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AND
ITS CLAIMANTS.



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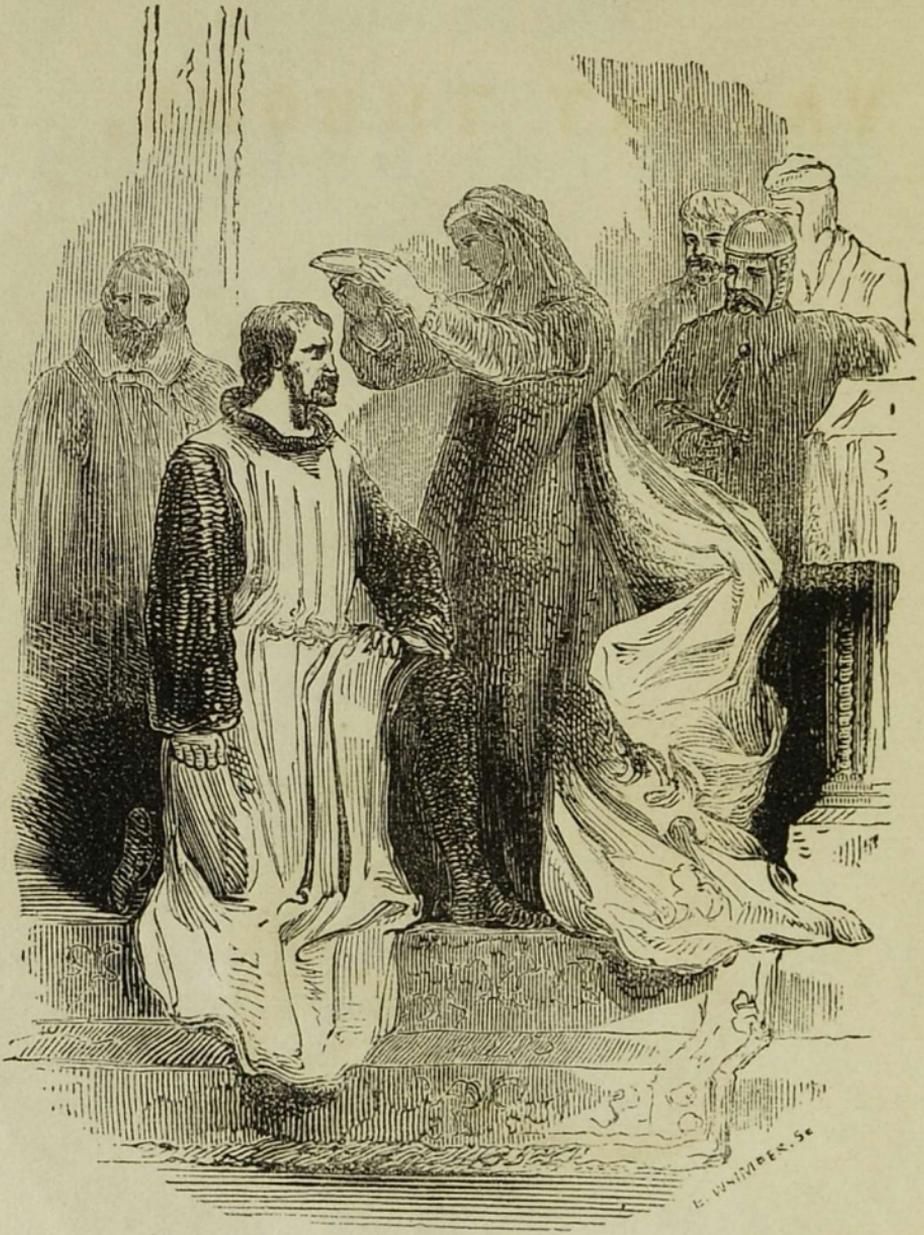
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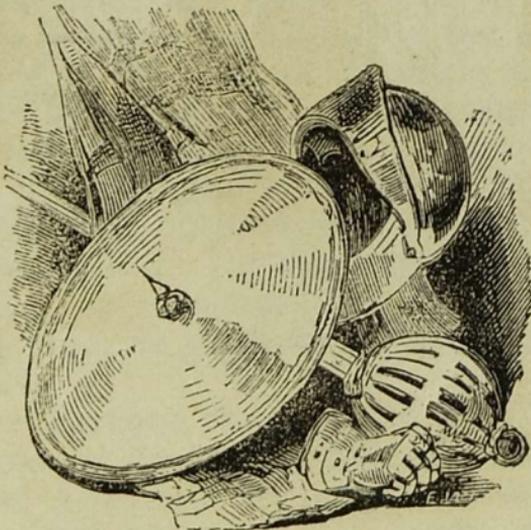


Coronation of Robert Bruce.

THE
VACANT THRONE,

AND
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A Scottish Story.



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A SCOTTISH STORY.



CHAPTER I.

A SHORT time ago, while I was looking over some curious books in the Library of the British Museum, I opened an old Poetical Chronicle of the "Life and Acts of Robert Bruce." In its cramped old English characters, and quaint Scotch expressions and style, I fear that to most British children, whether north or south of the Tweed, it would be unintelligible in the present day; but some of the adventures which it relates, are so pleasantly told, that I have gleaned a little from its pages for the amusement of youthful readers.

John Barbour, the author of this life of Bruce, was the greatest Scottish historian of his day, and was born at Aberdeen, about the year 1316; but according to some accounts, still later. He was a Poet, as well as Historian, and was made Archdeacon of Aberdeen, by David the Second, in 1356. With the help therefore of John Barbour, Buchanan, a celebrated author, who lived some years later, and others, I hope to have woven a pleasant tale, not the

less pleasant, because it is so far as we can know at this distance of time strictly true. I cannot better begin the story of Bruce than with Barbour's own preface.

“If stories to read be most delectable,
Suppose that they be nought but fable,
Then should not stories that **sooth fast* be?
If they be told in good mannere,
Have double pleasance in the hearing?”

In the days of our English King Edward of warlike memory, Scotland was thrown into great distress and confusion by the sudden death of its monarch, Alexander the Third. A good and wise king for the half-civilised times in which he lived, and greatly beloved by his people.

As he was riding in the dark one night along the sea coast of Fife, between Burntisland and Kinghorn, he approached too near the edge of the precipice, and his horse stumbling, he was thrown over the rocks, and killed on the spot, on the 16th of March, 1286.

Although this sad event occurred more than 500 years ago, the country people will still point out to you the very spot, called in remembrance of the accident, King's Craig. And there is a kind of elegy still preserved to his memory, one of the oldest specimens known of the Scottish language, which translated runs thus :—

“When Alexander, our king, was dead ;
Who Scotland kept in love and le,
Away was wealth of ale and bread,
Of wine and wax, of game and glee.
Then pray to God ! since only He,
Can succour Scotland in her need,
That placed is in perplexity.”

* *Sooth fast* means quite true.

The great cause of this perplexity was, that Alexander had left no children to inherit the crown, and the only direct heir was an infant grandchild, the daughter of his deceased child Margaret. This Margaret had some years before married Eric, King of Norway, and the little princess was known by the title of the Maid of Norway.

No dispute occurred relative to her right to the crown, and as she was so young, a regency was appointed ; that is to say, certain persons were chosen to direct the affairs of the kingdom, until she should herself be of an age to reign. Edward the First of England, her great uncle, therefore looked anxiously on this little maiden, and thought how desirable a thing it would be, that the maid of Norway should be united in marriage to his eldest son Edward, Prince of Wales. And now at seven years old, the poor child was taken from her nursery joys, and her little playfellows, to have her hand given to this unknown English cousin, and to leave her father's court for the rough and stormy seas. She was spared, however, that which might have been a still rougher passage through life—for the voyage in the month of October, proved too great a trial for her strength, and she became so ill that the vessel was obliged suddenly to land her on one of the Orkney isles, where after languishing a short time she died, leaving her vacant throne to be fought and bled for during many a long succeeding year. Thus Edward's grand scheme of uniting England and Scotland, by the marriage of the cousins having failed, he had to turn his attention to other means for its accomplishment. On reading the history of this period, one would have thought, indeed, that Edward had enough of conquest on hand already, but it seemed a growing taste with him, and like the love of money increased by indulgence.

And now you must patiently give your mind to

those circumstances which account for, if they do not altogether excuse, Edward's interference in the affair of the Scottish succession. There are two sides to every question, and we should, in reading history, try to weigh and compare if we would come to a just and fair decision.

There was a system prevalent in England and Scotland in early times, as well as in most European countries, called the Feudal system. Great kings, lords, earls, and even private gentlemen, were accustomed to grant provinces or lands, as the case might be, to their inferiors. The king of a country would sometimes grant whole provinces to some grandee among his subjects, and this duke or earl possessed nearly as much power in his own district as the king in the rest of his dominions; but then the vassal, as the person who held such lands under the king was called, was obliged to acknowledge him as master, or liege lord, to obey his summons to battle, to provide a certain number of soldiers whenever his master went to war, and in times of peace to attend him at court, as often as he was required. Now, it had happened that at the time the English were so busy fighting among themselves, and afterwards with the Normans, that their northern neighbours, the Scots, had enlarged their own territories by little encroachments on those of the English. They had crossed the river Tweed and the Cheviot Hills, and settled themselves down on some fine lands in Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmoreland.

When there came a quiet interval after these foreign wars and home quarrels, and the English had time to look about them, they were not greatly pleased to see the Scots making themselves so much at home on the English side of the Border. After much dispute, however, it was agreed that the King of Scotland should keep these English counties, or such parts as he already possessed, not as an independent

sovereign, but as a vassal of the King of England. For many years, therefore, the Scottish kings had performed homage to those of England, but the precise object of this homage was rather doubtful. The one nation declaring it was made for the *crown* of Scotland, the other that it was merely for the *lands* held. Sometimes, indeed, when a new king came to the throne, there was a sharp contention about the matter; and when Edward the First succeeded his father, there had been a struggle which at one time threatened to end in war. One of our historians declares that Alexander the Third did consent to do homage to the English king on his knees. I think you will now understand me when I tell you, that Edward pretended, at the death of the Maid of Norway, that he had a right to decide the disputed question of the succession. Indeed the Scots did not wait for him to offer himself for that purpose, but requested him to become the judge of this difficult question.

The claimants were no fewer than twelve, but only three of these appeared to have much justice in their pretensions. The names of these three were Bruce, Baliol, and Comyn. Bruce and Baliol were each descended from a daughter of David, Earl of Huntingdon, brother of the king, famous in early Scottish history as William the Lion. William the Lion was great uncle of the late king Alexander.

Baliol was the grandson of the *elder* daughter, Bruce the son of the *younger*; and the question was, which had the greater right to the crown. That difficulty would be settled now beyond any dispute; for you know that while any branch of the elder son of a royal family is living, the younger branches, even though more nearly related, are set aside; but in those times the point was often disputed, as in the present case; and this was the matter for Edward to decide, whether Bruce, the son of the

younger, or Baliol, the grandson of the elder, should reign. His first act was to write letters to all the barons, prelates, and gentlemen of Scotland, to announce his title as judge, and to appoint a day for the parties to meet him at the strong Castle of Norham, in Northumberland. Norham is a crumbling ruin at the present time, on a steep wooded bank overhanging the Tweed; but in the days of Bruce it was a noble building. The day came; and at Norham church, within the Castle boundaries, the English Justice informed the assembled people, that Edward had come to decide the great question of the rightful heir to the throne, but that the king required first an acknowledgment that he was lord paramount, or sovereign of that kingdom, and that whoever came to the Scottish throne, should hold the crown under him as such.

The nobles and churchmen of Scotland drew back at this bold assumption, but there was no disposition to yield in the proud face of Edward, who sat at Norham, in great state, attended by the principal officers of his court. He was the handsomest man of the time, and so tall that he was called Long-shanks, or Long-legs.

The deputies replied that they must have time to consider these conditions, and to consult a little among themselves.

‘By St. Edward,’ said the king, ‘whose crown I wear, I will make good my just rights, or perish in the attempt!’

The assembly was then dismissed; but on the 11th of June, 1291, they met again, and consented to Edward’s terms.

Barbour the Chronicler bitterly laments the proceedings of that day in these words:—“A blinded folk, full of all folly. Had ye ta’en keep* how this

* Heeded.

great king, alway forsaking sojourning, travailed to win seniority, and through his might, to occupy lands that to him were but as merchand, as Wales was, and also Ireland. But ye trusted unto law tie. A simple folk, but *malwittie*.”*

Twelve English, and twelve Scotchmen, were appointed to deliberate on the affair. They were to be strictly kept from all intercourse with others, until they had come to a decision. This is on the same principle, you know, that in our courts of law, the jury are prevented from associating with any one until they have come to a unanimous opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused party, so that they may simply judge from facts, and not suffer themselves to be biassed by the thoughts of other persons. Edward the First, however, broke through the regulation, and, it is said, went secretly in among them, trying to make them think as he did, and perplexing them with the opinions of French lawyers, whom he had consulted; thus, after all, leaving the poor jury more puzzled than ever.

At length the decision was made, and it was in favour of John Baliol, who was accordingly chosen king, but a king only in name, as he found to his cost.

The regency was at an end, and Baliol swore fealty to Edward in these words:—“Hear you this, my lord Edward, King of England, lord of the realm of Scotland, that I, John Baliol, King of Scotland, do swear fealty for the realm of Scotland, which I do hold, and claim to hold of you.”

Five weeks later, this oath was repeated by Edward’s desire at Newcastle-on-Tyne, so you see, that after all, John Baliol was only a kind of subordinate king, and that he held his crown in the same way that men hold lands as tenants, and not as

* Ill-judged.

owners. Bruce at this time was an old man, and having no ambition to run further into the disputes which doubtless he saw threatening, gave up his Lordship of Annandale, and retired from the busy scene. His son also shortly after did the same, and it is of the grandson of this Bruce, who was the first competitor with Baliol, that you will now hear such a wonderful history.



CHAPTER II.

THE KING AND HIS VASSAL.

WE must not leave Baliol until we see how he gets on with his master, for such Edward doubtless was. To obtain a crown, he had been content to wear it as a vassal, and many a cause of vexation and humiliation arose from his position. If a subject were discontented with any of his acts, he had only to appeal to the superior lord for redress, and Baliol was humbled by one of his own people. On one occasion, it happened that Macduff, Earl of Fife, who had been one of the Six Governors at the time of the Regency, was murdered by one of the Abernethies, a proud and powerful family in Scotland, and the earl's brother being accused of the murder, was called to answer for his crime. The judgment of Baliol was in favour of Abernethy, and Macduff's family were dispossessed of their estates. This so greatly incensed Macduff's brother with Baliol that he went and complained to King Edward. The cause was taken to London, and as Baliol in the rank of a brother king was sitting by Edward in Parliament, he was told to rise from his seat and plead in the Lower House. Baliol bore this insult silently, but anger burned in his breast, and when Edward shortly after made war with France, Baliol not only refused to supply troops for his assistance, but even went so far as to enter into correspondence with the French king against Edward. In fact, he had thrown off his allegiance, but hesitated to declare it, and so violent was the passion of the English

king, that it was with difficulty a messenger could be found to convey Baliol's letter to him. At last a mild Abbot of Aberbrothwic was induced to carry the unwelcome information. There were no posts in those days you know, and a journey from Scotland to England in those turbulent times was not so easy a matter as at present. Edward's indignation was very great, but it does not appear that the poor abbot came to any harm.

Baliol became the object of the English monarch's vengeance, so concluding a truce of eight months with France, he determined to make use of the fleet he had prepared against that country to subdue the Scots and to take away from Baliol the very name of king. Baliol did not struggle long, and in a very disastrous battle, in which the Scots lost 10,000 men, (some historians declare nearly twice that number) Edward was victorious, and Scotland for awhile subdued. Baliol came to Roxburgh where he made a humble submission. He appeared in a mean dress, bearing a white wand in his hand, and expressed his deep sorrow for the late rebellion, but the repentance came too late.

Edward insisted that he should resign the crown, and Baliol was removed as prisoner to the Tower of London, where he was allowed plenty of attendants, and a circle of twenty miles round the city walls. After a confinement of three years, he was permitted to retire to an estate he held in Normandy, promising to intermeddle no more with Scottish affairs.

Bruce does not appear in a very dignified light at this time, for, possibly with a hope of obtaining the kingdom for himself, he assisted in Baliol's overthrow. It is said, that when Bruce demanded the crown as a reward for his exertions in Edward's service, that king angrily replied in French, 'What! have I nothing to do but to win kingdoms for you?' It was plain, that Edward did not intend anything of

that sort, and marching through Scotland with a large army, he compelled all to submit to him. The Scottish coronation-stone which the Scots held in almost superstitious reverence, and on which all their kings had been crowned, was, with the crown jewels, seized by Edward and removed to London.

And now we must bring another character into our story—a name well known to you, I cannot doubt; it is the name of William Wallace. It is a pity that the exact history of Wallace is not known; but the truth is, that men were so busy fighting, that the number of historians was few, and when a little leisure for book-writing came, truth was too often mingled with prejudice and falsehood. Wallace was not one of the nobles of Scotland. He was the son of a private gentleman of Ellerslie, or Elderslie, near Paisley, in Renfrewshire. He had in early life killed an Englishman for some insult, and there is reason to believe that the English residents in Scotland often did insult the poor people. After this act, he was obliged to flee from his home to the woods and caves in which his country abounded; and many a secret place is still marked in Scotland as the shelter of William Wallace. There is one which I remember to have seen in Cartland Crag, near Lanark, a rough and rocky glen covered with trees and bushes, and full of high precipices, where he knew there was no chance of the English reaching him. But he did not remain long alone; other outlawed men joined him, and many a fierce attack was made by this little band on the English—attacks more creditable to their skill and bravery as soldiers, than to their kindness or honesty. But we must look at men according to the times in which they lived. A brave soldier of 1297 would in 1852 be reckoned little better than a savage. We should, as lovers of peace, be gentle in our judgment of those warriors of old,

remembering how imperfectly they were civilized, how small were their means of communication, and above all, how little the Bible was known or read among them. The adventures of Wallace are scarcely less interesting than those of Bruce, but we must not give particulars of them here. As his influence increased, he was created Governor of Scotland in the absence of Baliol; but Bruce and Comyn watched him very jealously; for, said they, "If we must be slaves, let it be to a great and powerful king, and not to an upstart." After one of his struggles with the English, in which, to his shame, Bruce assisted Edward, the two Scottish heroes met on opposite banks of the river Carron; the two were alone, and Bruce began: 'I marvel,' said he, 'that you, hurried by the favour of the vulgar, should expose yourself to such danger from the most potent king of the time; and even were you to overcome, think not that the Scots would ever have you for their king.'

To this Wallace proudly replied, 'I never proposed such an end to my labours, nor does my mind aspire so high; but when I saw my countrymen exposed to the cruelty and oppression of an enemy because of your sloth, I took pity on them. You, who would rather choose base slavery than honest liberty, go and hug your fetters.'

Thus the conference ended; but there is no doubt that the example and words of the warlike Wallace induced Bruce to stir in defence of his country.

After a time Wallace lost much of his influence with the Scots; and Bruce, with Comyn and the Bishop of St. Andrews, were appointed guardians of Scotland in his stead. Wallace's fate is well known. He was basely betrayed to the English by his professed friend Sir John Monteith, and after having his head struck off, his body was divided into four parts, and according to the barbarous custom of that day, exposed in different parts of the kingdom.

There is certainly a manly independence in the character of William Wallace that we cannot fail to admire. He never admitted Edward's right to govern Scotland, and while others took vows in fear, and broke them when the danger was passed, while Comyn, Bruce, and other nobles lived at Edward's court, watching for the safe time to assert their independence, he persisted in his endeavours to throw off the foreign yoke.

CHAPTER III.

BRUCE A KING.

BRUCE's union with Comyn, his rival, was merely an outward show. Both were slaves to Edward, though each longed to be free from his yoke. The insincerity of their dealings had a sad end. While apparently faithful to Edward, they entered into a solemn compact with each other, in which Comyn promised to support and uphold Bruce's claim to the crown, on condition of his giving up all his estates in Scotland to him. The paper confirming this was signed and sealed in the usual manner.

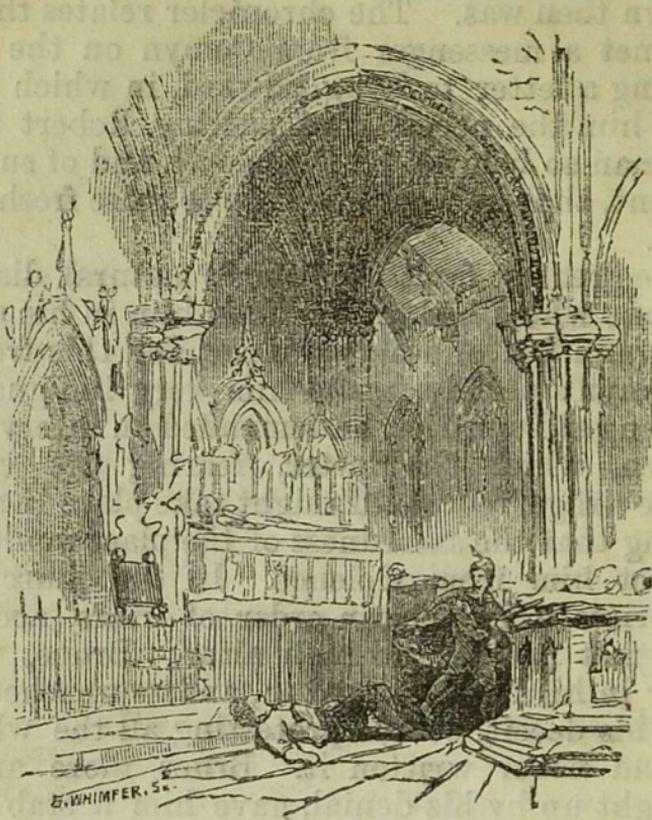
One day, however, Comyn, who was in Scotland, was mean enough to communicate the whole matter to Edward, who, naturally angry at such treachery, declared Bruce guilty of high treason, and forbade him to leave the court of London, where he was living at that time. It is said, but I cannot be sure of the truth of the story, although Barbour asserts it, that Bruce owed his safety to the conduct of an English friend of his, the Duke of Gloucester, who hearing Edward's threats, and not daring to write to Bruce, sent him a pair of gilt spurs, as if he had borrowed them, and a purse of gold. Bruce, though at first puzzled, took the hint, and sending for a smith, desired him to shoe three horses backwards, that their track might be mistaken in the snow, and travelled with such speed, that he arrived at his castle of Lochmaben, on the fifth day after he had left London. There he found his brother David, to whom he had scarcely told the cause of his flight, than he hastened

to Dumfries on the border, where he knew that Comyn then was. The chronicler relates that Bruce had met a messenger from Comyn on the journey, bearing a letter to King Edward, in which he urged upon him the necessity of putting Robert to death, as a man so beloved by the people, and of such noble descent, that he would be sure to raise fresh commotions.

The greatest fault in Bruce's natural disposition, and one which had grown upon him in his unsettled life, was a hot and fiery temper, and this fresh proof of Comyn's perfidy, made him very indignant. On arriving at Dumfries, he demanded an interview with Comyn, which the latter, fearing the effects of Bruce's rage, requested might take place in a church, hoping that the sacredness of the place would at least protect him from violence. In the church of the Minorites, a Franciscan order of friars, accordingly they met before the high altar. Bruce, with the letter in his hand, rushed in, and reproached Comyn with his deceit, Comyn protesting all the while that he had never written it. Bruce more and more wrought up by his denial, gave him a stab with his dagger, but left him still living. Having perpetrated this rash act, he ran out of church, and called for his horse. Two Scottish gentlemen, Kirkpatrick and Lindesay, who had attended him to Dumfries, seeing how pale he looked, asked what ailed him. 'I think,' said Bruce, 'I have killed the Red Comyn.'

'What!' said Lindesay, 'wilt thou leave such a matter to "*an I think,*"' and so saying, he ran back to make it sure, or 'sicker indeed,' to use his own words, and soon finished the work that Bruce had begun, adding to it the cruel murder of Sir Robert Comyn, the uncle, who having heard the tumult, had just entered the church to help his nephew.

This revengeful act brought Bruce into great trouble. The Pope, in whose eyes of course the



offence was aggravated, by having been committed in "holy church," was greatly incensed against him; and many historians declare, that it was followed by heaven's displeasure, for long afterwards nothing that he did appeared to prosper.

In the meantime you may judge what consternation there was in London. Edward no less hot than Bruce, was transported with rage at his escape, and still more so, when the news of Comyn's murder reached him. And now Bruce was desperate: he had committed an act which was sure to bring down on him the vengeance of the Comyn family, of the King of England, and of the church; and resolving to set all at defiance, he publicly declared his right to the

crown of Scotland. Gathering together as many of his followers as he could, he went to Scone, the usual coronation place of the Scottish kings, where he was hastily crowned. The coronation stone was indeed gone, and all things relating to the ceremony had to be performed in haste. A small circlet of gold, in imitation of the old crown, which Edward had borne away was made, but very few of the powerful barons could be induced to attend. Many brave Scotchmen remembered that but a little while ago, Bruce was in league with Edward the ambitious usurper. And many of Comyn's friends burned to revenge his death. So that the coronation of Bruce was a mournful affair. The honour of placing the crown on the head of the Scottish King, had always belonged to the family of Macduff, of Fife, but the present earl being on the side of the English, he could not as usual, be present. Hearing, however, that Bruce was to be crowned, Isabella, sister of the Earl of Fife, and wife of the Earl of Buchan, stole her husband's horses, and posted off to Scone, resolved that in spite of her brother and husband, Robert Bruce should be crowned by a Macduff. As she did not reach Scone until after the act of crowning had been performed, she repeated the ceremony, and the thin circlet was again placed on the new king's head by the adventurous woman. His coronation took place on the 29th of March, 1306.

On the 18th of the following May, Bruce was excommunicated by the Pope, on account of the murder of Comyn. A sentence, which, as you may know, excluded him from all the rites of religion, and even authorised any one to kill him. Edward, old and feeble though he was, and scarcely able to sit on his war-horse, was more than ever determined on rooting out Bruce and his family from the land.

Great were the preparations made for this war. All the garrison towns throughout Scotland were

strengthened. The armourer's trade was a thriving one, and in almost every town the noise of the busy hammer was heard, making the steel armour for the soldiers.

Then there was to be a great feast given at Westminster Hall, and a grand show at the Abbey, in which the honour of knighthood was conferred on three hundred young men from the best families in England.

First, the king's own son, the Prince of Wales, was knighted, and he, after ascending the high altar, performed the same ceremony on the 300 youths, "clad in robes broidered with gold." This was not all; for when the knight had descended from the altar, two swans were brought in by minstrels adorned with golden bells, in nets also of gold; and then the voice of the king was heard tremulous with age, but firm in its purpose, swearing by the God of heaven, and these two swans, that he would once more lead his army into Scotland, and never return until he had punished the rebels, and dealt with Bruce, as with Wallace, and then, said the old king, 'will I never more take up arms against Christians, but will go and fight the Saracens in the Holy Land, and then will I die in peace.'

These words and the pomp of the procession seemed to rekindle the ardour of the English, and shortly after the Prince of Wales left London with the army under his command, receiving from his father the solemn charge not to rest two nights in one place until he reached Scotland, he himself proposing to follow more slowly with his queen. He, however, never reached the enemy's land, but was obliged to remain at Carlisle, and be content to hear of the achievements of others, for his day was nearly spent, and to see the blue hills of the north at a distance.

Bruce's first attempts were very unfortunate. At

Methven, he and his little band were quite defeated by Pembroke, Edward's general, and the new-made king and a few followers, were compelled to retire into the mountains of Athol, where they led the lives of foresters and were often in great danger of discovery. The queen accompanied her husband at this time, and a hard life she must have led, poor lady! for hunting and fishing were the only means they had of providing food, and sometimes hunger as well as cold was her portion. In the course of Bruce's wanderings, he was driven into Lorn, a part of Argyleshire, but here he encountered the M'Dougals, a strong family, then called the Lords of Lorn, friends of the English, and very much opposed to Bruce, on account of the murder of their relation the "Red Comyn." So they attacked Bruce at his very entrance into their lands. The Lord of Lorn called a thousand men to his aid, and having lined the best passes in that mountainous country with soldiers, he made Bruce's progress a very difficult one.

At the first encounter, Bruce was defeated, but he was not daunted. He was a remarkably strong man, and so skilled in the use of the heavy armour of the time, that there were few who could oppose the strength of his arm.

After the first defeat, Bruce ordered his men to retreat to a very narrow pass, between a steep rock and a deep lake, and placing himself the last of the party, he fought with and slew as many of the enemy as pressed hard upon him.

Three followers of M'Dougal, a father and two sons, all very powerful men, when they saw Bruce thus protecting his followers determined to kill or make him prisoner. They all three rushed on the king at once. Bruce was on horseback, and the first hand that seized the bridle was severed in a moment. The man fell and bled to death. A

second now seized his leg and tried to drag him from the saddle, but Bruce setting spurs to his horse, made the animal give such a spring that the Highlander fell under his feet, and his head was cleft by Bruce's sword in an instant. The last of the three was the poor father, he saw his gallant sons fall, and with the desperation of a parent, he rushed on the king, and grasping him by the mantle, so contrived, that Bruce could not wield his long sword. An iron hammer, however, hung at the monarch's



saddle-bow, and seizing that, he struck the old man such a blow, that he was almost stunned. Yet dying

as he was, he kept his hold on the king's mantle with a firm grasp, and to free himself from the body, Bruce was obliged to unfasten the brooch or clasp that confined it, and leave it with the dying man upon the ground. The brooch is still preserved in the M'Dougal family.

After this adventure at Lorn, Bruce and his little band divided. Winter was coming on, and their clothes were so thin, that they knew their wild life among the hills with scanty food and scarcely any shelter, would be attended with great danger. So Bruce parted with his queen; he little thought for how long a time, and putting her under the charge of Nigel Bruce, his youngest brother, he sent them with a few attendants to the only castle which remained to him, that of Kildrummie, in Aberdeenshire, very near the head of the river Don.

When the party had gone away taking all the horses, Bruce was left with 200 men, and he resolved to spend the winter in Ulster, in Ireland, where he hoped for assistance from the Earl of that province.

On their journey, they had to cross Loch Lomond. The blue waters of that lovely lake were not then, as now, disturbed by the busy steam-vessel bearing on its deck admiring visitors, travellers from distant lands, or the townsfolk of Edinburgh or Glasgow, come out to taste the sweet air of their native mountains. No little white-sailed pleasure boats then as now, skimmed lightly across, with the youths from College, lazily lying across the benches musing on by-gone scenes for which the Loch is so famed. But there by its bank stood the wandering king, looking anxiously into every little cove for some boat to carry him across, and gazing on the frowning mountain opposite, and the still sterner mountain behind with anxiety and fear, but not with despair. Robert Bruce never despaired. Per-

severance and steady, constant endurance, were the great features of his character.

While he stood thus pondering, Douglas, a faithful companion of his wanderings, came with the joyous news that he had found a boat. A poor crazy, broken boat indeed, and unable to hold more than half a dozen persons at a time, but still a boat, and though the party were a day and a night in crossing, it answered their purpose tolerably well. Bruce was a good scholar and able to read fluently, and he amused his companions during their tedious hours with reading, or as I should think more likely, reciting, romances and poetry. You may smile at the compliment I have just paid Bruce, by saying he could read well, but I assure you, that in his days, a king did not *always* read *well*, and many a man of high rank could not read at all.

At last the whole band of 200 men were landed in safety; and, to the great joy of Bruce, he met his friend the Earl of Lennox, who had heard no news of the king since the defeat at Methven, and it was a joyful and unexpected meeting.

By the Earl's exertions, Bruce and his party obtained sufficient provisions to enable them to cross over to Rathlin, a small island on the north coast of Ireland, and within sight of the Scottish shore. At first, the islanders were not very well pleased at the visit of 200 Scotchmen, but they were soon reconciled, and Bruce and his men spent the winter of 1306 in Rathlin, if not in comfort, in tolerable safety.

While there, sad news arrived to the king. The castle of Kildrummie had been taken by the English. His young and noble brother, Nigel, was carried to Berwick, and there beheaded; the Earl of Athol was hanged, and the poor ladies, who had fled thither for greater safety, were taken. The Queen and her daughter were sent to London, where they were kept in captivity for many years; but the Countess of

Buchan, who had offended Edward, especially by her bold act in crowning Bruce, was sent to Berwick castle, where a strong prison was constructed of wicker and iron, in the form of a cage, and so placed that passers-by might look at her miserable condition. Some writers have declared that the countess was hung out in a cage on the castle walls, but it is at least certain that she was immured in the way I have described.

This news made Bruce very unhappy. He seemed now far off the throne, and a king but in name, while, for his sake, the young, the noble, the strong and the weak alike, were suffering chains and imprisonment. His estates were all seized, not even Kildrummie was left to him. The Pope's sentence of excommunication had gone forth, and in all the principal towns of Scotland the insulting words were shouted from street to street, that "Robert Bruce was lost, stolen, or strayed;" and high rewards were offered for him, dead or alive. So the winter passed drearily on, but spring awakens hope in most hearts, and Bruce had little of despair in his temperament. After a little consultation, Douglas agreed to go over in disguise to Scotland, and see how the people generally were disposed towards their king; if they were satisfied with Edward's rule, or if they were willing to make one more effort for freedom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING A WANDERER—BETTER DAYS.

DURING the absence of Sir James Douglas in Lanarkshire, Bruce and his brother Edward resolved on quitting Rathlin. Accordingly, about ten days after Douglas's departure, the whole party went over to the Isle of Arran. They were now within sight of the mainland of Scotland, but dared not cross over until they had sent to make some inquiries as to the number of English quartered on the coast, and the disposition of the people generally to his cause. So they sent over a spy named Cuthbert, who was to make a signal for them to join him if it appeared safe to do so. The signal agreed upon was to kindle a fire on Turnberry Head, a lofty cape, which could be discerned from Arran. Bruce and his men anxiously watched for the hoped-for light. At length, after a few nights, the joyful news was echoed from one to another of the company, "A fire! a fire on Turnberry!"

In the darkness of the night all was bustle and preparation, and their hearts beating high with expectation, they entered their little vessel, and steered as well as they could for the light which burned in Turnberry nook. After hard rowing, in the early dawn of morning, they reached the shore of Carrick, and there, wandering to and fro on the beach, they saw a tall figure. It was that of Cuthbert the spy.

'I am come,' said he, 'to tell you there is no hope of doing anything in Carrick; that the bonfire

was not lighted by me, and, seeing its blaze, I have come down to warn you not to land.'

Both the king and his brother Edward were of rather fiery dispositions, and they were by no means gentle in their reply to poor Cuthbert. 'I tell you,' said Edward, 'I will not leave my native land now that I am so unexpectedly restored to it. I will give freedom to Scotland, or leave my dead body on the face of the land that gave me birth.'

After a little further talk as they stood on the land in the dim light of the morning, they agreed to venture; and Bruce, hearing there was a party of soldiers belonging to Percy, the English governor of the district, made up his mind to attack them at once, which he did with great success. He was obliged, however, to lie concealed among the woods and mountains of his own earldom of Carrick constantly changing his hiding-place, and leading a life of great hardship and danger. For the sake of secrecy, as well as on account of the scarcity of provisions, he seldom kept more than one or two followers near him. The Galloway men were chiefly dependents of the M'Dougals, and you must remember that the power of a chief over his clan was almost equal to that of a king over his subjects at that time.

The Lord of Lorn, a relative of the M'Dougals, espoused the side of the King of England against Bruce, and determined to surprise and attack Bruce in one of his secret caves, and bring him forth to justice.

But he might have sought in vain in that wild and hilly region, but for the expedient of using blood or sleuth-hounds. These dogs are trained to chase a man by the scent, or sleuth of his footsteps, just as fox-hounds are taught to chase a fox, or harriers a hare. Without seeing the object of pursuit, a well-trained hound will follow a man for miles, and is seldom wrong in his track. So a party of 200 Ga

loway men set out one day with three sharp blood-hounds, to chase King Robert Bruce. The path lay through morasses and forests, over hills and down dales, but on they galloped on their Galloway steeds, heeding no difficulties that they met by the way.

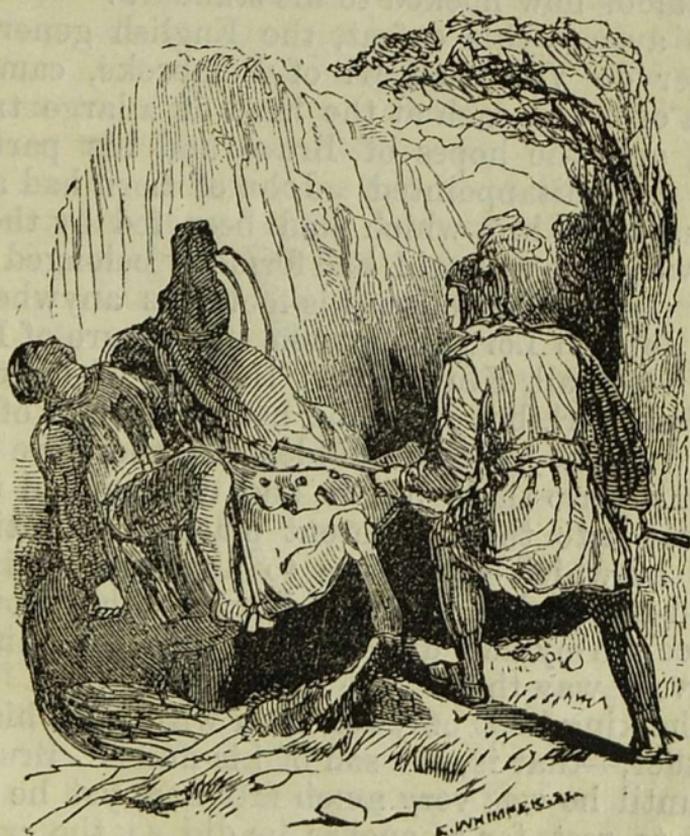
Happily, however, Bruce had received warning of the pursuit, and collecting sixty men together, prepared himself to resist the enemy. The choice of a suitable place for defence was the great consideration, and here, as in almost all his actions, Bruce showed that wonderful forethought and preparation for great emergencies which was, more often than his strength of body and skill in arms, the secret of his successes. What could sixty men do against 200, if they really came to battle? Nothing, he knew; and he did not mean to run the risk.

Accordingly, he quartered himself one evening on the further side of a very deep and swift-flowing river, which ran between steep and rocky banks, as the Scottish rivers often do. There was but one ford; that is to say, only one place where the stream was sufficiently shallow to cross, and this ford was so narrow that it was almost impossible for two men abreast to pass it. The ground, moreover, on that side of the river, where Bruce had placed himself, was also so steep, and the path leading upwards so difficult and dangerous, as well as narrow, that the king knew that even if the Galloway men succeeded in landing, they would be easily beaten off by himself and his brave followers. Telling his men to lie down and rest, he and two attendants went to the ford through which he knew the enemy must pass, and patiently listened in the quiet evening air for the sounds of the horses' hoofs, or the baying of the hounds. It was a bright moonlight night, and long he listened in vain.

At last, the sound of the blood-hounds rejoicing as they neared the object of their chase, fell on his

ear, and he knew then that the two hundred Galloway men were not far behind. A little longer, and the tramp of horses' feet was heard, then the ringing and the clank of the heavy armour, but he did not shrink.

Sending his two companions to awaken his sleeping soldiers, he stood on the river's bank alone. The two hundred men were not much alarmed at the sight of the solitary man standing by the river's brink, and so one by one they plunged into the deep stream. The first man who came within reach of Bruce's lance, fell in a moment, and with a second thrust the warrior stabbed the horse, which in its kicking and plunging prevented the others who



followed from getting out of the river. In the confusion, five or six men were killed, and their bodies, with those of their horses, seemed to form quite a rampart for the king.

Those who had witnessed the unlooked-for resistance were quite aghast; it seemed all like magic, that one man should kill five or six strong-armed soldiers with his single spear. So they seriously contemplated running away; when, thinking how shameful it would be to let two hundred be conquered by one, they rushed forward again, when the loud shout of Bruce's followers warned them to retreat; and after the loss of fourteen of their party, they retired. The spirits of Bruce's party were quite revived by this success, and many who had held aloof now flocked to his standard.

To avenge this defeat, the English general, Sir Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, came with John of Lorn, each at the head of a large troop of men, and the hopes of Bruce and his party were once more disappointed. John of Lorn had a blood-hound with him which had been fed by the king, and which, it was said, had formerly belonged to him. This dog would follow his footsteps anywhere, and now John of Lorn thought he was secure of Bruce.

First of all, King Robert thought of fighting the English earl, but when he heard of John of Lorn's approach, he gave up the idea. He therefore divided his men into three bodies, and commanded them to retreat into three different places, appointing one spot at which they were to assemble again. The blood-hound led John of Lorn to the spot where Bruce's army had divided, and then took his course the very way that Bruce had gone.

The king kept only one man with him, his foster-brother,—that is, the son of his nurse. Bruce went on until he was very much fatigued, yet he did not dare to rest, for whenever he did so, the cry of the

dog was heard. At length they came to a small river, and Bruce proposed that they should wade down the stream as far as possible, that the hound might lose the scent of his footsteps. Straight to the water's edge came the dog, but when there he was puzzled, and they were obliged to give up the pursuit, for the running water, you know, could not retain the scent of a man's foot as the turf had done.

Glad enough were Bruce and his brother to rest in the woods, for they were very tired and hungry. Presently three men came up, looking very much like thieves. They were well-armed, and one of them had a sheep on his back. The king asked them where they were going. They replied that they were looking for Robert Bruce, as they wished to join his party. Bruce was a little too wary to trust them all at once, so he merely said that he knew where the Scottish king was hiding, and would lead them to him. Such a change came over the men's face at this, that Bruce suspected the truth that he and his companions had some design against him, in order to gain the reward offered for his head. So he sent them on before him, although they declared that he need fear no harm from them. In the course of the day, they came to a ruinous cottage where the men proposed to rest, and dress part of the sheep. The king was hungry, and was glad enough of the mutton, of which he ate very heartily. After his meal, he was so drowsy, that he told his foster-brother that he must sleep a few minutes, begging that he would watch by him, which he was willing to do, but having undergone as much fatigue as the king, in spite of his resolution, he soon fell into a deep slumber. Bruce was awakened by one of the men rising from the floor to kill him, and starting up, drew his sword in an instant, but not before his foster-brother was killed. The king was now alone, one man against three. But, with

his usual skill and his amazing strength, he freed himself of his foes, one after another, and left the cottage.

A farm-house was not far distant, where he was happy enough to meet with friends; a loyal old lady greeting him with these words, "Welcome, as all travellers are welcome here, for the sake of one our king, Robert Bruce." Bruce informed her who he was, and soon the old lady was very busy in getting the weary king his supper, when a great tramping of horses was heard. They feared it might be the English, or John of Lorn's men, and the woman exhorted her two sons, who were with her in the house, to fight to the last for King Robert. But their courage was not put to the test, for the party was led by Lord James Douglas and Edward Bruce, the king's brother, who, with 150 horse soldiers, had come to this farm-house, on their way to rejoin Bruce, as he had appointed.

The king learned from his brother that the English, believing the Scottish army to be dispersed, were in a very unguarded state, and seizing the opportunity, they therefore rushed upon two hundred of the enemy, the greater part of whom they put to the sword. And now fortune seemed to smile on Bruce; how dearly purchased by the death of so many in the full vigour of their days! The time to think of all this came to Bruce, but it was not come yet. His cause gained strength every day, and King Edward the First, who was on his dying bed, at Carlisle, though unable to bear the fatigue of the journey, insisted on going to Scotland in person to crush the rebellion. Having reached Burgh-on-the-Sands with extreme difficulty, he was so exhausted, that he could proceed no farther, and sank rapidly. All his thoughts were still bent upon war and bloodshed, and a melancholy account is given of his last moments. No thoughts of peace seemed to enter his heart. He

could not give up the world, and the thought of that unsubdued nation embittered his last hours. His dying injunction to his son was, never to rest until Scotland was his own. He even gave orders that his bones should never be buried until that end was achieved, but that they should be wrapped up in a bullock's hide, and carried at the head of the English army, believing as he said, that those dry bones would terrify the people, upon whom he had inflicted such woes. His desire, however, was not fulfilled. Edward, possibly wiser in this respect than his father, judged that they would be better laid in Westminster Abbey, where accordingly they were placed, and you may still see the monument, which was raised to commemorate his warlike deeds, bearing for its inscription, "Edward the First, the hammer of the Scotch."

CHAPTER V.

THE BATTLE-FIELD.

THE son to whom Edward the First had left this legacy of war, was a very different man to his father. He was a weak, pleasure-loving prince, and at the time of his accession, not more than sixteen years of age. Bruce, on hearing of Edward's death, was inspired with fresh courage, and though scarcely recovered from a serious illness, he rose from his couch, determined to use this opportunity to strengthen the victory he had already gained. He soon drove Edward the Second and his army back to England, and gaining spirit as he saw the tide of fortune turned in his favour, he rooted the English out of their garrisons, destroyed castles and forts, and constantly defeated the parties sent out to oppose him. The years from 1310 to 1313 were thus spent, and repeated complaints were made by the Cumberland and Northumberland people, of the ravages which the Scots committed on their country. At last Edward the Second, who had just returned from France, made serious preparations to invade Scotland. Stirling Castle still remained in the possession of the English, and it was the attack made by Edward Bruce on this fortress which decided the King of England to make one great effort for the recovery of that power which he had lost.

Edward entered the country by Berwick, at the head of an army of 100,000 men, 40,000 of whom were horse soldiers. Bruce, with all his endeavours,

could muster no more than 30,000 fighting men, and about 15,000 camp followers. It was at this time, in prospect of such an unequal contest, that Bruce gave another display of that prudence and skill which had so often befriended him in times past. He chose his ground on the face of a hill sloping toward the river Forth, near Stirling, a place where, from the boggy nature of the ground, he knew the English cavalry would have most difficulty in fighting, it had the town of Stirling, with woods on the left, and the little *burn* or brook of Bannock on the right. He ordered pits to be dug in front of his line, about the depth of a man's knee. These pits were filled with sharp pointed stakes, and then neatly covered over with turf and rushes; besides which certain contrivances called calthropes, fitted with sharp iron spikes, were thrown about the field, for the purposes of laming the horses of the English. These preparations completed, the Scots waited the approach of the enemy. In what glowing terms do the chroniclers of the time speak of the appearance of that mighty army. They describe the gallant men-at-arms on horse and foot, the fine old English war-horse, foaming with impatience and pride, while the bright steel armour flashed in the glorious rays of a midsummer morning. Standards, pennons, banners, and flags of different kinds floated in the breeze, and looking along the line, an infinite variety of faces was seen, from one and another of the conquered kingdoms of the late king. The stout hardy Welshman, the bold impetuous Irishman, the well-trained French Cuirassier, the Englishman with his far-famed cross-bow and quiver, or his formidable battle-axe were there, each bent on the work of destroying the precious gift of life in fellow-men, created in the image of the Maker. This is the better side of the picture. These men had hearts and homes, and who can

tell the regrets that dwelt there, the grief and the desolation that was left behind. Not a head fell among those ranks at Bannockburn, but caused some heart to ache with bitter anguish, not a drop of blood was shed on that fierce battle field, but tears fell, and spirits fainted.

As for the battle itself, I quote Scott's eloquent description :—

“ Now onward, and in open view,
 The countless ranks of England drew,
 Dark rolling like the ocean-tide,
 When the rough west hath chafed his pride,
 And his deep roar sends challenge wide
 To all that bars his way !
 In front the gallant archers trode,
 The men-at-arms behind them rode,
 And midmost of the phalanx broad
 The Monarch held his sway.
 Beside him many a war-horse fumes,
 Around him waves a sea of plumes,
 Where many a knight in battle known,
 And some who spurs had first braced on,
 And deem'd that fight should see them won,
 King Edward's hests obey.

“ Earl Gilbert waved his truncheon high,
 Just as the Northern ranks arose,
 Signal for England's archery
 To halt and bend their bows.
 Then stepp'd each yeoman forth a pace,
 Glanced at the intervening space,
 And raised his left hand high ;
 To the right ear the cords they bring--
 —At once ten thousand bow-strings ring,
 Ten thousand arrows fly !
 Nor paused on the devoted Scot
 The ceaseless fury of their shot ;
 As fiercely and as fast
 Forth whistling came the grey-goose wing
 As the wild hailstones pelt and ring
 Adown December's blast.

Nor mountain targe of tuff bull-hide,
 Nor lowland mail, that storm may bide ;
 Woe, woe to Scotland's banner'd pride,
 If the fell shower may last !

Upon the right, behind the wood,
 Each by his steed dismounted, stood
 The Scottish chivalry ;—

—With foot in stirrup, hand on mane,
 Fierce Edward Bruce can scarce restrain
 His own keen heart, his eager train,
 Until the archers gain'd the plain ;

 Then, ' Mount, ye gallants free !'
 He cried ; and, vaulting from the ground,
 His saddle every horseman found.

On high their glittering crests they toss,
 As springs the wild-fire from the moss ;
 The shield hangs down on every breast,
 Each ready lance is in the rest.

 And loud shouts Edward Bruce,—
 ' Forth, Marshal, on the peasant foe !
 We'll tame the terrors of their bow,
 And cut the bow-string loose !'

“ Bruce, with the pilot's wary eye,
 The slackening of the storm could spy.

 ' One effort more, and Scotland's free !
 Lord of the Isles, my trust in thee
 Is firm as Ailsa Rock ;

Rush on with Highland sword and targe,
 I, with my Carrick spearman, charge ;
 Now, forward to the shock !'

At once the spears were forward thrown,
 Against the sun the broadswords shone ;
 The pibroch lent its maddening tone,
 And loud King Robert's voice was known—
 ' Carrick, press on—they fail, they fail !
 Press on, brave sons of Innisgail,

 The foe is fainting fast !

Each strike for parent, child, and wife,
 For Scotland, liberty, and life,—

 The battle cannot last ! ”

It was a bold venture on the part of the Scots. 30,000 brave mountaineers to 100,000 English, French, Irish, and Welsh, but they won the day, and on the 24th of June, 1314, Bannockburn was covered with slain. Many of the best and noblest of the English families lay dead or wounded there, while the king himself was obliged to take flight. The lowest number that the English lost on that memorable occasion was 154 lords and knights, 700 gentlemen, and 10,000 common soldiers; while of the Scots there fell 4,000 men. Among the prisoners taken from the English was a poor monk of the Carmelite order, who was brought into the army to sing the victory of the English in a poem; but they being beaten, he offered to sing of their defeat, which he did in a canto so greatly to the satisfaction of the Scots, that they granted him his liberty.

For seven or eight years the Queen of Scotland had been a prisoner in London, and Bruce, in exchange for some noble Englishmen, now received his wife and daughter, with several other persons of distinction.

And now King Robert, from having been hunted with bloodhounds, and tracked from wood to cave, and from mountain to glen, arose to the rank he had so coveted—that of a powerful sovereign. It was a dearly-bought victory, but it was complete. Scotland was once more an independent country, and the sound of rejoicing was heard throughout the land.

I must tell you one more of Bruce's marvellous adventures, of which I think you will say he had his share during his lifetime. It is the last recorded of him. About thirty miles from Berwick-on-Tweed stands the ancient castle of Dunbar. After the battle of Bannockburn, Edward the Second took refuge there; for although the governor was a

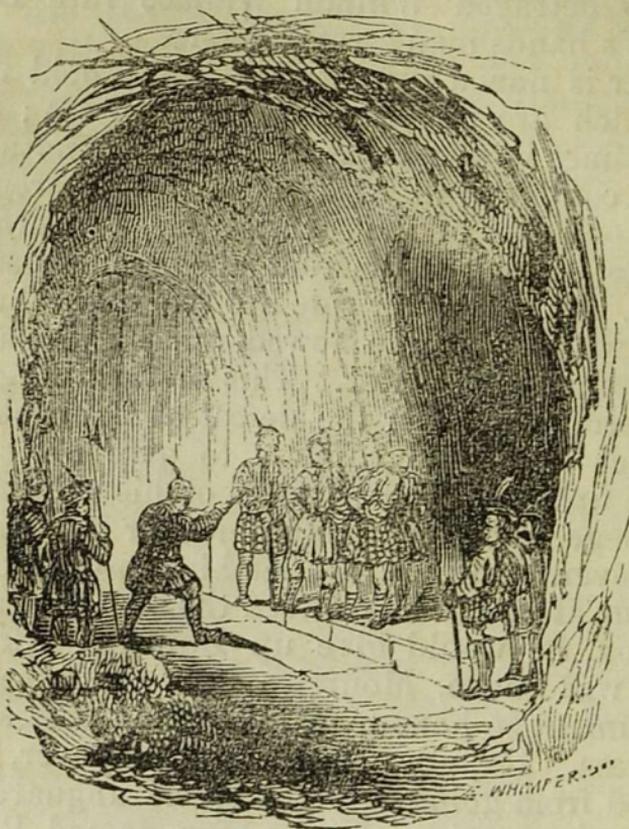
Scotchman he had always favoured the English party. It was indeed the same Monteith who had so basely betrayed William Wallace into Edward the First's hands many years before.

Dunbar is now a ruin standing on a bold reef of rocks which are washed by the stormy sea; but in ancient times it seemed as though both nature and art had combined to render the fort impregnable. Beneath one part of the rock is a large cavern, with a passage leading to it from above, once used as a dungeon. On the other side are two natural arches, through which the tide flowed, and by which boats could enter at high water. This castle still held out for Edward, even after the defeat at Bannockburn; and Bruce wishing, I suppose, to give his soldiers rest, and unwilling to lose more of his subjects in a useless siege, treated with Monteith for its surrender.

The governor would not let him have it on easy terms, but at last it was agreed that for the earldom of Lennox, he would give up Dunbar. After the bargain was made, Monteith invited Bruce to an entertainment in honour of his taking possession of the fortress. Happily for the king, however, he was prevented from going into the castle unguarded, by a warning he received from a man named Rolland. This man told him that he knew Monteith intended evil to him, and informed him that concealed in a cellar was a large band of armed men prepared to surprise and take him prisoner. So Bruce was on his guard.

On his entrance into the fortress, where he was received with a great show of respect, he informed Monteith that he particularly wished to see all the rooms in the castle. Monteith politely conducted him into all the principal apartments, but was somewhat confused when Bruce said, 'I must now see the wine cellars.' He hesitated, and at length declared that the keys were mislaid. 'Then,' said

Bruce, calling for a smith, 'we will do without the keys,' and accordingly forced his way into the cellar,



where he soon took the unguarded Englishmen prisoners, and Dunbar castle was cleared of the English in a very short space of time.

After the battle of Bannockburn, Bruce tried to tranquillize his poor country; but he seemed still to think it needful to make frequent attacks on England, annoying and weakening the inhabitants of the northern counties as much as possible.

England was indeed in a pitiable state at that time. Civil war was distracting the country, and the effects of the last unsettled reigns were now apparent in the immoral condition of the people. All the evils

of a battle are not left with the slain upon the field. Home affections and social ties had been utterly disregarded, from the wicked Queen Isabella on the throne to the lowest of her subjects. Families were neglected and divided. A grievous famine which prevailed in England seemed as a judgment of God on the people, but this famine was a natural consequence of the neglect of agriculture, occasioned by the late wars. Trade and manufactures were at a low ebb, and the only country in Europe which seemed to have any spirit of industry or improvement left was Flanders.

The disorders of the times and the scarcity of which I have spoken, increased the number of robbers both in England and Scotland; for knights and gentlemen, no longer able to keep so many servants and retainers in their households, continually dismissed them, and these cast-off servants meeting in troops, overran the country and obtained their living by plunder. The murder of the King of England in Berkeley Castle, occurred in 1327, at which time Bruce determined to make a more decided attack than he had yet done on England. He was too ill to lead his army out as of yore; indeed, before his time he seemed to have become an old and infirm man, and his days for fighting were over.

Accordingly, he entrusted the expedition to Douglas and Randolph, and they proceeded with 20,000 men into Northumberland and Durham, burning and destroying wherever they went. The young king, Edward the Third, indignant at the news of their ravages, went to check them, but he could never overtake the enemy, and, consequently, they did not come to an open engagement. The reason for the rapid movements of the enemy, was that they were not encumbered with heavy wagons of provision and baggage which always make the march of an army

slow. Each soldier carried his bag of oatmeal upon his saddle, as well as a light plate of iron on which to bake his cake in open field; and they killed the cattle of the English as they went along. A dishonest plan you will say, but a plan always adopted in an enemy's country. They were content with rough sort of cookery, roasting great pieces of the flesh on wooden spits, or boiling it in the skin of the slaughtered animal which they hung on some high stakes in the open air. Their shoes, or rather sandals, were made out of the bullocks' hides which they fitted to their ankles, and as they wore the hairy side outwards, the English used to call them the rough-footed Scots, or "Red Shanks."

This was the last effort of the kind which Bruce made. Both nations seemed to desire rest, and in 1328, terms of peace were concluded. David Bruce, the son of king Robert, married Johanna daughter of the late king Edward the Second, and Edward the Third gave up all pretensions to the Crown of Scotland.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST.—THE HEART OF BRUCE.

TRAVELLERS, as they pass along on the road to Dumbarton, are shown two clumps of trees, and are told that on that spot stood the ancient castle of Cardross, where Bruce retired after his rough and warlike life, and where he died in 1329.

He used, as long as he was able, to go upon the beautiful river Clyde, on the banks of which Cardross stood, and there, in his little boat, he would sit and recount to his companions the adventures of his youth, and his eyes would sparkle, and his weak voice grow strong, as he told of the moonlight skirmish with John of Lorn's men at the Ford, or the slaughter of the followers of M'Dougal in the mountain pass at Lorn. He suffered much, however, from a dreadful disorder called leprosy, and at fifty-six years of age this disease had so enfeebled him that his life was despaired of. Stretched on his couch he heard the physician's opinion that he had not long to live.

The strong arm which had wielded the battle-axe, and cleft the skull of the foe at a blow, lay powerless by his side; the tones of that voice which had so often inspired the fainting spirits of the men, was scarcely to be heard above a whisper. Bruce was dying.

Yet little does it matter when the eye is dim and the hand is weak, when the body faints and the heart fails, if the soul is at peace; but Barbour declares that "King Robert's heart it was heavy and sore," and that the memory of all the blood he had shed was a "bitter memory in his dying hour!" He called his followers to his bed, and beckoning to

Douglas, he told him how he mourned and repented of his past life, and especially that he had in his uncontrolled passion killed Comyn in the church. 'When all went hardest with me,' he said, 'I vowed to God then, if it were his pleasure to permit me to see the end of my wars for my crown and country, I would proceed to the Holy Land and carry on war against the enemies of my Saviour. But since God permitteth me not to fight his foes, and since my body cannot go thither, I pray thee, my beloved and tried friend, for the love you bear me, that you will cause my heart to be taken out of my body, carry it to Palestine, and place it in the sepulchre of my Lord.'

Douglas could scarcely answer his old friend for weeping, but when he was able, he solemnly gave him the promise he required. 'Now, praise be to God,' said Bruce, 'I shall die in peace.'

To understand the full meaning of this curious request, you must be acquainted with the history of the Crusades, as those wars were called. Before and after the time of Bruce, it was a common practice for men, in order to pacify their consciences for some great crime, to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and they really believed that, however great the sins of which they had been guilty, such pilgrimages and engagements against the Saracens in Palestine would be sure to atone for them.

Alas! it was easier to go on a long wearisome journey to Jerusalem, or to give of their treasures to poor pilgrims for that purpose, than to overcome an ambitious and selfish desire. Harder work to show gentleness and piety at home, than to rush into battle against Turk and Saracen, or to walk barefoot to some martyr's shrine.

Bruce died on the 9th of July, 1329, in the fifty-seventh year of his age.

Douglas complied with his directions as far as he

could, but was not permitted to reach his journey's end. The heart was embalmed, placed in a silver casket, and followed by a train of nobles, Douglas set out on his singular expedition.

When they arrived in Spain, Alphonso, King of Castile entreated their assistance against the Moorish King, or Sultan of Granada, who was at that time engaged in war against him.

Douglas complied, but he fell in the battle-field ; and those of his companions who escaped, fled back to Scotland, taking with them the heart of Bruce and the bones of the Lord James Douglas. That heart was buried, after all, under the high altar of Melrose Abbey, where the spot in which it reposes is still shown.

The funeral of Bruce took place at Dunfermline Abbey, the burial place of many of the Scottish kings.

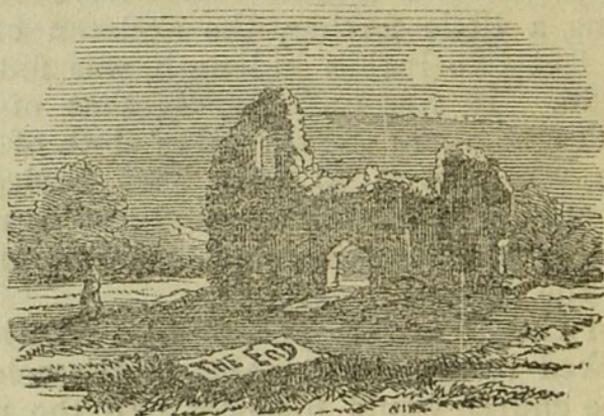
Some years after his interment, the roof of the church fell in, and Bruce's monument was broken to pieces, so that for a long time the precise situation of Bruce's tomb could not be discovered ; but in 1818, when the old church of Dunfermline was repaired, and the rubbish that had fallen carefully removed, pieces of a marble tomb were observed. On digging a little farther, the skeleton of a tall man, six feet two inches in length, was found in a stone coffin. It was undoubtedly that of Robert Bruce. Fragments of the shroud of cloth of gold in which he was known to have been buried, were found adhering to the skeleton, and the breast-bone had evidently been sawn through, for the purpose of obtaining the heart.

News of this discovery spread far and wide, and many flocked to see the remains of the celebrated hero. The church would not hold half the number of spectators, so the crowd had to pass through a railing, one by one, to view the skeleton. Many shed tears, and not a few talked of Methven and of

Bannockburn, as if these battles were but things of yesterday.

Whatever may be our views of war, and however much we may regret the accounts of bloodshed, and the destruction of life with which every page of Bruce's history abounds, there is one feature in the character of this king, on which the young may do well to ponder. His steady perseverance in the pursuit of that which he believed duty, through discouragement which would have driven many a man to despair. We may learn something more from history than mere dates, facts, and adventures. There is a moral attached to the story of each of the illustrious dead.

The spirits of men now-a-days are very different from those of men in the time of Bruce. We are not all called upon, happily, to struggle for freedom and fame, but we have each our foes to fight; and believe me, a child who struggles against selfishness and pride, who lives for the good of others, and who thinks humbly of himself, has the elements of heroism in him—nay, he may be in after life more worthy the name of Hero than Robert Bruce.



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