

THE SIEGE OF THE CASTLE OF EDINBURGH.*

A.D. 1573.

IN the second year of the regency of the Earl of Morton, the fourth and last of the regents of Scotland who filled that dangerous office in the brief space of five years after the deposition of Queen Mary, the Castle of Edinburgh was held by Sir William Kirkaldy of Grange, one of the bravest soldiers of his time, in the interest of the Queen, then a prisoner in England. The Regent Morton resolved to obtain possession of this important fortress, and, after various fruitless negotiations, summoned Kirkaldy to surrender.

The Castle of Edinburgh, at that period, presented a very different appearance from its modern state. In a bird's-eye view of the city, published in 1575,† the walls of the Castle are delineated as almost circular, and completely encompassing the stupendous rock on which the fortress is built.

* *Scotia Rediviva*; *Pitcairn's Criminal Trials*; *Robertson's History of Scotland*; *Chambers' Biographical Dictionary of Illustrious Scotsmen*; *Maitland's History*; *Arnot's History of Edinburgh*; *Birrell's Diary*; *Churchyard's Poems*; *Chalmers' Life of Queen Mary*; *Dalyell's Scottish Poems of the Sixteenth Century*; *Journal of the Siege of the Castle of Edinburgh in 1573.*

† *Theatre des Cités du Monde.*

Towers are represented as strengthening, at intervals, the walls; on the highest part of the rock is a series of buildings, almost square, part of which forms the present range, in which are Queen Mary's apartments, the rooms for the Regalia, and other conveniences; and near the half-moon battery stood a tall pile, inhabited by the soldiers of the garrison. The entrance to the fortress was much the same as at present, though destitute of the batteries and guard-houses; and a lofty wall opposed itself to the city. An Italian artist represents the castle very nearly in the same manner in 1580.

Kirkaldy of Grange had been appointed governor of the castle by the Regent Moray, when he was opposed to the supporters of Queen Mary; but after the assassination of that nobleman at Linlithgow, he declared in favour of the Queen's party, and kept possession of the fortress, in defiance of the succeeding regents, Lennox, Mar, and Morton, in the hope of receiving aid from France, and especially from the celebrated Duke of Alva. He had been abandoned by all his associates, except Lord Home, the Bishop of Dunkeld, Maitland of Lethington, and his own brother; yet, although the whole of Scotland had submitted to the authority of Morton, in the name of James VI. he resolved to hold out, and to wait the arrival of the promised succours. To the summons of Morton to surrender, Kirkaldy answered in language of bold and obstinate defiance, reminding the regent of sundry events in his past life which could not fail to exasperate him, and exhorting him to return to his allegiance as a subject of the Queen. John Knox, who knew Kirkaldy when he was one of the intrepid defenders of the Reformation, and still loved him, though he lamented what he considered his apostacy, sent him a message, characteristic of the political sagacity of that extraordinary man. "His soul is dear to me," said Knox, "and I would not willingly see it perish. Go, and tell him from me

that if he persists in his folly, neither that crag in which he miserably confides, nor the carnal wit of that man [Maitland] whom he counts a demi-god, shall save him; but he shall be dragged forth, and hanged in the face of the sun." Kirkaldy returned a contemptuous answer, dictated by Maitland; but he afterwards with tears, when Knox was in the grave, remembered this warning, which he had received nearly two years before.

In 1572, Kirkaldy had greatly exasperated the citizens against him by firing upon the town, and killing a number of the inhabitants, as well as of Morton's soldiers. Towards the end of that year, a truce had been agreed upon between him and the Regent till the first of January; and during the cessation of hostilities, the latter erected two bulwarks across the Lawnmarket to protect the city from the canons of the Castle. The day of the truce had no sooner expired, than Grange commenced a furious cannonade from the Castle. His artillery was chiefly directed against the Fishmarket, then recently erected in what is now called the Old Fishmarket Close; and the bullets, lighting among the numerous baskets of fish exposed for sale, scattered them about the streets, and, according to Arnot, beat some of them so high, that even the tops of the houses received them in their fall. This induced a number of persons to run into the streets; and the poor, thinking it a favourable opportunity of procuring a gratuitous supply of fish, ran to gather them, regardless of the danger to which they were exposed. While thus engaged in appropriating to themselves the scattered contents of numerous creels and baskets, a bullet fell among them, by which five were killed, and about twenty dangerously wounded. This accident increased the odium of the citizens against Kirkaldy, which was aggravated by his proceedings some days afterwards. On a stormy night he ordered his artillery to be directed against some houses, chiefly covered with thatch,

at the end of the West Port. The houses took fire, the boisterous wind spread the flames, yet Kirkaldy persisted in his cannonade, to prevent any persons assisting to extinguish them.

Morton, having formed a treaty with the Earls of Huntly, Argyle, the powerful family of Hamilton, and other leaders of the Queen's party, from the mutual benefits of which Kirkaldy was excluded, now solicited the assistance of Queen Elizabeth to reduce the Castle. The Regent was in want of everything requisite for a siege, but Kirkaldy was in no better condition for defence. He was amply supplied with powder and ammunition, but his provisions were limited, and the water of the garrison was liable to be stopped. This, in fact, had been partially done. At the foot of the perpendicular rock of the Castle, on the north side, are still the ruins of the *Well-House Tower*, in which there is a spring of excellent water, and which afforded, in ancient times, a supply for the garrison. The soldiers of Kirkaldy exerted themselves to defend this important well, and erected a bulwark to protect it; but the besiegers at length obtained possession of it, though not without several bloody skirmishes and considerable loss. In addition to this mortification, Kirkaldy was discouraged by the seizure of a considerable sum of money, being one year's rent of Queen Mary's dowry, remitted to him from France, and entrusted to the care of James Kirkaldy, his brother. Finding it impossible to approach near the Castle, as all access to it and to the city were vigilantly guarded, this gentleman landed at Blackness. The governor of that fortress had been in the interest of the Queen, but finding his party declining, he made his peace with Morton by surrendering Blackness, in which was Sir James Kirkaldy, with his treasure.

Sir William Drury, governor of Berwick, who had made a "raid" into Scotland in 1570, was ordered to march to the assistance of the Regent Morton at the head of 1200

men and a considerable train of artillery. It ought to be noticed that Sir William Drury had been sent from Berwick to Edinburgh, some weeks before the siege, on some feigned business. He was most imprudently allowed by Kirkaldy to enter the Castle as if from curiosity, and he saw the nature of its defences and the points of attack—which accounts for the skill exhibited by the besiegers in planting their batteries. Having joined the forces of the Regent Morton, the trenches were opened, and approaches were regularly carried on against the fortress on the 25th of April. On the 2d of May the batteries were completed, and five pieces of artillery placed on each—one battery on the Castle Hill, one in the Greyfriars churchyard, one at the West Port, and one beyond the North Loch. These batteries were designated after the names of their respective commanders—King's Mount, Drury's Mount, Lee's Mount, Carey's Mount, and Sutton's Mount.

Those batteries did such effectual execution against the Castle, that three towers were demolished on the second day after, as Birrell states, they "began to shoute." Kirkaldy, excited by despair, continued to defend himself with great bravery. He resisted the repeated attacks of the besiegers thirty-three days, and it is quaintly said of him, that "he would not give over, but shot at them continually both with great shot and small, so that there was a very great slaughter among the English cannoneers, sundries of them having their legs and arms torn from their bodies in the air by the violence of the great shot." The besiegers, nevertheless, continued to push their attacks with courage and determination, for Elizabeth, who felt that her influence in Scotland was insecure as long as the Castle remained in hostile hands, had resolved, as her secretary Walsingham expresses it, *to pull the garrison out by the ears.*

But the bravery of Kirkaldy was unavailing, and indeed

it was scarcely to be expected, that a governor and a garrison could withstand a commander who had been allowed to examine their defences. There was a fortification called the *Spur*, a building of great strength, and very imperfectly manned, taken by storm, with the loss of eight men killed, and twenty-three wounded. A tower, called *David's Tower*, probably after David I., whose gardens lay at the north base of the Castle rock, and which this tower overlooked, was completely demolished; trenches were raised upon the east side which prevented any ingress or egress from the fortress; the gates were choked up with rubbish; and, to add to the distress of the garrison, their provisions were not only nearly exhausted, but one of the wells had dried up, and the other was filled with the crumbling walls, so that their supply of water was stopped. Yet, even under these disastrous circumstances, the spirit of Kirkaldy was not subdued, and he would have fallen gloriously behind his last intrenchment rather than have yielded to his enemies, but his garrison were not animated by the same enthusiasm, and threatened to mutiny if he did not capitulate.

It was indeed impossible to attempt any farther resistance. The fortifications were destroyed, the walls battered down, and the sufferings which the garrison endured for want of water and other necessaries were great. A truce was in consequence demanded, and Kirkaldy requested a conference with Sir William Drury. He was let over the wall by ropes, along with Sir Robert Melville—a safe-conduct having been given, and held an interview with the English commander near the battery erected in the Lawnmarket. Drury, who was intimately acquainted with Kirkaldy, after extolling his bravery and his gallant defence, seriously advised him to surrender, as it was impossible for him to benefit by the foreign assistance he expected, on account of the whole coast being vigilantly

guarded. Kirkaldy readily acquiesced in Sir William Drury's statements, and offered to surrender on the conditions that their lives and fortunes would be secured—that Lord Home and Maitland of Lethington would be permitted to retire to England—and that he was to be allowed to accompany them, or to stay in Scotland, as he pleased—and, above all, that he and his friends were to be protected from the revenge of the insidious and arbitrary Regent.

These conditions were refused through the influence of Morton, who said that he could get Kirkaldy into his power without any stipulations. He was well aware of the state of the garrison from the report of two gentlemen, Colville of Cleish and his brother, whom he had sent to the Castle under the pretence of proposing an agreement, but in reality to ascertain the state of the fortress, and to excite the soldiers to mutiny, or to effect their escape, in which they were partially successful. Kirkaldy returned to the fortress with the intention of burying himself under its ruins; but the garrison refused to hazard a new assault, and in case of another attack by the besiegers, they even threatened to hang Maitland of Lethington over the walls, regarding him as the cause of their sufferings occasioned by the protracted defence.

Under these circumstances, nothing remained but an unconditional surrender, yet Kirkaldy, with all the enthusiasm of a Scotsman, could not endure the thought of delivering the fortress to an Englishman. He sent a private message to two gentlemen of Morton's troops, requesting them to appear with a party between the English battery and the Castle, and to them he surrendered the fortress, while he personally submitted to Drury, who had promised, in the name of Queen Elizabeth, that he would be favourably treated. Along with Kirkaldy were taken prisoners Lord Home and the gentlemen already mentioned—his brother,

Sir James Kirkaldy, Sir Robert Melville, Maitland of Lethington, some citizens of Edinburgh, and about one hundred and sixty soldiers. It is said that after the Castle was surrendered some of the English troops entered it by a breach on the east side, that they might give out that they had won the fortress, but this was an empty boast, as it was not under the command of the Regent's brother, who would not even allow them to enter in any considerable number. The Castle of Edinburgh thus capitulated on the 29th of May 1573; but so odious had the garrison rendered themselves to the citizens by the losses their obstinate defence had occasioned, that it was necessary to procure an escort of English soldiers to protect them from violence.

The promise given to Kirkaldy was shamefully violated. Three days after the capitulation he and his companions were made prisoners. Maitland of Lethington escaped public execution by dying suddenly at Leith, which is supposed to have been caused by poison, to "prevent his coming to the shambles with the rest." A different fate awaited the brave and generous Sir William Kirkaldy and some of his associates. They at first remained in the custody of Drury, who treated them with the utmost kindness till the pleasure of Elizabeth was known, whose prisoners they were. But the Regent Morton, who had from the first resolved to destroy them, insisted that they should suffer the punishment merited by their obstinacy, declaring that his person and authority were not secure so long as they were allowed to live, and Elizabeth, without regard to the promise of Drury, placed them in his power. Overwhelmed with shame and sorrow at such perfidy, Drury retired from the command of Berwick.

Morton confined Kirkaldy and his associates in separate prisons, and at last procured the consent of Elizabeth for the execution of the unfortunate governor and his brother. On the 3d of August 1573, Kirkaldy, his brother and two

citizens of Edinburgh named Mossman and Leckie, were hanged at the Cross of Edinburgh, and their heads were placed on the most prominent places of the Castle walls. Such was the ignominious end of one of the bravest of Scottish knights. "This gallant gentleman," says Sir James Melville, "perished for being too little ambitious and greedy: but so soon as the King's Majesty came to perfect age, and understood how matters had gone during his minority, he caused to restore the heirs of the said Laird of Grange, whom he said was put to death contrary to the appointment made with the governor of Berwick, and also ordered his bones to be taken up and buried honourably in the ancient burial place of his predecessor at Kinghorn." As for Lord Home, the Regent "durst not meddle with him, he standing in awe of Alexander Home of Manderston, the Laird of Cowdenknows, and the rest of that name;" and Sir James Melville informs us that the life of his own brother, Sir Robert, was spared at the special request of the English ambassador. No other of the prisoners were put to death.