

THE BLOOD-HOUND OF LORN.*

A.D. 1306.

THE old metrical historian of King Robert Bruce narrates a romantic event in the life of that celebrated monarch, the substance of which is as follows :—

The King, after numerous vicissitudes, had again been enabled to maintain some footing in Scotland, yet though he obtained several advantages, he was in a weak and precarious condition ; and he was compelled to retire from his enemies whenever they assembled in considerable numbers. It happened that, while he was lurking with less than four hundred men in the wilds of Cumnock in Ayrshire, his inveterate enemy MacDougal, commonly called John of Lorn, aided by Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, came against him with eight hundred Highlanders, and a large force of men-at-arms. They also brought with them a slough-dog, or blood-hound, which had at one time belonged to Bruce himself, and which John of Lorn had contrived to get into his possession. Great dependance was placed on the scent of the animal on this occasion, more particularly from the circumstance that, as it had been formerly a favourite with Bruce, it was less likely to lose the track.

King Robert was enabled to make head against those of

* Barbour's Bruce, edited by Pinkerton, Book vii. ; Sir Walter Scott's Lord of the Isles.

his enemies who were mounted; but when he perceived that the Highlanders of Lorn had nearly cut off his retreat, he arranged his followers in three divisions, and ordered them to meet at a certain specified place, to which they were to proceed by different routes. When John of Lorn came up to the spot where Bruce divided his followers, he caused the blood-hound to be put upon the trace, and the animal immediately directed him to that party headed by King Robert. Lorn in consequence pursued this party with his whole force, paying no attention to the others.

Bruce was compelled to subdivide his small party in the same manner as he had previously done, and this expedient was attended with the same results. The pursuers attached themselves exclusively to the handful of men led by him, allowing the others to proceed where they pleased without molestation. Thus hard pressed by his inveterate foes, Bruce dismissed all his followers, with the exception of his foster-brother. The blood-hound still followed the trace of the King and his only attendant, and John of Lorn, now convinced that the capture of his enemy was almost certain, ordered five of his most active retainers to pursue closely, and interrupt his flight.

The nimble mountaineers were seen by the King fast gaining ground on him. "What assistance can you render?" said Bruce to his attendant. "The best I can," replied his foster-brother. "Then," said the King, "here I take my stand." The five mountaineers came up rapidly, and Bruce opposed himself to three of them, leaving the other two to his attendant. A combat commenced sword in hand, and the King slew the first who encountered him. Observing his foster-brother hard pressed by his two assailants, he rushed forward and killed one, leaving him to deal with the survivor. He then returned upon the other two, both of whom he despatched before his foster-brother had laid prostrate his antagonist. The whole five were over-

come, and the King courteously thanked his companion for his assistance. "It pleases you to say so," was the answer, "but you yourself slew four of the five." "True," said Bruce, "but only because I had a better opportunity than you. They were not apprehensive of me when they saw me encounter three, so I had a moment's time to spring to thy aid, and to return unexpectedly upon my own assailants."

The force headed by John of Lorn was approaching rapidly, and Bruce and his foster-brother retired to a neighbouring wood. Here they sat down to refresh themselves, after their recent exertions. The cry of the blood-hound was now so near, that Bruce was entreated to consult his safety by removing farther. "I have heard," said the King, "that whosoever will wade a bowshot down a running stream, shall make the slough-hound lose scent. Let us try the experiment, for were yon devilish hound silenced I would care little for the rest."

There was fortunately a rivulet near them, and Bruce entered the stream, down which he waded a considerable way. When John of Lorn had found the bodies of his five followers, he vowed the most summary vengeance. He followed the hound to the side of the stream, but here the animal was at fault, and Lorn was compelled to relinquish the pursuit. Barbour informs us that others allege the King's life was saved upon this occasion by a skilful archer who accompanied him, and who, perceiving that they would be taken by means of the blood-hound, concealed himself in a thicket, and shot the animal with an arrow.

But whether this escaping fell
As I tauld first, or now I tell,
I wot weill, without lesing,
That at the burn escaped the King.—
When the chasers rallied were,
And John of Lorn had met them there,

He told Sir Aylmer all the case,
How that the King escaped was ;
And how that his five men slew,
And syne to the wood him drew.
Sir Aylmer said—‘ He is to prise ;
For I know none that living is,
That at mischief can help him sae.
I trow he would be hard to slay
If he were matched evenly.’
On this wise spak Sir Amery.
And the good King held on his way,
Him and his man, while they
Passed out through the forest were,
Syne in the muir they entered there.

The King afterwards had an adventure with three thieves, and he was at last found by Douglas in a hut. A hundred and fifty of his followers defeated a part of Sir Aylmer's force, and the latter was at length completely routed near the woods of Glentrule in the eastern part of Ayrshire, after which his affairs assumed a prosperous appearance. Bruce was soon enabled to take ample vengeance on the Lord of Lorn.