

THE EXPLOITS OF THE GOOD SIR JAMES DOUGLAS.

THE noble family of Douglas, "whose coronet so often counterpoised the crown," and whose patrimonial seat gave name to the parish of Douglas and to the district of Douglasdale in the upper ward of Lanarkshire, is said to have been founded by Theobald, a Fleming, who acquired the lands around that seat at a very early period in Scottish history. But the first great man of the family—and at the same time one of the most distinguished and famous of all the great ones it produced—was "the Good Sir James," the eighth Lord of Douglas, who lived amid the earliest and fiercest outbursts

of the wars of the succession, and bade defiance to Edward of England at the very moment of his riding most rampantly over prostrate Scotland, and fought either at the side of Bruce, or in vigorous support of him, throughout all his efforts to achieve his country's independence.

Sir James's own castle of Douglas had been taken and garrisoned by the troops of Edward I.; and he resolved to take it, and at the same time inflict signal chastisement on the intruders. A beautiful English maiden, named the Lady Augusta de Berkeley, had replied to her numerous suitors that her hand should be given to him who should have the courage and the ability to hold the perilous castle of Douglas for a year and a day; and Sir John de Walton, anxious to win by his valour such a lovely prize, undertook the keeping of the castle by consent of Edward. For several months he discharged his duty with honour and bravery, and the lady now deeming his probation accomplished, and not unwilling perhaps to unite her fortunes to one who had proved himself a true and valiant knight, wrote him an epistle recalling him. By this time, however, he had received a defiance from Douglas, who declared that despite all his bravery and vigilance, the castle should be his own by Palm Sunday; and De Walton deemed it a point of honour to keep possession till the threatened day should pass over. On the day named, Douglas having assembled his followers, assailed the English as they retired from the church, and having overpowered them took the castle. Sir John de Walton was slain in the conflict, and the letter of his lady-love being found in his pocket, afflicted the generous and good Sir James "full sorely."

The account of this taking of the Castle of Douglas, in the History of the Houses of Douglas and Angus, by Godscroft, is somewhat different, and states that Sir James had drawn Sir John de Walton, by an ambuscade, out from the castle into the open country, where he fell on his band, killed their leader, and took the castle. The castle, however, was

more than once taken, retaken, burnt, and rebuilt, during the life of the Good Sir James; and the account of one of the most interesting assaults upon it is given as follows by Godscroft: "The manner of his taking it is said to have been thus—Sir James taking with him only two of his servants, went to Thomas Dickson of whom he was received with tears, after he had revealed himself to him, for the good old man knew him not at first, being in mean and homely apparel. There he kept him secretly in a quiet chamber, and brought unto him such as had been trusty servants to his father, not all at once, but apart by one and one, for fear of discoverie. Their advice was, that on Palm Sunday, when the English would come forth to the church, and his partners were convened, that then he should give the word, and cry 'the Douglas slogan,' and presently set upon them that should happen to be there, who being despatched the castle might be taken easily. This being concluded, and they come, so soon as the English were entred into the church with palms in their hands, (according to the custom of that day,) little suspecting or fearing any such thing, Sir James, according to their appointment, cried too soon, (a Douglas, a Douglas!) which being heard in the church, (this was St. Bride's church of Douglas,) Thomas Dickson, supposing he had been hard at hand, drew out his sword and ran upon them, having none to second him but another man, so that, oppressed by the number of his enemies, he was beaten downe and slaine. In the meantime, Sir James being come, the English that were in the chancel kept off the Scots, and having the advantage of the strait and narrow entrie, defended themselves manfully. But Sir James, encouraging his men, not so much by words as by deeds and good example, and having slain the boldest resisters, prevailed at last, and entring the place, slew some twenty-six of their number, and tooke the rest, about ten or twelve persons, intending by them to get the castle upon composition, or to enter with them when the

gates should be opened to let them in ; but it needed not, for they of the castle were so secure that there was none left to keep it, save the porter and the cooke, who knowing nothing of what had hapened at the church, which stood a large quarter of a mile from thence, had left the gate wide open, the porter standing without, and the cooke dressing the dinner within. They entred without resistance, and meat being ready, and the cloth laid, they shut the gates and took their refection at good leisure. Now that he had gotten the castle into his hands, considering with himself (as he was a man no lesse advised than valiant) that it was hard for him to keep it, the English being as yet the stronger in that countrey, who if they should besiege him, he knewe of no reliefe, he thought it better to carry away such things as be most easily transported, gold, silver, and apparell, with ammunition and armour, whereof he had greatest use and need, and to destroy the rest of the provision, together with the castle itselfe, than to diminish the number of his followers there where it could do no good. And so he caused carry the meale and meat, and other cornes and grain into the cellar, and laid all together in one heape: then he took the prisoners and slew them, to revenge the death of his trustie and valiant servant, Thomas Dickson, mingling the victuals with their bloud, and burying their carkasses in the heap of corne: after that he struck out the heads of the barrells and puncheons, and let the drink run through all; and then he cast the carkasses of dead horses and other carrion amongst it, throwing the salt above all, so to make all together unuseful to the enemy; and this cellar is called yet the Douglas lairder. Last of all he set the house on fire, and burnt all the timber, and what else the fire could overcome, leaving nothing but the scorched walls behind him."

During the close and frequent contests of Bruce with the English invaders in Ayrshire, on one occasion, Sir James made a sudden and smart reprisal on the English for a disas-

ter they had inflicted on his master,—surprising and maiming and scattering them very soon after the moment when they had become victors; and on another occasion, he laid an ambushade at Ederford for a party under Sir Philip Mowbray, pounced upon him like a tiger from his lair, routed the men, and gave Sir Philip himself so hot a chase that he flung away his sword, ran headlong without any attendant, and made a hair's breadth escape to Kilmarnock. When Bruce had beaten the English at Loudon-hill, and saw his way open to proceed toward Inverness, Douglas remained behind to attempt to recover such places as were still in the enemy's hand; and he made such quick and sure work throughout the fastnesses of the great range of mountains which extends from the Cheviots into south-western Galloway that “within a short time he freed Douglasdale, Ettrick-Forest, and Jedburgh Forest of the English garrisons and subjection.” About the same time, also, while roving among the mountains, he surprised and made prisoners Alexander Stewart of Bonkill, and Thomas Randolph, the nephew of Bruce, and afterwards Earl of Moray; and took them northward with him as far as the Mearns, where he met Bruce returning from Inverness,—“of whom,” says Godscroft, “he was heartily welcomed, both for his own sake, and because he had brought him his nephew Randolph, whom the King did chide exceedingly. This piece of service was of no small importance, in regard to the good service done to the King by Randolph, both while the King lived, and after his death when he was regent; which all may be ascribed to Sir James, who conquered Randolph to the King's side.”

In March 1312-13, while the English garrison were reveling on the eve of Lent, Sir James, with a party of only 60 men, dexterously captured the castle of Roxburgh,—a strength of great importance which had been committed by the King of England to the charge of Gillem de Fiennes, a knight of Burgundy. Sir James and his men blackened their armour,

and chose the early part of the night for the time of the attack, and laid themselves prostrate on the ground, and crept on their hands and feet among brushwood and trees, till they came close to the castle. The sentinels on the wall espied them, but supposed them to be cattle; and one of them remarked to another, "The gentleman in the neighbourhood surely means to make good cheer to-night, that he hath no care of his cattle, but leaves them thus in the fields." "He may make good cheer this night," replied the other, "but if the Douglas come at them, he will fare the worse hereafter." Sir James and his men heard this conversation, and were well encouraged by it to proceed. They fastened to the walls ladders of cords, made by an ingenious hero called Simon of the Lead-house; and this person was the first who scaled them, and did so alone, both that he might try their strength, and reconnoitre the state of the watch above. The nearest sentinel on the wall distinctly saw him; but, observing him to be alone, he gave no alarm, and simply stood ready to catch him at the top of the ladder, thinking to knock him down, or to tumble him headlong over the wall. But Simon distinctly saw him too; and, leaping nimbly in upon him ere he was aware, stabbed him with a knife, and threw him over the hither side of the wall; and, another sentinel coming speedily up, Simon despatched him in the same style. Sir James and the rest of the party had now got up; and they marched toward the hall, and there found the garrison in high revelry, most of them drunk, and all of them unarmed; so that they had easy work to do with them what they pleased, and to take immediate possession of the fortress. Gillem de Fiennes was severely wounded with an arrow, and fled into the great tower and remained there all night; but next morning he yielded himself, and afterwards was set free by his captors.

In 1314, Sir James commanded the centre of the Scotch army at the famous battle of Bannockburn. In 1317, while

Bruce was in Ireland, an English army, under the Earl of Arundel, invaded Jedburgh Forest; and Douglas drew them into an ambush, forced them to fight at a disadvantage, discomfited them, and slew with his own hand one of their chief officers, Thomas de Richemont. In the same year, an English force, under Edmond de Cailaud, the governor of Berwick, made a predatory and devastating inroad into Teviotdale; and when they were on their way home laden with plunder, Douglas intercepted them, and slew many of their number, including their leader. Not long after, Douglas got intelligence of a boast by Robert Neville, the successor of Cailaud in the command of Berwick, that he would encounter him whenever he saw his banner displayed; and Douglas advanced to the neighbourhood of Berwick, displayed his banner, and burnt some villages; and, having in consequence provoked Neville to take the field, he killed that boaster, and discomfited his forces. In 1319, Sir James, in conjunction with Randolph, Earl of Moray, entered England by the west marches with 1,500 men, routed the English under the archbishop of York, eluded Edward II., and returned with honour to Scotland.

When Robert the Bruce was on his deathbed, in 1329, he sent for his true friend and companion in arms the Good Sir James, and requested him, that so soon as his spirit had departed to Him who gave it, he should proceed with his heart and deposit it with humility and reverence at the sepulchre of our Lord at Jerusalem. Douglas resolved to carry the request of the dying King into execution, and for this purpose he received a passport from Edward III., dated September 1, 1329. He set sail in the following year with the heart of his honoured master, accompanied by a splendid retinue. Having anchored off Sluys, he was informed that Alphonso XI., the King of Leon and Castile, was engaged in hostilities in Grenada with the Moorish commander Osmyn; and this determined him to pass into Spain, and assist the

Christians to combat the Saracens, preparatory to completing his journey to Jerusalem. Douglas and his friends were warmly received by Alphonso, and having encountered the Saracens at Theba, on the frontiers of Andalusia, on August 25, 1330, they were routed. Douglas eagerly followed in the pursuit, and taking the casket which contained the heart of Bruce, he threw it before him, exclaiming, "Onward, brave heart, that never failed, and Douglas will follow thee or die!" The Saracens rallied, however, and the Good Sir James was slain. His companions found his body upon the field along with the casket, and mournfully conveyed them to Scotland. The heart of the Bruce was deposited at Melrose, although his body was interred in the royal tomb at Dunfermline. The remains of Sir James were buried at Douglas, and a monument erected to him by his brother Archibald. The old poet Barbour, after reciting the circumstances of Sir James' fall in Spain, tells us—

"Quhen his men lang had mad murnyn,
Thai debowlyt him, and syne

"Gert scher him swa, that mycht be tane
The flesh all haly fra the bane,
And the carioune thar in haly place
Erdyt, with richt gret worschip, was.

"The banys have thai with them tane;
And syne ar to thair schippis gane;
Syne towart Scotland held thair way,
And thar ar cummyn in full gret hy.
And the banys honorabilly
In till the kirk off Douglas war
Erdyt, with dull and mekill car.
Schyr Archebald has sone gert syn
Off alabastre, baith fair and fyne,
Or save a tumbe sa richly
As it behowyt to swa werthy."

Douglas Castle, the patrimonial inheritance of the Good Sir James, the scene of his early exploits, and the resting-place of his mortal remains, is the "Castle Dangerous" of Sir Walter Scott's last novel, and was visited by him amid the sad decay of his wondrous powers, while that novel, so immeasurably feebler than his early ones, was in progress. "The remains of the old Castle of Douglas," says he, "are inconsiderable. They consist, indeed, of but one ruined tower, standing at a short distance from the modern mansion, which itself is only a fragment of the design on which the Duke of Douglas meant to reconstruct the edifice, after its last accidental destruction by fire. His Grace had kept in view the ancient prophecy, that, as often as Douglas castle might be destroyed, it should rise again in enlarged dimensions and improved splendour, and projected a pile of building, which, if it had been completed, would have much exceeded any nobleman's residence then existing in Scotland, as, indeed, what has been finished, amounting to about one-eighth of the plan, is sufficiently extensive for the accommodation of a large establishment, and contains some apartments the extent of which are magnificent. The situation is commanding; and though the Duke's successors have allowed the mansion to continue as he left it, great expense has been lavished on the environs, which now present a vast sweep of richly undulated woodland, stretching to the borders of the Cairntable mountains, the favourite retreat of the great ancestor of the family in the days of his hardships and persecution. There remains at the head of the adjoining *bourg*, the choir of the ancient church of St. Bride, having beneath it the vault which was used, till lately, as the burial place of this princely race, and only abandoned when their stone and leaden coffins had accumulated, in the course of five or six hundred years, in such a way that it could accommodate no more. Here a silver case, containing the dust of what was once the brave heart of Good Sir James, is still pointed out; and in the

dilapidated choir above appears, though in a sorely ruinous state, the once magnificent tomb of the warrior himself."—The old church of Douglas was called St. Bride, from being dedicated to St. Bridget or St. Bride. It is a place of great antiquity, and the spire, and aisle which was used as the burying-place of the family of Douglas, are still preserved. The monuments in it are said to have been wantonly mutilated by a party of Cromwell's troopers, who made the edifice a stable for their horses, and at a still later period by the mischievous propensity of the boys of the place, who for a length of time had free access to the aisle. But even in their mutilated state some of them are exquisitely beautiful; and Sir Walter Scott says of the tomb of the Good Sir James, that "the monument, in its original state, must have been not inferior in any respect to the best of the same period in Westminster Abbey."