

THE HEART OF ROBERT BRUCE.

WHEN King Robert Bruce was in his last illness, at Cardross in Dumbartonshire, he requested that, as soon after his death as suitable arrangements could be made, his old and faithful companion in arms, the good Sir James Douglas, should carry his heart to Jerusalem, and humbly deposit it at the Sepulchre of our Lord. One motive for this request may have been state policy, to the effect that Douglas and Randolph, his

two chief barons, of nearly equal fame, had hitherto worked well together principally through his own controlling influence, that they might fall out and form conflicting factions after his death, and that the speedy removal of one of them to a great distance for a sufficient length of time to allow the affairs of the next reign to become consolidated, would powerfully promote the public peace; but the predominant motive, perhaps almost the sole one, was the peculiar superstition of the age,—the associating of a pilgrimage to Palestine and a reverencing of the holy places in Jerusalem with the hope of salvation and the honouring of Christ,—enhanced, in Bruce's case, by remorse for the murder of the Red Comyn at Dumfries, by the habit of doing homage to sacred places and saintly relics throughout the vicissitudes and perils of his eventful life, and by a purpose which he had long cherished, but now felt to be for ever disappointed, of completing his military renown and giving evidence of his faith and zeal in the cause of the Catholic religion, by carrying his arms into Syria, and there performing high soldierly service against the Saracens.

The royal heart was put into a precious casket; and, in June 1350, exactly a twelvemonth after Bruce died, Douglas set sail with it, at the head of a numerous and splendid retinue. Froissart says that he had in his train a knight bearing a banner, seven other knights, twenty-six squires, all "comely young men of good family," and many attendants of inferior rank; that he kept open table, with timbrels and trumpets, as if he had been king of Scotland; that he was served on gold and silver plate; and that all persons of condition who visited him on ship-board were well entertained with a variety of wine and condiments. He anchored off Sluys in Flanders—then the great emporium of the Low Countries—expecting to find there adventurers who would take part in his expedition to Jerusalem; and he remained twelve days, receiving many visitors with princely hospita-

lity, and astonishing them by the magnificence of his retinue and equipments.

At Sluys he learned that Alonzo, the young king of Leon and Castile, was carrying on a war with Osmyn, the Moorish governor of Granada; and he felt a sudden and strong sympathy with him, and resolved to visit Spain, and render him assistance against the Saracens, before proceeding to Palestine. He seems indeed to have cherished some firm general idea in this direction from the very commencement of his preparations to carry away the royal heart; for on the 1st of September, 1326, he obtained from Edward III. of England a passport, "*Versus Terram Sanctam in auxilium Christianorum contra Saracenos cum corde Domini Roberti Regis Scotiæ nuper defuncti.*" And, at all events, he felt stimulated by the spirit of the times, which regarded all warfare against the Saracens as a holy service; and he probably viewed the opportunity of attempting some exploit against them in Spain as a providential occasion for promoting and making illustrious the grand ultimate object of his mission to Jerusalem.

Douglas and his companions were received with great respect and favour by Alonzo, and had an honourable place assigned to them in the Spanish army. Some of Alonzo's chief men were veteran warriors, and brave, and were well able to appreciate the enterprise and heroism which brought the Scottish travellers to their standard. "I am astonished," said one of them, whose face was wholly disfigured with the scars of wounds received in battle,—addressing himself to Douglas,—“I am astonished that you, who are said to have seen much service, should have no marks of wounds on your face.” “Thank Heaven,” replied Douglas, “I had always an arm to protect my face.”

The Spaniards, with their new allies, marched out against the Moors, and came in view of their camp near Theba, on the frontier of Andalusia, toward the kingdom of Granada.

Osmyn the Moor made arrangements that three thousand of his horsemen should make a feigned attack on the Spaniards, while he himself, with the rest of his army, should make a concealed circuitous march, and fall on the rear of the Spanish camp by surprise. But Alonzo got intelligence of his stratagem, and set a sufficient body of troops to oppose the feigned attack, and drew up his main force, including the Scots, in readiness to receive the onset from the rear. When therefore the Moorish army came in sight from their circuitous march, the Spaniards readily repulsed them, and broke up their array, and drove them back in discomfiture and flight; nor did they stop the chase till they reached the Moors' camp, and got possession of their stores and baggage. Douglas and his companions even went farther and became hotter; for while most of the Spaniards drew bridle at the camp, the Scots thought only of hunting down the Saracens, and therefore continued to pursue them till the number of the pursuers became a mere handful compared to the host of the pursued. The Moors soon perceived this, and rallied in strong force, kept their ground, and surrounded the Scots. Douglas endeavoured to cut his way through the enemy, and most probably would have succeeded, had he not turned at a critical point of the contest, to attempt the rescue of Sir William Saint Clair of Roslin, whom he saw to be in imminent danger. In making this attempt, he became inextricably involved with the Moors; and, taking from his neck the casket which contained the heart of Bruce, he cast it before him, and cried aloud, "Onward, brave heart, that never failed, and Douglas will follow thee or die." And, a few moments after, a body of the Spaniards came down like a hurricane, and swept away the Moors. The conflict down to this crisis is graphically described as follows by Mr Aytoun, in his "Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers:"—

“The trumpets blew, the cross-bolts flew,
The arrows flashed like flame,
As spur in side, and spear in rest,
Against the foe we came,

And many a bearded Saracen
Went down both horse and man ;
For through their ranks we rode like corn,
So furiously we ran!

But in behind our path they closed,
Though fain to let us through,
For they were forty thousand men,
And we were wondrous few.

We might not see a lance's length,
So dense was their array,
But the long fell sweep of the Scottish blade
Still held them hard at bay.

‘Make in! make in!’ Lord Douglas cried,
‘Make in, my brethren dear!
Sir William of Saint Clair is down ;
We may not leave him here!’

But thicker, thicker, grew the swarm,
And sharper shot the rain,
And the horses reared amid the press,
But they would not charge again.

‘Now Jesu help thee,’ said Lord James
‘Thou kind and true St. Clair!
And if I may not bring thee off,
‘I’ll die beside thee there!’

Then in his stirrups up he stood,
So lionlike and bold,
And held the precious heart aloft
All in its case of gold.

He flung it from him, far ahead,
And never spake he more,
But—'Pass thee first, thou dauntless heart,
As thou wert wont of yore!'

The roar of fight rose fiercer yet
And heavier still the stour,
Till the spears of Spain came shivering in
And swept away the Moor."

But Douglas fell and died amidst the mellee; and three of his knights, and many of his companions, were slain around him. His body and the casket of the royal heart were afterwards found by his surviving friends, and conveyed mournfully to Scotland; and the former was entombed in the Douglas cemetery at Douglas, and the latter in the abbey of Melrose. The Douglasses have ever since borne the armorial device of the Bloody Heart surmounted by the crown; and the descendants of the knight who brought the royal heart and the body of Douglas home from Spain, adopted the name of Lockhart and took for their effigy a heart within a fetterlock.