

THE BATTLE OF HALIDON HILL.

IN 1333, when young King David II. of Scotland had sunk into misfortune, and the usurper Edward Baliol had abjectly flung himself and the kingdom at the foot of the English throne,—when the two ablest military commanders of the loyal Scots, Sir Andrew Moray and the Knight of Liddesdale, had been carried away, the one by captivity and the other by death,

—when almost all the flower of the Scottish forces, the veteran officers in the counsels and campaigns of Robert Bruce, had given place to comparatively young and inexperienced men, —when Archibald Douglas, lord of Galloway, a hot-headed warrior who was either wounded or defeated or made prisoner in every battle which he fought, had just been appointed Regent under David II.,—and when the whole Scottish people were distracted by the sudden calamities which had followed the death of Robert Bruce, and by the tremendous schism which prevailed in connexion with Baliol's usurpation, and by the distress and poverty which had everywhere flowed from the thousand springs of the nation's long-continued agitations,—Edward III. of England proclaimed war with the Scots, and collected a great army, both of his own subjects and of foreigners, to invade their territory.

A chief object of the English King was to obtain possession of the town and castle of Berwick, which had been ceded to him by Baliol. The Scots valued this place as highly as he did, and conjectured from the first moment they heard of his hostility that he would try to make himself master of it; and they therefore put it into as strong a state of defence as they could, and poured into it a numerous and brave garrison, and appointed Sir William Keith to govern the town and Patrick Earl of Dunbar to govern the castle. Edward approached with vast pomp and preparation, and affected to regard the Scots as a restless nation of truce-breakers, whom he ought to terrify with indignation and to castigate without mercy. He ordered his army to rendezvous promptly at Newcastle-on-Tyne about the end of spring; he desired that public prayers might be offered for himself and his troops in their meritorious progress of invasion; he requested the Earl of Flanders to prohibit his subjects from affording any aid by sea to the Scots; and, having recently gulled and blinded the King of France with pretences of deference to his advice in matters of Scottish politics, he now threw off all disguise, and

declared to that monarch that, in retaliation of their alleged violation of the international peace, he was resolved to castigate the Scots and extort redress for grievances in such a manner as to himself should seem good.

Edward sat down before Berwick at Tweedmouth in May; and finding, after he had remained about a month, that the place was not likely to be soon reduced, he led part of his army into Scotland, and spent several weeks in ravaging the country as far north as Dundee and Scone and as far west as Dumbarton. On his return, he found Berwick as entire and resolute as when he left it; and, being reinforced with a fresh body of troops from Ireland and Aquitaine, under the command of John Lord D'Arcy, he made a determination not to leave it till he should either capture it or draw the Scots into a pitched battle. The besiegers do not appear to have had any engines or to have practised any vigorous system of attack, but seem principally to have maintained a strict blockade by land and sea, and to have placed their main hopes in wearing out the garrison's patience, or in starving them and the townspeople by want of provisions; and the besieged endeavoured to drive them off, or to fight their way through them for supplies and succours, by many vigorous sallies,—and also made a successful assault upon the English fleet, and burned or sunk a large proportion of its ships. But at length the town was set on fire during a general attack, and in a great measure consumed; both soldiers and people within the walls began to turn feeble from scarcity of food; the inhabitants, harassed by the severe evils of the siege, and terrified to anticipate the worse evils of a storm, implored Sir William Keith and the Earl of Dunbar to offer terms of capitulation; and on the 15th of July, a treaty was concluded with Edward, that the town and castle should be delivered to him on the fifth day after if not relieved before that time with 200 men-at-arms from the Scottish army or by a battle,—that in the interval, there should be a cessation of hostili-

ties on both sides,—that in the event of a surrender, the lives of the garrison and of the inhabitants should be preserved, and their properties secured,—that to such persons as were disposed to leave the town, liberty should be granted to depart, and 40 days allowed them to dispose of their effects,—and that permission should be enjoyed by Sir William Keith to go immediately in person, and make known the state of affairs to the Regent Douglas, who was then not far off at the head of an army.

A most horrible action is asserted by the Scottish historians, Boece and Buchanan, to have been perpetrated at this time by the English King. They say that Sir Alexander Seton was now governor of Berwick,—(and possibly he both was governor before the appointment of Sir William Keith, and may have been made deputy-governor during the brief period of Sir William's mission to the Regent;) and they add that Edward demanded and received Sir Alexander's eldest son as one of several hostages for the faithful performance of the stipulations of the treaty,—that, soon after the treaty was concluded, he began to repent of it, and to apprehend that the activity of Sir William Keith and Lord Douglas might deprive him of the prey which now seemed almost within his grasp,—that he then demanded Sir Alexander immediately to surrender the town, and threatened, in the event of refusal, to hang both his son whom he had received as an hostage, and another son whom he had formerly taken prisoner,—that Seton reminded him how the day agreed on for a surrender had not yet arrived, and vehemently complained of so gross a violation of faith,—and that Edward, regardless of his remonstrances, ordered a gibbet to be erected in full view of the town, and both the sons to be led forth to execution. These historians say farther—and this part of their story they are at great pains to adorn—that in the sore struggle which so woful a spectacle excited in the breast of the parent, fondness for his offspring was like to have prevailed over patriotism and hon-

our, but that his lady opportunely interposed, and by powerful and spirited exhortations, and by at last hurrying him away from the view of the horrid scene, saved him from betraying the trust reposed in him by his country; and they declare that the King relented nothing, but went on with his purpose, and hanged the two young men. The whole of this story, however, is in the highest degree improbable, and seems at worst to point to some cruel incident which the malice of Edward's enemies enormously exaggerated in order to cover his name with infamy. Fordun mentions the execution of only the son who had been given as an hostage, and dates the time of it after the expiration of the period for surrender fixed by treaty; Tyrell, on the authority of two manuscripts, speaks also of the execution of only one, and narrates the event in such a way as to assign merely the cruelty of it to Edward and all the perfidy to Sir Alexander Seton; and almost all the English historians treat the entire affair as a sheer fable, invented by rancour and venom to asperse the character of their favourite monarch. The probability seems to be that a son of Seton was really executed in the view of the besieged by order of Edward,—though the precise reasons and circumstances of the horrible event cannot now be ascertained; and a tradition of the execution has continued in Berwick down to the present day,—and the scene of it is still pointed out, at a place vulgarly called Hang-a-Dyke-Nook, in full view of the ramparts of the town.

The Regent Douglas, at an early period after the commencement of the siege of Berwick, began to devise measures for relieving it; and he found little difficulty in collecting a very numerous army from the different parts of Scotland, led by their chiefs and nobles, and full of ardour to defend their native country, and repel its formidable invaders; and on the 11th of July, he appeared at the head of this army in the neighbourhood of Berwick, and endeavoured both to convey succours into the town and to provoke the besiegers to leave

their advantageous position and engage in battle. But the English obstructed every passage and stood doggedly on the defensive. The Regent then crossed the Tweed, and marched along the coast toward the castle of Bamburgh, where Philippa, the young queen of England, was at that time residing on account of its reputed impregnability ; and he spent some days in blocking up that fortress and in ravaging the adjacent parts of Northumberland, in the hope of provoking Edward to run for the defence of his queen and for the preservation of so fertile a spot of his kingdom, and so abandon the siege of Berwick. The lure, however, did not take, and had no other effect upon the events of the war than to keep the Scottish army at a useless distance from their besieged countrymen.

When the Regent learned, upon the arrival of Sir William Keith, that a treaty of but a few days' duration had been made with Edward, and that, at the expiration of it, Berwick was likely to be lost for ever to Scotland, he promptly and sternly resolved, in defiance of the opinions of many of the Scottish nobles, to march northward and to attempt to relieve the town by a battle before the time appointed for its surrender. He therefore moved with all speed toward Berwick, and led his army over the Tweed, and encamped, on the 18th of July, at a place called Dunsepark or Bothul. But sadly different was this array, in the moral vigour of its material and in the heroic prowess of its leaders, from that of most of the armies which had deployed and fought under the Scottish banner during the preceding thirty years ; and well might the sight of it give rise to such a dialogue as the dramatist of "Halidon Hill" puts as follows into the mouths of two of his interlocutors :—

" 'Tis scarce twelve years

Since I left Scotland for the wars of Palestine,
And then the flower of all the Scottish nobles

Were known to me ; and I, in my degree,
Not all unknown to them."

" Alas! there have been changes since that time ;
The royal Bruce, with Randolph, Douglas, Grahame,
Then shook in field the banners which now moulder
Over their graves i' the chancel."

" And thence comes it,
That while I look'd on many a well-known crest
And blazon'd shield, as hitherward we came,
The faces of the Barons who display'd them
Were all unknown to me. Brave youths they seem'd ;
Yet, surely fitter to adorn the tilt-yard,
Than to be leaders of a war. Their followers,
Young like themselves, seem like themselves unpractised—
Look at their battle rank."

" I cannot gaze on't with undazzled eye,
So thick the rays dart back from shield and helmet,
And sword and battle-axe, and spear and pennon.
Sure 'tis a gallant show! The Bruce himself
Hath often conquer'd at the head of fewer
And worse appointed followers."

" Ay, but 'twas Bruce that led them.
'Tis not the falchion's weight decides a combat ;
It is the strong and skilful hand that wields it.
Ill fate, that we should lack the noble King,
And all his champions now !"

The ground on which the English army lay encamped, and which they evinced a stubborn determination not to leave till they should gain possession of Berwick, was the hill of Halidon, a very considerable eminence on the west side of the town, rising by a gradual acclivity from the banks of the Tweed, descending by a much more rapid fall on the other and western side, commanding from its summit and shoulders a thorough prospect of all the approaches to Berwick, and

possessing all the characters of an advantageous position either for attacking any army which should attempt to enter the town, or for repelling any superior force which should rush to battle against its own acclivities ; and in front of which extended a marshy hollow which could not be traversed in good order by an army attacking them, and which might sadly embarrass them if they should be forced to make it their battle-field. The Scottish army had no alternative but either to assail the English in this strong position, or to lie tamely by till Berwick should be lost ; and they might well have escaped all imputation on their valour, and won not a little credit for their prudence and wisdom, if they had just allowed Berwick to fall, and awaited some more favourable opportunity of measuring their strength with the invader. But their chief commander, the Regent, was headstrong and sanguine, and probably counted too much on the fiery zeal of his young officers and the hot patriotism of the great body of his army ; and seems to have thought the spirit of his people and the goodness of his cause an ample counterbalance against all local disadvantages. Possibly, too, he felt much impelled by sheer pride and passion, and may have said or thought some such thing as the poet, in the following lines, ascribes to him and one of his chief officers :—

“ Ay, but King Edward sent a haughty message,
 Defying us to battle on this field,
 This very hill of Halidon ; if we leave it
 Unfought withal, it squares not with our honour.
 We will not back one furlong—not one yard,
 No, nor one inch ; where'er we find the foe,
 Or where the foe finds us, there will we fight him.”

The numbers of the Scottish army are very variously reported,—figuring in some records as most incredibly large, and in others as comparatively small. The continuator of Hemingford, an author of that age, and Knyghton, who lived in the

succeeding age, ascertain these numbers, however, with more precision than is generally required in historical statistics. The former says, that, besides Earls and other Lords, or great Barons, there were 55 Knights, 1,100 men-at-arms, and 13,500 of the commons, lightly armed, amounting in all to 14,655 ; and with him the latter appears to concur, when his narrative is cleared from the errors of ignorant or careless transcribers. Yet it is probable that the useless followers of the camp, and the servants who attended the horses of persons of distinction, and of the men-at-arms, were more numerous than the actual combatants. The numbers of the English, though not so well ascertained, may be supposed to have been at least equal to those of the Scots. In fact, most of the English historians represent the Scottish numbers as having been much greater than the English, and most of the Scottish historians represent the English numbers as having been much greater than the Scottish ; so that a regard to impartiality obliges us to conclude that the two numbers were not very far from being alike.

On the 19th, the Regent Douglas disposed his army in battle array, arranged them in four divisions, and prepared for rushing into conflict. At the head of the first division was John Earl of Murray, son of the famous Randolph, supported by Lord Andrew Fraser, and his two brothers Simon and James ; at the head of the second was Robert, Lord High Steward of Scotland, supported by the chief men of his kindred and by the Earl of Menteith ; at the head of the third were the Earls of Ross, Sutherland, and Strathearn ; and at the head of the fourth was the Regent himself, supported by the Earls of Lennox and Carrick. The English army stood strongly posted on the slopes of Halidon Hill, and was disposed in four bodies of foot, confronting the four divisions of the Scots ; and each of its bodies was winged with bands of choice and skilful archers. The relative position of the two armies could not but portend awful disaster to the Scots, and

might have readily suggested such a colloquy as the following between the Regent and one of the wisest of his chief officers:—

“ Now you gaze

On yon old warrior, in his antique armour,
 As if he were arisen from the dead,
 To bring us Bruce's counsel for the battle.”
 “ 'Tis à proud word to speak ; but he who fought
 Long under Robert Bruce, may something guess,
 Without communication with the dead,
 At what he would have counsell'd. Bruce had bidden ye
 Review your battle-order, marshall'd broadly
 Here on the bare hill-side, and bidden you mark
 Yon clouds of Southron archers, bearing down
 To the green meadow lands which stretch beneath—
 The Bruce had warn'd you, not a shaft to-day,
 But shall find mark within a Scottish bosom,
 If thus our field be order'd. The callow boys,
 Who draw but four-foot bows, shall gall our front,
 While on our mainward, and upon the rear,
 The cloth-yard shafts shall fall like death's own darts,
 And, though blind men discharge them, find a mark.
 Thus shall we die the death of slaughter'd deer,
 Which, driven into the toils, are shot at ease
 By boys and women, while they toss aloft
 All idly and in vain their branchy horns,
 As we shall shake our unavailing spears.”

When the two armies stood ready to engage, they were induced to postpone their collision for a little by the occurrence of a stern single combat. A brawny and gigantic Scotsman, who had acquired the name of Turnbull on account of his having at one time saved King Robert Bruce from being gored to death by a wild bull which had overthrown him while he was hunting,—this man, attended by a

large mastiff, approached the English army, and challenged any person in it to come forth and fight him in single combat. His challenge produced a momentary lull of astonishment, but was soon accepted by Sir Robert Benhale, a young Norfolk knight, who was inferior to Turnbull in stature, but possessed great bodily strength and an eminent degree of soldierly skill and cleverness. Benhale was first met by the mastiff, and fetched such a cleaving blow upon its loins as to separate its hinder legs from its body; and he then encountered Turnbull, eluded his assaults and thrusts, and, with mingled dexterity and power, cut off first his left arm and then his head.

The Scots affected to be nothing daunted by the deadly discomfiture of their champion, but got all in motion, and made a vigorous effort to ascend the hill in good order, and to fling themselves in a mass upon the foe. The commanders, the chiefs, and the men-at-arms left their horses to the care of their valets, and advanced to the combat on foot; the noblest soldiers and the most rustic, the bravest and the most cowardly, the nimblest and the most loutish, the fiercest and the most cloddy, were thus on one level and in one move; and the unwonted mixture of infantry and dismounted cavalry, together with the absence of every adventitious means of inspiritment, combined with the sinking and entangling nature of the morassy hollow which they traversed, to dislocate their ranks, and somewhat convert their array into a crowd. And all the while the English stood compactly firm or moved very slowly and quite regularly forward, and began, at the most advantageous moment, to pour down showers of deadly shafts from their long bows. Who could doubt the issue?

“ Behold yon English host come slowly on,
With equal front, rank marshal'd upon rank,
As if one spirit ruled one moving body:
The leaders, in their places, each prepared
To charge, support, and rally, as the fortune

Of changeful battle needs:—then look on ours,
 Broken, disjointed, as the tumbling surges
 Which the winds wake at random. Look on both,
 And dread the issue."

The Scots, though fatigued by the difficulties of the ground, and galled with the severity of their reception, fought as it became men who had conquered under the banners of Robert Bruce. But they could neither avert nor mitigate nor retaliate the terrible storm of archery which fell upon them from the English bowmen; they were struck down by hundreds long before they could get footing to deal so much as one retributive blow; they struggled and panted up an acclivity so steep that, according to one historian's account of it, one man upon it above might keep down four below; and, had they all given way to a sudden panic, and turned round and scampered off like a flock of hunted sheep, they would have behaved no worse than many an experienced army has done in a similar plight. But they merely became confused and dispirited, and would not see that their circumstances were desperate till compelled to feel them so. Even when assailed down hill by the English spearmen and men-at-arms, and when driven out of their former disorder into a "confusion worse confounded," and when beginning to be strewed and amassed into heaps of wounded and slain, they still refused to give way, and rallied fiercely from discomfiture, and kept up the conflict with maddening and weltering bravery. But at length some of their chief commanders, including the Regent himself, fell victims in the fray; the struggling multitude became more and more like a mere mad mob, and felt compelled to run; the valets and pages who had charge of the horses rode off with them at full speed, attentive only to their own safety; nobles, knights, and peasantry fled in indiscriminate rout, and almost trod one another down in the race; all were more or less pursued and overwhelmed by corps of English men-at-arms who careered

upon them mounted, fresh, and full of fury; many who faced about singly or in small bodies were everywhere overpowered by the victors; and not a few continued to run the long distance of five miles from the field of battle, hotly chased by a choice brigade of cavalry and mounted archers. The rout was an almost total dispersion, the slaughter a most appalling carnage, and the escaped few scarcely less wild than hunted deers at bay.

“ All's lost! all's lost! Of the main Scottish host,
Some wildly fly, and some rush wildly forward;
And some there are who seem to turn their spears
Against their countrymen.”

Few of the Scottish army escaped destruction. Most of the Scottish historians state the number of the slain at ten thousand, Boece makes it amount to fourteen thousand, and the English historians exaggerate it to upwards of thirty-five thousand; but all seem to speak on somewhat conjectural data, and may be supposed more or less to include a good many of the mere servants or followers of the camp, who either fell in the fight, or were never again brought to the rendezvous. The most important of the slain were the Regent, the Earls of Ross, Sutherland, Lennox, Carrick, Athole, and Menteith, three Stuarts, uncles of the Lord High Steward, three Frazers, Sir John Graham, Sir Duncan Campbell, and Sir William Tudway. Some considerable persons, among whom was Sir William Keith, were also taken prisoners, and are said by Boece to have been put to death, by order of Edward, on the morning after the battle; but some of them are known on other and better testimony to have been alive long afterwards, and probably none experienced worse treatment than a little temporary restraint. The loss of the English in the battle must, in the nature of the case, have been very inconsiderable; but it is diminished to a point far below belief by the English historians, who

state it at only one knight, one esquire, and twelve or thirteen footmen. On the day after the battle, Edward got possession of the town and castle of Berwick; and he faithfully observed the articles of capitulation.