the field. The fate of James was not then known, but in a short time rumours were soon spread over the country of the assassination, aggravated by an additional report that the Duke of Rothsay was the murderer; but it was some days before the young prince, now James IV., received certain information of his father's fate, and he heard it with the deepest anguish. Still some asserted that the King was alive, and a person who came to Linlithgow informed the insurgents that Admiral Wood was still traversing the Forth, and it was believed that the King had reached the fleet in safety. They immediately proceeded to Leith, whence a message was sent from the Duke of Rothsay to Wood, desiring to know if the King was on board any of his vessels. The Admiral solemnly declared that he was not, and gave them permission to search his ships. A second message was sent, desiring an interview, but the Admiral refused to go on shore without hostages for his safety. Lords Seton and Fleming were the persons sent as hostages, and were committed by the Admiral to the custody of his brother, while he proceeded to Leith, and presented himself before the prince. Mistaking the Admiral at first, from his noble appearance and striking resemblance, for the King, Rothsay exclaimed, with tears, "Sir, are you my father?" "I am not your father," replied the Admiral, "but I was your father's faithful servant, and an enemy to those who have occasioned his downfall." Some of the insurgent leaders, who were beginning to tremble for their own safety, asked Wood if he knew any thing of the King, or where he was, to which he replied that he knew not. They then inquired who the persons were who went on board his vessels in boats opposite Alloa? "I and my brother," replied the Admiral,

“ who were ready to have risked our lives in defence of the King.” They still asked if he really was not in any one of his vessels, and the Admiral boldly declared—“ He is not ; but would to God he were, for he would be in safety. I would defend and keep him from those vile traitors who have cruelly murdered him, and I hope to see the day when they will be rewarded as they deserve.” As these sentiments were by no means agreeable to those who were present, it is probable that Admiral Wood never would have returned to his fleet if there had been no hostages for his safety : and indeed his brother had already become impatient about his absence, which was longer than was expected, and threatened to hang Lords Seton and Fleming without ceremony, as they testified at their return, when fortunately the Admiral made his appearance.

At last the body of the unfortunate King was discovered, and carried to Stirling Castle, where it lay till it was interred in the Abbey of Cambuskenneth beside the body of his queen. The spot is still traditionally shown, but there is no memorial. So sincerely did James IV. repent of his proceedings against his father, that the keenest remorse long afterwards preyed upon his mind. “ Residing for some time,” says a writer, “ in the Castle of Stirling, the priests in the Chapel-Royal deplored in his presence, and even in their prayers, the death of their founder ; and the solemnity of religion increased the mental gloom of his son, who resolved with amiable superstition to wear constantly in penance an iron girdle, the weight of which he increased with his years. The Roman Pontiff spared the youth and innocence of James, but darted the thunder of his Vatican at the rebellious barons whose arms had been pointed against their sovereign.”

The house in which James III. was murdered is still in existence, and is called *Beaton's Mill*, probably after the

person who then possessed it. The author of the Picture of Scotland informs us that "he had the curiosity to visit it, and to inquire into the traditionary account of the circumstances above related, as preserved by the people of the place, which he was surprised to hear tallied in every particular with the historical narrative. He was even shown the particular corner in which the King was slain. The house has been somewhat modernized, and converted from a mill into a dwelling-house. The lower part of the walls, however, are to about a man's height unaltered, and impressed with the appearance of great antiquity. A corner stone of the modern part of the fabric bears date 1667. The house is divided into two *ends*, with separate doors accommodating two families, and is thatched. It stands about fifty yards east of the road from Glasgow to Stirling, in the close neighbourhood of the new mill, which had been substituted when it was converted into a dwelling-house."
