

SIEGE OF EDINBURGH CASTLE. •

A.D. 1640.

THE siege of the Castle of Edinburgh by the Covenanters in 1640 is a curious episode in the history of that celebrated fortress. At the sitting of the Scottish Parliament in the beginning of June that year the garrison, who were in the interest of Charles I., opened a fire upon the city, and killed several persons on the streets. This conduct greatly exasperated the inhabitants, and particularly the triumphant leaders of the Covenant, who resolved to ob-

• *Memorie of the Somervilles; Munro's Expedition, Part II.*

tain possession of the fortress. The garrison, commanded by General Ruthven, were summoned to surrender in the name of the Parliament, but a contemptuous answer was returned, and General Leslie was entrusted with the conducting of the siege.

Four batteries were erected—one near the Castlehill, the second in the Greyfriars' Churchyard, the third a little above St Cuthbert's church, upon the site of the present Queensferry Street, and the fourth on the opposite side of the North Loch, on the ground now occupied by the houses of Hanover Street. All these batteries were mounted with guns, but the cannon were of no great weight, and two of the batteries were altogether unnecessary.

There was at that time on the Castlehill, near the foot of the parade, an outer fortification, somewhat resembling a ravelin or half-moon, called the *Spur*, which was demolished by order of the Scottish Parliament in 1649. In other respects the older part of the buildings of the fortress were the same as at present. We are told on this occasion that the *Spur*, "which took up the greater part of the Castlehill to little purpose, added no strength to the Castle, but put those that were within to the charge of a greater number of men than was needful to defend so strong a hold." It appears that Leslie at first meditated merely a blockade, preventing supplies of provisions, and thereby compelling the garrison to surrender. For this purpose he erected his first battery opposite the *Spur*, on the north side of the Castlehill, a little above the spot where Cromwell planted his battery when he besieged the fortress in 1650, but "our pious zealots of the feminine complexion within the town, with their brethren, and the ministers, who kept themselves far enough back from blows, must needs have a formal siege layed to the Castle,

and all possible endeavours used to take it by the strong hand."

During the erection of the batteries General Ruthven kept up a constant fire upon the besiegers, and many were killed, but they succeeded in erecting the works, and opened a fire upon the Castle. The governor returned the compliment with double the number of shot, to show that he wanted neither ammunition nor resolution to defend the fortress. It is stated that the chief object of both parties at first was to dismount each other's cannon, or at least to make the cannon useless. "When much powder," says a cavalier chronicler, "was spent upon both sides to small effect, Ruthven discontinued the shooting, but at such times as he was sure to do the Covenanters a displeasure either in their works, soldiers, or guns, the truth being, if his generous soul had not pitied the inhabitants of this distracted and ungrateful city of Edinburgh, who had received so many favours and enjoyed so many privileges by the bounty of his Majesty's royal predecessors and his own grants, wherein there were not a few thousand that could not discern between the right and left hand, he might easily have reduced it to ashes or to a ruinous heap in a very few days, notwithstanding the *mountains of dung* which they reared up in the streets as high as the tops of the highest houses for their defence, but in effect served to secure the people walking in the streets in case Ruthven played his guns that way."

The *mountains of dung* piled in the streets of the Old Town of Edinburgh to intercept the bullets of the garrison were rather ludicrous defences, yet it appears that, notwithstanding General Ruthven's forbearance, many were killed "of both ages and sexes, by accidental and casual shots from the Castle, when they were firing upon the batteries and against some prominent places of the town,

wherein those who besieged him had placed musqueteers, to take off his cannoneers, and such soldiers as stood either for defence of the battlements or as sentinels." After continuing the siege in a desultory manner some days, and finding every attempt to batter the walls unavailing, Leslie called a council of his officers, which was attended by some of the influential leaders of the Parliament, when it was resolved to attempt possession of the Spur by means of a mine on the Castlehill. The work was begun under the superintendence of Major Somerville of Drum, on the site of the present Water Reservoir near the Spur, and opposite that part of the rock by which an ascent could be made with some difficulty. It is remarkable that Leslie should have taken no notice of this part of the rock, by which Cromwell intended at one time to enter the fortress, and this distinguished Scottish general, who had been present at many Continental sieges, is accused of " spending most of the time of this siege in shooting bullets in the air, or at the rock," the batteries erected above the West Church, as St Cuthbert's Church is commonly designated. and on the site of the present Hanover Street, then called the *Lang Gate*, or *Road*, doing little or no injury to the fortress.

During the siege the garrison made several sallies upon the besiegers and the city, one of which is recorded by an eye-witness. Some sheep scampered off from their drovers or owners in the Grassmarket, and ran up a steep and narrow lane, still partly in existence, called the Castle Wynd, leading to the parade ground then occupied by the Spur. By some means or other the sheep reached the north bank of the Castlehill, which overlooks Prince's Street. It was early in the morning, and when the soldiers of the garrison first observed the sheep, which they did before the animals were noticed by the besiegers on the battery, they made a sally oy a gate at the foot of the wall of the Spur, which opened

towards the North Loch, now occupied by Prince's Street Gardens, and began to drive the sheep into the Castle. As soon as the besiegers observed this proceeding they seized their arms, and without waiting for orders rushed to the rescue of the sheep. A singular encounter ensued, and we are told that the fight was conducted "without either word or sign to distinguish the one party from the other, often killing and wounding they knew not whom, friend or foe, but as they drove the sheep to or from the Castle, which was all the token or mark they had to distinguish their friends from their enemies." The skirmish attracted a number of persons to the spot, and after an hour's fight, in which upwards of forty persons were killed, besides many who were wounded on both sides, the garrison soldiers succeeded in securing thirty sheep, which they carried into the Castle. Some hours afterwards a parley was concluded between both parties, until the dead bodies were carried away, and "thus ended the skirmish of the sheep."

Some minute particulars are preserved of this siege, which, though of a gossiping nature, are curious. One morning two chief cannoneers of the besiegers, who had been brought from the Continent to serve in the war, fired their guns to so little purpose from the battery erected near the Spur, that the commander ironically told them that they had not only missed the Castle but the whole rock. Nettled at this observation, the cannoneers assured this officer that they would immediately redeem their want of success. They pointed out to him a large cannon placed on the Half-Moon Battery, directly above the second gate of the fortress, and told him that they would dismount it with the first shot or forfeit a month's pay. The officer replied that he would double the wager if they pleased. The cannoneers commenced their preparations, but while they were stooping at the end of the cannon to

make their aim sure, a shot from the Castle shattered them to pieces. "Their entrails," says an eye-witness, "were carried as high as the house tops," and parts of their bodies were seen adhering to the chimneys some weeks afterwards. As much of their bodies as could be gathered together were decently interred.

Major Somerville, who had the charge of the mine, invited some of the principal officers of the besiegers to dine with him at his lodgings, then on the Castlehill. While they were sitting at dinner, a ball from the Castle passed through the wall of the kitchen, and severely wounded a young woman in the act of "*flaming a leg of veal.*" The conduct of the officers, when they ascertained that the young woman was not seriously injured, was not the most delicate, and sundry licentious jokes were passed which form a strange contrast to the religious principles of the party with whom they were connected.

The besiegers now began to despair of obtaining possession of the fortress by assaults from their batteries, and devoted their whole attention to the mine. While the mine was in progress, Major Somerville was sent to Dundee to apprehend Scrymgeour, the Constable of that town, "a worthy gentleman of an honourable and ancient family, heritable bearer of the royal standard in time of war, who, by reason of his great age, being nearly eighty, could hurt them no farther than by his good wishes and prayers for his royal master." Scrymgeour could have easily concealed himself, for some of his friends in Edinburgh had sent him an intimation of the order to arrest him, but he considered it prudent to face the danger. He received Major Somerville and the officers who accompanied him in the most courteous manner, being well acquainted with Somerville's relations. After the ordinary compliments were exchanged, the Major made the old Constable acquainted with the purport of his visit, and exhibited the

warrant to apprehend him. Scrymgeour read the warrant and returned it to the Major, observing that "he could have wished from his soul that the nobility and gentry of Scotland had been better advised than to have taken up arms against their native prince, in the behalf of another nation, especially after his Majesty had given them all possible satisfaction as to their own security both in the Church and in the State, and he doubted not but the present and future generations might smart for their faults." Somerville answered that "he was not entitled to discuss the intentions of the State, but he hoped that those whom he served would act according to their declarations to the world—that their present undertakings would tend to advance and secure the Protestant religion, the honour and safety of his Majesty's person—and that nothing would be derogated from his just authority." "Honour and safety!" exclaimed the old cavalier, laying his hand on Major Somerville's shoulder, "you are a young man, and may see the contrary. So they began with his grandmother Queen Mary, and the end was tragical, and those are truly blind who do not see the same spirit of rebellion working in this generation. For my part I took the Covenant solely from respect and loyalty to the King, which was my interpretation of it, and if I had understood it otherwise I never would have taken it, or drawn a sword in the quarrel."

Major Somerville brought the old Constable of Dundee to Edinburgh, and found the mine prepared to assault the *Spur*. It appears that the Covenanting officers were by no means ambitious for the honour of superintending the operation, but Somerville, assisted by an officer named Waddel and a select party, at length undertook the dangerous duty. The garrison were on the alert, yet the besiegers succeeded in blowing up a great part of the south-east wall of the ravelin. Exposed to a severe fire from the

garrison, and foiled in every attempt to obtain possession of the gates of the fortress, the Major drew up his men under the shelter of a wall near the Spur, and resolutely took up his position. While here he was addressed from the battlements by General Ruthven, with whom he was intimately acquainted—"Somerville, you have exposed yourself and your soldiers to certain hazard, for which my old comrade your general (Leslie) is to blame. Retire, I beseech you, under the favour of my shot, for I have no pleasure in the death of gallant men." The Major, however, refused to retreat, until he was peremptorily ordered off by General Leslie, severely wounded. Of one hundred and twenty-five soldiers, thirty-three and the Major only escaped, and most of them wounded or otherwise hurt.

Every attempt to carry the Castle having failed, it was now resolved to turn the siege into a blockade, and starve the garrison into a surrender. This had the desired effect, for General Ruthven, having been somewhat more than three months besieged, his provision became scant, his water failed, many of his soldiers were dead, and most or all of those alive were sick of the scurvy by the frequent use of salted meat, so that he had scarcely men to mount guard and stand sentinels upon the walls. The garrison had abandoned the Spur and all their outworks, and confined themselves solely to the fortress. A white flag was at length hung out, as an intimation of their wish to surrender, and General Leslie, with the sanction of the Committee of Estates, appointed Major Somerville and two gentlemen to hold a conference with Ruthven. They met in a guard-room within the third gate of the fortress, where Ruthven had a suitable repast prepared, to "persuade them that he wanted not store of provisions to hold out for a long season, but that his Majesty's commands and service required his presence elsewhere," which, he

declared, "were the sole reasons for his relinquishing the stronghold." He addressed himself chiefly to Major Somerville, and told him "they were now met in a more friendly manner than some weeks before, if stone walls had not hindered their nearer approach;" then inquiring for his old companion General Leslie, he observed that formerly they were wont to serve the same master, alluding to the great Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, and "now he was heartily sorry for the unhappy difference which divided them, for although he was a soldier by profession and lived by his sword, yet he was so good a countryman as to wish peace at home and wars abroad." Somerville coincided with this opinion, and expressed his hope that there would be speedily a good understanding between the King and his subjects of both kingdoms. "By my faith," replied the cavalier general, "those are not in the way to effect this as long as they are in arms against the King, and force his garrisons and commissioned officers. But, Sir, your superiors must answer for that. The present business is the surrender of this place to the Estates of Scotland, on such terms as are fit for them to give and me to receive." Major Somerville replied that he had not the smallest doubt such conditions would be granted as would not be inconsistent with his fidelity to the King. "Nay," said Ruthven, "if I thought the surrender would bring my loyalty into question, I would leave my bones in the Castle."

The garrison at length surrendered after a siege of five months, during which it is stated upwards of a thousand persons, including women and children, were killed, while the besieged sustained little loss except what was caused by "thirst and eating of salt meat, which gave them the scurvy, whereof many of them died." The Covenanters took possession of the fortress, and Major Somerville was entrusted with the command. Ruthven and his soldiers embarked at Newhaven for England amid the execrations

of the prevailing party, who designated him "malignant, and traitor to his country, and murderer of the people and saints of God, which, albeit he had escaped the hands of men, yet they hoped the justice of God would send him and his accomplices to the bottom of the sea." The cavalier general heard their reproaches with the utmost indifference. We are told that he marched down the High Street with the same grace as if he had been at the head of an army, disdainng so much as to cast an eye upon his revilers, until he came to Newhaven, where he civilly took leave of the noblemen, gentlemen, and officers who accompanied him, giving twenty pounds sterling as a gratuity to the soldiers who guarded him to the boat.

This cavalier officer was afterwards created Earl of Brentford by Charles I., and appointed general of his army, after the death of the Earl of Lindsay, at the battle of Edgehill. It is said that he was as much celebrated in the wars of Bacchus as of Mars. After the battle of Leipsic an officer named Munro, the gallant author of a quaint and curious work, entitled "Munro's Expedition," tells us that he entered the hall where Gustavus Adolphus and the Duke of Saxony were carousing. "Being seen by his Majesty," he says, "I was presently kindly embraced by holding his arm over my shoulder, wishing I could bear *as much drink* as old Major-General Ruthven, that I might help his Majesty to make his guests happy."