

THE BATTLE OF SHERIFFMUIR.

THE battle of Sheriffmuir, sometimes called the battle of Dunblane, was fought on the 13th of November, 1715, between an army of Jacobites upwards of 8,000 strong under the Earl of Mar, and an army of royalists, about 3,500 strong, under the Duke of Argyle. Its occurrence was simultaneous with the battle of Preston, recorded on pp. 139-149 of the

Third Volume of these Tales. The scene of it is a boggy uncultivated tract, on the lower part of the declivity of the Ochil Hills, a little north-east of the town of Dunblane.

The Earl of Mar, just after having taken up his quarters at Perth, was informed that the Duke of Argyle had returned from the Lothians to Stirling; and, having been joined by the northern clans under the Earl of Seaforth, and expecting to be joined also by those of the west under General Gordon, he thought he could not do better than force the passage of the Forth, and march away southward to form a junction with the Jacobite forces on the Scottish border and in England. He left Perth at the head of his army on the 10th of November; and he proceeded on that day as far as Auchterarder, and there he reviewed his troops, and allowed them to dispose themselves to rest. On the 11th, he remained at Auchterarder, and was joined by the western clans under General Gordon; and on the morning of the 12th, he ordered Gordon to march forward with 3,000 of the Highlanders, and eight squadrons of horse under Brigadier Ogilvy and the master of Sinclair, and take possession of Dunblane. After ordering the rest of the army to parade on the moor of Tullibardine, he departed for Drummond castle to hold an interview with the Earl of Breadalbane, having previously directed General Hamilton to follow Gordon with the main body.

As early as the morning of the 10th, the Duke of Argyle had received intelligence from some of his spies at Perth of Mar's intended march, and of his plan for effecting the passage of the Forth. Fortunately for Argyle, his little army had been lately almost doubled by reinforcements from Ireland; and it now amounted to 2,300 foot and 1,200 horse, all in the best order and condition. But though formidable from its composition when united, it was too weak to divide into detachments for resisting at different points the passage of an army thrice as numerous, in an attempt to cross the

Forth. As Argyle, therefore, saw he could no longer retain his position on the banks of the river, which, from its now beginning to freeze, would soon be rendered more passable than before, he determined to cross the river and offer the insurgents battle before they should reach its northern bank. Though he exposed himself by this bold step to the disadvantage of fighting with a river in his rear, he considered that the risk would be sufficiently counterbalanced by the advantage which his cavalry would have by engaging the enemy on level ground.

Having called in several small detachments which were quartered at Glasgow, Kilsyth, and Falkirk, Argyle crossed Stirling bridge on the morning of the 12th for Dunblane, much about the same time that Mar's forces had begun to advance upon that town in an opposite direction from Auchterarder. In a short time after their setting out, Argyle's advanced guard took possession of Dunblane; of which circumstance General Gordon was apprized on his march. Having halted his division, Gordon sent an express, announcing the intelligence to General Hamilton, who despatched it to the Earl of Mar; and in a short time he forwarded a second express confirming the previous news, and adding that the enemy were in great force. Hamilton, upon receipt of this last despatch, halted his men on the ground adjoining the Roman camp at Ardoch, about five miles from Dunblane, till he should receive instructions from the Earl. Mar soon thereafter returned from Drummond castle; and being desirous of obtaining additional intelligence from the general in advance, ordered Hamilton to remain in his position, and to hold his men in readiness to march on a moment's notice. This order had however been scarcely issued, when a fresh despatch arrived from General Gordon, announcing that the Duke of Argyle was in Dunblane with his whole army. Mar thereupon sent an express to Gordon, desiring him to remain where he was till the main body of the army should come

up; and having ordered three guns to be fired, the signal agreed upon to be given Hamilton for putting his men in marching order, the latter immediately formed his division and put it in motion. After a junction between the two divisions of the army had been formed, the insurgents marched to the bridge of Kinbuck, about four miles from Dunblane, where they passed the night under arms without any covering or tent.

The Duke of Argyle, who had the most exact intelligence brought to him of the motions of the insurgents, left Dunblane and formed his army in order of battle in the evening, on a rising ground above the house of Kippenross, about two miles north-east from the town. His army was drawn up in one extended line. In the centre were eight battalions of foot under the command of Major General Wightman; the right wing consisted of five squadrons of dragoons, under Lieutenant-General Evans; and a similar number, at the head of whom was Lieutenant-General Whitham, composed the left wing. After thus drawing up his men, the Duke issued orders that no tent should be pitched during the night either by officer or private soldier; that all the officers without distinction should remain at their posts; and that the troops should rest on their arms in the exact order in which they had been formed. The severest penalties were threatened those who should infringe these orders. Though the night was extremely cold, the troops prostrated themselves upon the bare ground, and snatched a few hours repose. The Duke himself retired to a sheep-cote at the foot of a hill on the right of the army, where he passed the night sitting on a bundle of straw. Intelligence having been brought him at midnight of the near position of the enemy, he ordered six rounds of ammunition to be distributed to each man in addition to twenty-four which they had already received. This order was carried into effect before two o'clock in the morning.

Although the two armies had bivouacked during the night within three miles of each other, and were separated only by the Sheriffmuir, yet so ignorant was Mar of the movements of Argyle, that so far from supposing him to be within such a short distance of his camp, he imagined that he still remained at Dunblane; and it was not until he observed a reconnoitring party of Argyle's cavalry on the adjoining heights of the Sheriffmuir next morning, that he became aware of his immediate proximity. This party was headed by the Duke himself, who had aroused his army by break of day, and who, after issuing instructions to his men to prepare for battle, had ascended at an early hour the hill where his advanced guard was posted to survey the position of the insurgents.

The Earl of Mar had also put his men under arms shortly after break of day; and when Argyle's party of observation was first noticed, he was busily engaged ranging his men in marching order, preparatory to advancing upon Dunblane. Conceiving that Argyle meant to offer him battle immediately, he instantly assembled all the chiefs in front of his horse, and after addressing them in an eloquent speech, in which he painted in glowing colours the wrongs of their prince and their country, and congratulated them that the day had at length arrived when they could revenge their injuries in open battle, he desired to know if they were willing to engage. The Marquis of Huntly alone raised some objections, and some few were heard in under-tone to advise a return to Perth till the spring; but the voices of Huntly and his supporters were drowned by loud shouts of "fight, fight!" from the rest, who at once galloped off to their different posts.

The Earl of Mar thereupon resumed the marshalling of his army, which formed into two lines with a rapidity and decision, which would have done honour to veteran troops; but by accident, three squadrons of horse posted on the left, misled by a cry from the Highlanders, of "horse to the

right," left their position and took ground on the right,—an unfortunate mistake for the insurgents, as it contributed to the defeat of their left wing. The centre of the first line was composed of ten battalions of foot, consisting of about 4,000 men under the command of the captain of Clanranald, Glen-gary, Sir John Maclean, the laird of Glenbucket, Brigadier Ogilvy, and the two brothers of Sir Donald Macdonald of Sleat. General Gordon, who had long served in the army of the Czar of Muscovy, was at the head of these battalions. On the right of this line were placed two of the Marquis of Huntly's squadrons of horse, and another called the Stirling squadron, which carried the Chevalier's standard. This squadron, which consisted wholly of gentlemen, also bore the title of "the Restoration regiment of horse." The Perthshire squadron formed the left wing. The centre of the second line consisted of eight battalions of foot, viz., three of the Earl of Seaforth's foot, two of the Marquis of Huntly's, the Earl of Panmure's battalion, and those of the Marquis of Tullibardine of Drummond, commanded by the Viscount of Strathallan, and of Logie-Almond, and Robertson of Struan. On the right of this second line were posted two squadrons of horse under the Earl Marischal. The Angus squadron was on the left. The whole of the force thus formed for action may be estimated at 8,000, besides which there was a *corps de reserve* of 400 horse posted considerably in the rear.

While this formation was going on, the Duke of Argyle observed for several hours with great attention the various evolutions of the insurgents; but from the nature of the ground occupied by them, he could not obtain a full view of their line, which extended through a hollow way, the view of which was obstructed by the brow of a hill which was occupied by a party of Mar's troops. From Mar's advanced guards looking towards Dunblane, the Duke conjectured that the insurgents intended to march in that direction; but

he was undeceived in this idea by a movement on the part of a mass of the insurgents towards his right, as if they intended to cross the moor and fall upon the flank of his army. As a large morass lay in the way of the insurgents, Argyle, in advancing from Dunblane, had conceived himself free from danger on that side; but it had now been rendered quite passable for foot as well as horse by a keen frost during the preceding night. As soon as Argyle saw this large body advance up the face of the moor, which, from the right wing of the insurgents being concealed from his view by a rising ground, he supposed was the main body of Mar's army, he requested the advice of the officers who surrounded him as to how he should act. It was the general opinion, an opinion in which the Duke himself concurred, that there would be less risk in engaging the insurgents on the high grounds than in waiting for them in the position occupied by the Duke's army; but although most of the officers thought that there would not be sufficient time to bring forward the troops and to change the order of battle, a change which was absolutely necessary, the Duke resolved to draw out his troops upon the moor.

Having come to this determination, the Duke returned quickly to the army, and ordered the drums to beat the *General*. This order was given about eleven o'clock; but although the drums instantly beat to arms, an hour elapsed before the troops were ready to march. The new order of battle was as follows:—The Duke's first line consisted of six battalions of foot, all old troops, amounting scarcely to 1,800 men. On the right were posted three squadrons of dragoons, being the best in the army, namely Evans's, the Scots Greys, and the Earl of Stairs. On the left there were placed three squadrons of dragoons, namely, Carpenter's, Ker's, and a squadron of Stairs. The second line was composed of only two battalions of foot, with a squadron of dragoons on each wing. The right wing of the army was commanded by the

Duke himself, the centre by General Wightman, and the left by General Whitham. Behind Evans's dragoons, on the right wing, a body of about sixty horse, noblemen and gentlemen volunteers, took up a station.

The body which Argyle had observed coming up the face of the moor, was a squadron of the Earl Marischal's horse and Sir Donald Macdonald's battalion, under their respective commanders. These had been despatched by the Earl of Mar, to drive away the reconnoitring party under the Duke of Argyle from the height; but on its disappearing, they returned and reported the circumstance to the Earl. On receiving this intelligence, Mar gave orders to his troops to march up the hill in four columns. The whole army was accordingly put in motion; but they had not proceeded far when the Earl Marischal, who was in advance, observed Argyle forming his lines on the southern summit of the hill, at a short distance from him. He immediately notified the circumstance to Mar, who instantly gave orders to his men to quicken their pace up the hill. In the hurry of their ascent, the second line pressed so closely upon the first as to occasion some confusion on the left when again getting into line; and it was in consequence of this disorder that the squadrons of horse forsook their position on the left, and took ground on the right.

Before the insurgents reached the summit of the moor, Argyle's right wing was fully formed; but the greater part of his centre and left, who were moving up the ascent by a gradual progression from right to left, had not yet reached their ground. Argyle's right now found itself within pistol-shot of Mar's left; but from the greater extent of Mar's line, it considerably outflanked Argyle's left. As soon as the Earl of Mar perceived that Argyle's line was only partially formed, he resolved instantly to attack him before he should be able to complete his arrangements; and having sent orders to his right and left to fall simultaneously upon the enemy, Mar

placed himself at the head of the clans; and being apprized by a firing on his left that the action had commenced, he pulled off his hat, which he waved, and with a huzza led forward his men upon the half-formed battalions which composed the left wing of the enemy.

Arrived within pistol-shot, the Highlanders, according to custom, poured in a volley upon the English infantry. The fire was instantly returned; and, to the dismay of the Highlanders, Alan Muidartach, the captain of Clanranald, was mortally wounded. He was instantly carried off the field, and, as his men clustered around him, he encouraged them to stand firm to their posts, and expressed a hope that the result of the struggle in which they were engaged would be favourable to the cause of his sovereign. The loss of a chief, who, from the stately magnificence with which he upheld his feudal rank, and the urbanity of his disposition, had acquired an ascendancy over the minds of his people, could not fail to depress their spirits, and make them almost overlook the danger of their situation. While absorbed in grief, they were in a moment roused from their dejection by Glengary, who, observing their conduct at this juncture, sprung forward, and throwing his bonnet into the air, cried aloud, in the expressive language of his country, "Revenge! Revenge! Revenge to-day and mourning to-morrow!" No sooner had this brave chieftain pronounced these words, than the Highlanders rushed forward, sword in hand, with the utmost fury, upon the royalist battalions.

The government troops attempted to stem the impetuosity of the attack, by opposing the Highlanders with fixed bayonets, but the latter pushed them aside with their targets, and rushing in with their broad swords among the enemy spread death and terror around them. The three battalions on Argyle's left, which had never been properly formed, unable to rally, instantly gave way, and falling back upon some squadrons of horse in their rear, created such confusion,

that within seven or eight minutes after the assault, the form of a battalion or squadron was no longer discernible. A complete rout ensued; and there seems no doubt that the whole of Argyle's left would have been completely destroyed, had not General Whitham, at the head of the squadrons which were upon the left of the battalions, checked the advance of Mar's horse by a charge, in which he succeeded in capturing a standard. Afraid of being outflanked by Argyle's left wing, which extended far beyond his position, and being ignorant of what was passing on the right wing of the royalists, the view of which was concealed by the unevenness of the ground, Whitham retired in the direction of Dunblane. The earl of Mar pursued the disordered mass to the distance of only half a mile, and having ordered his foot to halt till he should put them in order, resolved to follow the enemy and complete the victory; but receiving intelligence that his left wing and second line had given way, and that his artillery had been taken, he retraced his steps, and took up a position on the top of the stony hill of Kippendavie, till he should receive further information respecting the fate of his left wing.

This wing, which was the first to begin the attack, opened a fire upon Argyle's right wing when almost within pistol-shot. The Highlanders thereafter steadily advanced, and pouring a second volley among the enemy, with a precision and effect not to be surpassed by the best disciplined troops, rushed up, sword in hand, to the very muzzles of their muskets. Though the fire was destructive, and made Evans's dragoons reel for a time, the English troops maintained their ground, and the foot kept up a platooning, which checked the fury of their assailants. The struggle continued for some time without any decided advantage on either side; but as Argyle began to perceive that he could make no impression in front upon the numerous masses of the insurgents, and that he might be outflanked by them, he resolved to attack

them on their flank with part of his cavalry, while his foot should gall them with their fire in front. He therefore ordered Colonel Cathcart to move along the morass to the right with a strong body of cavalry, and to fall upon the flank of Mar's left wing,—a movement which he executed with great skill. Cathcart, after receiving a fire from the insurgent horse, immediately charged them, but they sustained the assault with great firmness. Borne down by the superior weight of the English dragoons, whose horses were much larger than those of the insurgents, the Scottish horse, after nearly half-an-hour's contest, were compelled to give way. The foot of Argyle's right having made a simultaneous attack upon Mar's first line of foot, the latter also were forced to fall back, and Mar's horse and foot coming into contact with his second line, they mixed indiscriminately, and a general rout in consequence ensued.

After receding a short distance, the insurgent horse, which consisted principally of the Jacobite gentry of Perthshire and Angus, attempted to rally, and even to charge Argyle's cavalry in their turn, but they were again forced to retire by the pressure of the English dragoons, who kept advancing in regular order upon the receding masses of the insurgents. Determined, however, not to yield one inch of ground without the utmost necessity, the cavalier horse made repeated efforts to drive the enemy back, and, in the course of their retreat, made ten or twelve attempts at different places to rally and charge the advancing foe; but unable to resist the overwhelming pressure of the English cavalry, they were, after three hours' hard fighting, driven across the river Allan by Argyle's dragoons. Some idea may be formed of the obstinacy of the contest, when it is considered that the distance from the field of battle to the river is scarcely three miles. To the gallant stand made by the horse may be ascribed the safety of the foot, who would have been probably all cut to pieces by the dragoons, if the attention of the latter had not

been chiefly occupied by the horse. The foot, however, suffered considerably in the retreat, notwithstanding the humanity of the Duke of Argyle, who endeavoured to restrain the carnage. Besides offering quarter to such of the Jacobite gentlemen as were personally known to him, he displayed his anxiety for the preservation of his countrymen so far, that on observing a party of his dragoons cutting down a body of foot, into which they had thrown themselves, he exclaimed with a feeling of deep emotion, "Oh, spare the poor Blue-bonnets!"

As Mar's right wing had been concealed from the view of Argyle, the latter conceived that the numerous body he was driving before him formed the entire of the insurgent army. He, therefore, resolved to continue the pursuit till dark, and to support him, he ordered General Wightman, who commanded his foot upon the right, to follow him with his battalions as quickly as possible. Wightman accordingly proceeded to follow the Duke with a force of rather more than three regiments; but he had not marched far, when he heard a firing on his left, to ascertain the cause of which, he sent his aid-de-camp in the direction whence the firing proceeded. This officer returned in a short time, and reported that the half of Argyle's foot, and the squadrons on the left, had all been cut off by the right of the insurgents, which was superior in point of numbers to Argyle's left. Wightman thereupon slackened his pace, and despatched a messenger to inform the Duke of the fate of his left wing. Afraid of being attacked in his rear by Mar's right wing, he kept his men in perfect order, but no demonstration was made to follow him.

When informed of the defeat of his left wing, Argyle gave over the pursuit, and joining Wightman with five squadrons of dragoons, put his men in order of battle and marched boldly to the bottom of the hill, on the top of which the enemy, amounting to 4,000 men, were advantageously posted.

Argyle had now scarcely 1,000 men under him, and as these were already greatly exhausted, he judged it expedient to act on the defensive; and accordingly he posted his men behind some enclosures at the bottom of the hill, ready to repel any attack which the enemy might make. For better protection he posted two pieces of cannon on his right and left, to play upon the enemy should they approach; but the insurgents showed no disposition to engage, and both parties, as if by mutual consent, retired from their positions in different directions. The Duke filed off his men to the right, in marching order, towards Dunblane; but as he still dreaded an attack, he formed his men several times on the march, wherever he found the ground convenient, and waited the approach of the enemy. Mar drew off his men toward Ardoch, where he passed the night, and Argyle's troops lay under arms during the night in the neighbourhood of Dunblane.

As might have been expected, on an occasion of such dubious success on either side, both parties claimed a victory, but impartiality will confer the palm on neither. Argyle, it is true, visited the field of battle the following morning, which Mar might also have done had he been inclined, and this circumstance, therefore, can afford no argument in support of his pretensions. Neither can the capture of standards and colours by Argyle be considered as a proof of success, for although he took fourteen colours and standards, including the royal standard called "the Restoration," besides six pieces of cannon and other trophies, Mar, according to the official Jacobite account, captured four stands of colours, several drums, and about fourteen or fifteen hundred stands of arms. The following verse from the well-known ballad on the battle of Sheriffmuir, though sufficiently rough, appears to be truly descriptive:

“ There’s some say that we wan,
And some say that they wan,
And some say that nane wan at a’ man;
But ae thing I’m sure,
That at Sheriffmuir
A battle there was that I saw, man;
And we ran and they ran, and they ran and we ran,
And we ran and they ran awa, man.”

Accounts the most contradictory were given by the two parties respecting the losses which they sustained. According to the rolls of Argyle’s muster-master general, his loss amounted to 290 men killed, 87 wounded, and 133 prisoners, making a grand total of 510; while the Jacobite account makes the loss in killed and wounded on the side of Argyle amount to between 700 and 800, and states the number of killed on Mar’s side as only one in fifteen to those of Argyle. On the other hand, the Jacobites state their loss in killed at only 60, and that very few of their men were wounded, while the royalists say that they lost, in killed and wounded, about 800 men. From these statements it appears that the main discrepancy relates to the loss on the Jacobite side, which can neither be admitted to the extent of the royalist account, nor considered so low as that given by the Jacobites. But even supposing the royalist statement correct, the comparative loss of the insurgents scarcely exceeded one-third of that sustained by the government forces.

Several officers were killed on the royalist side. Among the wounded was the Earl of Forfar, a brave officer who commanded Morison’s regiment. He received a shot in the knee, and sixteen other wounds, of which he died at Stirling about three weeks after the battle. Several persons of distinction were killed on the side of the insurgents, among whom were the Earl of Strathmore, and the captain of Clanranald. A considerable number of gentlemen were

taken prisoners by Argyle, but many of them escaped, and he was enabled to carry only eighty-two of them to Stirling. Of this number were Lord Strathallan, Thomas Drummond his brother, Walkinshaw of Barrowfield, Drummond of Logie-Drummond, and Murray of Auchtertyre.