

SIEGE OF CARRICKFERGUS.*

A.D. 1316.

ON the 25th of May 1315, Edward Bruce landed with six thousand men at Carrickfergus, in the bay called Belfast Lough. This ancient town, long the principal seaport in the north of Ireland, before it was supplanted by its modern neighbour Belfast, was then strongly fortified by the English, and contained a lofty castle built on a rock projecting into the sea by Hugh De Lacy in 1178. Oppressed by or discontented with the English government, the Irish of the province of Ulster, when they heard of the complete defeat of Edward II. at Bannockburn, implored the aid of the victorious Robert Bruce, now secure on the Scottish throne, and offered to acknowledge his brother Edward Bruce as their sovereign. Although it might have been foreseen, as it probably was, that the expulsion of the English from Ireland, and the union of the discordant factions of the Irish, was a work of almost insuperable difficulty, yet the offer of a crown inflamed the ambition of Edward Bruce, whose intrepid spirit knew no obstacle in the path of valour, and the invasion of Ireland at that particular time would divide the forces and increase the perplexities of the English.

The history of this invasion is very imperfectly known. Edward Bruce embarked at Ayr, where a parliament had been recently held, and with whose approbation the expe-

* Barbour's Bruce; Lord Hailes' Annals of Scotland; Annals of Ireland, in Camden's Britannia; Fordun's Scoto-Chronicon; Burdy's History of Ireland; Crawford's History of Ireland; M'Skimmin's History of Carrickfergus.

dition was probably undertaken. The principal persons who accompanied him were Randolph Earl of Moray, Sir Philip Moubray, Sir John Foulis, Sir John Stewart, Fergus of Ardrossan, and Ramsay of Ochterhouse. To these knights are added, in the Annals of Ireland subjoined to Camden's Britannia, John Monteith, John de Bosco, John Bisset, and John Campbell, supposed to be the son of Sir Niel Campbell of Lochaw, and nephew of King Robert Bruce. No sooner had Edward Bruce landed with his six thousand followers than the Irish chiefs of Ulster repaired to his standard, and solemnly engaged themselves in his service by giving hostages for the performance of their engagements. The Scottish forces, in conjunction with those of the Irish chiefs, are accused of committing great devastation, and ravaging with merciless barbarity the possessions of the English settlers. They put to the sword all the English who came in their way, levelling their castles, and burning their towns. On the 29th of June Dundalk was taken and burnt. Atherdee and other places of less note experienced a similar fate.

Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, assembled his forces, assisted by some Irish chiefs of the province of Connaught, to repel this invasion, and marching through the county of Meath he entered the province of Ulster, spreading desolation around. Butler, Justiciary or Lord-Deputy of Ireland, joined De Burgh with a large reinforcement, but the Earl refused his assistance, and requested him to return and defend Leinster, as his own troops were sufficient to repel the Scots. "You may return home," said De Burgh, "I and my vassals will overcome the enemy." Butler withdrew his troops, and left the conduct of the war to the Earl of Ulster.

As De Burgh proceeded northwards, the Scots retreated before him for want of provisions, but at length, after some inconsiderable actions, a battle was fought at Coleraine,

where the English were defeated. De Burgh had advanced too precipitately to the attack, ignorant that the Scots, by the advice of Sir Philip Moubray, had left their banners flying in their camp, while they were making a circuit, which enabled them to fall suddenly on the English. Lord William de Burgh and several persons of distinction were made prisoners. Some of the fugitives took refuge in the Castle of Carrickfergus.

A few days after this battle, on the 15th of September, Randolph proceeded to Scotland to procure reinforcements, and returned to Ireland with five hundred men. Marching southward by Dundalk, he penetrated through Meath into Kildare, and encountered Butler, the Lord Justiciary, near Arscoll. The English, although superior in numbers, were enfeebled by discord, and soon gave way. Two Scottish knights fell in this action, Fergus of Ardrossan and Walter of Moray.

In the meantime Edward Bruce laid siege to Carrickfergus, but on the 6th of December he was compelled to raise it. Notwithstanding his victory over De Burgh, he found it necessary to tamper with Fedlim, prince of Connaught, whom he engaged by specious promises to join him as soon as an opportunity occurred. His possessions in Connaught had been usurped in his absence by his kinsman Roderic, also in alliance with Edward Bruce, and who would not take the advice of the Scottish leader to suspend his dispute with Fedlim till the English were subdued. The Ulster Irish, unacquainted with Fedlim's engagement with Bruce, severely harassed his vassals in his march to expel Roderic from Connaught, whither he was followed by the shattered army of De Burgh. A desultory warfare now took place between the supporters of Fedlim and Roderic, which was terminated by Sir John Bermingham, who in a fierce engagement slew the latter. Fedlim, now undisputed master of the principality, immediately avowed his treaty

witn Bruce, and turned his arms against his English deliverers, making furious inroads into their settlements. His defection caused many chiefs of the south of Ireland and of the county of Meath to follow his example, but he was soon afterwards slain in a battle with some thousands of his followers.

A famine prevented Bruce from pursuing his advantages, and many of the Scots perished in a country which had been desolated by their inconsiderate fury. Randolph again proceeded to Scotland to raise new levies, while Bruce assumed the dignity of a sovereign in Ulster, and was even crowned with due solemnity at Dundalk. In 1316 he resumed the siege of the Castle of Carrickfergus, which was defended by Lord Mandeville, who had contrived to enter it with a considerable body of troops. Early in the morning after his arrival Mandeville made a desperate sally, and found the Scots too confident in their quarters, sixty men under an officer named Niel Fleming being their only guard. When Fleming perceived that all would be irretrievably lost if his countrymen were surprised, he resolved to devote himself and his companions to preserve the army. "Now of a truth," he exclaimed, "shall men see how we can die for our master." He sent a messenger to alarm the Scots, and advanced to check Mandeville's impetuosity. He received a mortal wound, and every one of his companions fell.

Mandeville sent a portion of his troops to surround the Scots and prevent their escape, while he proceeded in person with a chosen body through the principal street of Carrickfergus. He was here encountered by Edward Bruce and his household. Among the latter, one Gilbert Harper is mentioned as noted for his strength and intrepidity. This individual knew Mandeville by his armour, and with one blow of his battle-axe felled him to the ground. The English gave way when they saw the fate

of their leader, and the Scots, assisted by two hundred Irish spearmen, pressed onwards against them. They sought refuge in the Castle, but the garrison, afraid that the Scots would rush in, drew up the bridge, shut the gates, and barbarously left their companions to the fury of the victors. When Bruce surveyed the scene of conflict he found Fleming in the agonies of death, and his soldiers stretched around him. This deeply affected him, and he bitterly lamented their fate, but he was in no condition to spend much time in sorrow, and to have openly indulged in it would have dispirited his followers.

The English agreed to surrender the Castle of Carrickfergus, and a détachment of thirty men was sent to take possession of the place, but in defiance of their stipulation the detachment was treacherously seized, and the garrison declared that they would defend the fortress to the uttermost. During these transactions King Robert Bruce, who had recently made an expedition to the Western Highlands, where John of Lorn, who had been driven from Scotland in 1308, still maintained himself, and reduced them under his government, formed the resolution of conducting a reinforcement in person to the assistance of his brother in Ireland. Entrusting the kingdom during his absence to his son-in-law the High Steward and to Douglas, he embarked at Lochryan in Galloway, and landed at Carrickfergus. But the garrison, reduced by famine, had been compelled to capitulate. They had subsisted as long as they could on the hides of animals, and one revolting instance of barbarity is alleged against them. When the hides were exhausted, they were accused of killing and eating the thirty Scots whom they had basely made prisoners. If this is true, it is one of the most infamous and atrocious instances of savage cruelty on record.

The capitulation of Carrickfergus and the arrival of King Robert Bruce were of great advantage to the enterprise of

his brother. The expedition was indeed ultimately and speedily to fail, but in the meantime the standard of Edward Bruce was joined not only by crowds of the discontented Irish, but even by many of the disaffected English, among whom were the Lacys and their numerous followers in Meath, who, when summoned by Roger Mortimer, the newly appointed chief-governor, to answer for their conduct, killed his messenger in defiance, and took refuge in Connaught.