

STIRLING CASTLE FROM BACK WALK.

BY JAMES TODD, F.E.I.S., STIRLING.

THE most interesting and important edifice in Stirling is the Castle crowning the precipitous extremity of the ridge on which the town is built, and forming the most conspicuous object to the surrounding country. The Esplanade in front of the entrance commands magnificent views of some of the fairest and most historic scenes in Scotland. On the north side of the Esplanade there is a massive statue of King Robert Bruce, erected in 1877. The patriot hero, who is looking towards Bannockburn, is represented as sheathing his sword in the moment of victory.

The visitor, who is fairly familiar with the map of Scotland, can hardly fail to understand the strategic importance of this ancient fortress, situated at the only crossing place between the two well-defined divisions of the country. The rocky eminence on which it stands rises 220 feet above the plain, terminating precipitously on the north-west side of the town in weather-worn columns of basalt, many of which show clear markings of glacial action during the "great ice age." Long before the dawn of history the commanding position would naturally suggest the erection of a stronghold. The Roman general, Agricola, is said to have erected fortifications on the rock, and the great military Roman road passed immediately beneath it. The semi-legendary St. Monenna, who died in 519, according to the Irish chroniclers, founded one of her seven churches in the Castle of "Strivelyne." In the ninth and tenth centuries it frequently figures in the half-real, half-mythical battles between the Northumbrian Saxons and the fierce, warlike Scots of the north. At first it seems to have consisted of only a single tower, probably similar to the Castle depicted on the burgh arms, but from time to time it received considerable additions, as it became a favourite residence of the early Scottish Kings.

In the twelfth century its history becomes more definite and authentic. In 1120, Alexander I. built a chapel in the Castle, and he died there in 1124. David I. is known to have lived in it, and William the Lion closed his long and chequered career within its walls. When Alexander III. died in 1286, Stirling becomes the focus of Scottish history. Edward I., after deposing John Balliol, invaded Scotland, marching on Stirling, which had been abandoned by the Scots. Before returning to England he left a strong garrison in the Castle. At the battle of Stirling Bridge, in 1297, Wallace inflicted a crushing defeat on the English, and the Castle was restored to the Scots. In the following year, Edward I. defeated Wallace in the battle of Falkirk, and the

Castle again was temporarily in the hands of the English. The Scots soon drove out the English and held the Castle, till in 1303 Edward I. again appeared in Scotland, carrying everything before him. Stirling was the last spot in Scotland to hold out, and the Castle sustained its longest and most memorable siege. The governor, William Oliphard or Olifant, could muster less than 200 men, and had opposed to him the ablest warrior of his time, with all the military resources of a warlike nation at his disposal. The siege began on the 22nd of April, and lasted for nineteen weeks. Thirteen engines, marvellous in their day for ingenuity of device and weight of metal, kept pounding away at the walls with little intermission, but still the heroic Olifant held out. One engine, the "War Wolfe," did great execution, partially breaching the walls, but the immediate presence of starvation, rather than the success of the assailants, compelled the garrison to surrender. Olifant and the leading defenders appeared before the conqueror, and, with ropes round their necks, performed the humiliating ceremony exacted at that time from prisoners of war. The governor was confined for four years in the Tower of London. Obtaining his release he returned to Scotland, and in 1329 died at Aberdalgie, where his monument may still be seen. Robert the Bruce was crowned in 1306, and Edward I. died in 1307. The Scottish fortresses were gradually recaptured, till in 1313 Stirling Castle alone remained in the hands of the English. The Scots, under Edward Bruce, laying siege to it, Moubray, the governor, agreed to surrender, if not relieved before the Feast of St. John, June 24th, 1314. To save the Castle, Edward II. invaded Scotland at the head of an immense army, arriving near Stirling on June 23rd. The next day the decisive battle of Bannockburn was fought, and, according to agreement, the Castle was surrendered. During the minority of David Bruce it underwent several sieges. In 1339 it was retaken by the Scots, and never again changed masters for more than 300 years, although the English during that period often invaded the country.

Under the Stuart kings, Stirling Castle became the Windsor of Scotland, and the scene of many of the events which make up the wild and varied romance of Scottish history. James I., from its secure shelter, often dealt out sharp and swift justice to his intriguing and turbulent nobles. Below the Castle at the Mote Hill, the end of the Gowan Hill nearest the river, may still be seen the Beheading Stone, where the Regent Murdoch, his sons, and other relatives were executed in 1425. James II. was born in it as well as James V., and James VI. was educated there by the celebrated George Buchanan, whose room in the palace is still pointed out. James V., the "King of the Commons," made it his favourite residence; and, disguised as the "Gudeman of Ballan-geich," was wont to steal out of it in quest of adventures, as well as information about the condition of the country.