

THE ROUT OF SOLWAY.*

A.D. 1542.

AT the head of the navigable arm of the sea which extends eastward from the Irish Sea, and forms the boundary

* Chalmers' Caledonia; Pinkerton's History of Scotland; Tytler's History of Scotland; Pitcairn's Criminal Trials; Ridpath's Border History; Lodge's Illustrations; Lindsay of Pitscottie's History.

between England and Scotland for upwards of fifty miles, called the Solway Frith, is the extensive morass near the river Esk called the Solway Moss—a district memorable in Scottish history for a defeat, or rather a rout, which caused the death of King James V., on the 23d of November 1542. It had long been the wish of the supporters of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland to involve the King in a war with his uncle Henry VIII., to prevent him from embracing the measures of the English monarch in opposition to the Pope. At length James ordered an army of 30,000 men to assemble on the Boroughmuir near Edinburgh, to oppose the Duke of Norfolk, who had entered Scotland at the head of an equal number of men, and had committed to the flames the towns of Roxburgh and Kelso, and about twenty villages. Ignorant that Norfolk had been compelled, by the want of provisions and the lateness of the season, to lead his army back to Berwick and dismiss his troops, James marched to Fala, near the western extremity of the Lammermuir Hills, and about twenty miles on the march towards Kelso, when the tidings arrived that the English commander had withdrawn his forces. The Scottish army halted at Fala, and partly from disaffection, and partly from the recollection of Flodden, the nobility declared that they would only act on the defensive, and that they would not retaliate the invasion. They also alleged the rigour of the season and scarcity of provisions, and the honour already acquired by the retreat of such a formidable force of his enemies at the rumour of the King's approach, in addition to which they pretended an affection or anxiety for the King's person, who had at this time no children alive.

James was obliged to submit to this unanimous refusal of his nobility to follow him. He had no influence over the army, for the soldiers considered themselves as only bound to obey their chieftains, and, connected by the firm-

est ties of tenure, obedience, and protection, to their several leaders, regarded the monarch as the nominal chief commander. James had irritated the most powerful of the nobility, by adopting several measures calculated to lessen their influence and mortify their pride. Above all, he had shown an inordinate affection for favourites, and particularly for one Oliver Sinclair, a gentleman of ancient family, upon whom he had conferred the most marked distinctions and honours. It is said that the Scottish nobles intended to react the proceedings at Lauder in the reign of James III., if the King had not dismissed the army when they refused to march into England, and it is probable that James also suspected a repetition of the scenes alluded to in the reign of his grandfather.

Mortified, irritated, and disappointed, the King returned to Edinburgh, and his anguish of mind was such, that to allay it his council proposed to levy 10,000 men, and retaliate, by an invasion of the western marches, the injuries inflicted by Norfolk. Lord Maxwell was appointed to the command, a nobleman firmly attached to the King, but with him were also associated the Earls of Cassillis, Glencairn, and other noblemen and gentlemen of the south and west of Scotland, who were well known to be favourable to the English interest and to the cause of the Reformation. The soldiers were called together in the most secret manner, and the King sent a number of his own domestics to join in the enterprise, while Cardinal Beaton and the Earl of Arran employed themselves in raising men in the usual public mode, to conceal the project as much as possible, and orders were issued to those soldiers to march towards the eastern Borders, probably in the direction of Berwick.

With the exception of the leaders, scarcely a man of the army destined for the invasion of England by the western marches was acquainted with the real design of the

enterprise, the success of which was most promising, as the English were totally unprepared to meet such a force. The army advanced to the Solway Moss, and the King followed his troops to the Castle of Caerlaverock, where he resolved to await the issue. When the soldiers entered England and approached the river Esk, a halt was called, and Oliver Sinclair, the King's favourite, was elevated on shields to read the royal commission, in which he was most imprudently nominated commander-in-chief. A general murmur and breach of all military order instantly ensued; the nobility would not recognise him as their leader, and the soldiers would not obey one whom their chieftains despised. Uproar and tumult now prevailed, loud threats and insulting expressions were every where uttered, and if James had appeared in person his reception would have been equally humiliating.

The Scottish nobility resolved not to act even on the defensive—a line of conduct which they thought most effectual to punish the imprudence of their sovereign. Without offering any violence to Sinclair they proceeded no farther, and were preparing to retrace their steps when a party of English cavalry, in number between three and four hundred, commanded by Sir Thomas Dacre and Sir John Musgrave, appeared in sight, drawn up in good order upon a neighbouring eminence to watch the motions of the Scottish leaders. Perceiving the tumult and disorder which prevailed, and being informed of the cause by some deserters, this handful of cavalry made a brisk attack on the ten thousand Scots, who made not the slightest attempt to defend themselves, and became an easy prey to the English. They could have taken as many prisoners as they pleased, but they contented themselves with one thousand, among whom were the Earls of Cassillis and Glencairn, Lords Sommerville, Maxwell, Gray, Oliphant, and Fleming, and other persons of distinction, who preferred a

captivity in England to the risk of their sovereign's indignation.

James heard of this defeat with the utmost anguish. Ascribing it to the perfidy of his nobles, and provoked by this new insult, which encouraged the insolence of his subjects, and exposed him to the derision of his enemies, he left Caerlaverock in private, and proceeded first to Holyrood House, and then to his palace of Falkland, where he resigned himself to despair. It is said his distress was farther increased by hearing of the murder of an English herald at Dunbar by two English fugitives named William Leech and John Priestman. A burning fever preyed upon his exhausted frame, and he died at Falkland nineteen days afterwards, broken-hearted and miserable, leaving as the heir of his kingdom his daughter Mary, then only a week old. The birth of that princess appeared to aggravate his sufferings, and when it was announced to him, he answered the messenger in the well known words—"It came with a girl, and it will go with a girl"—referring to the succession to the crown. He was buried in the royal vault at Holyrood House, and Cardinal Beaton presided at his funeral obsequies.

The English writers in the list of the Scottish prisoners taken at the Solway Rout designate Oliver Sinclair, the great cause of it, the *King's minion*. He is designated of *Pitcairns*, and after the King's death he was called to account for his conduct—the common fate of all favourites. In 1543 he found Gilbert Earl of Cassillis his security, "whenever he shall be required, on premonition of fifteen days, to underly the law for certain crimes imputed to him." Some prosecutions also followed; for two individuals, Duncan May and William Smith, alias Chesman, were obliged to find security to appear when called upon, "for consulting with and frequently giving false information to the late King James V. for the purpose of deceiving him,

thereby occasioning vehement suspicions between him and his earls, barons, and lieges, and for causing in him great apprehension and fear for his slaughter and destruction." The noblemen taken prisoners were soon afterwards set at liberty, but upwards of one hundred and fifty gentlemen were compelled to pay for their freedom, and their ransom was settled by the Commissioners appointed to negotiate a peace.

It ought to be noticed, that though the English force which discomfited the Scotch army at Solway Moss is generally stated as amounting to only four or five hundred men, it appears that it actually numbered fourteen hundred, including horse and foot. The whole affair was bloodless on both sides, no resistance being offered, and no violence committed by the English.
