

## THE BATTLE OF INVERURY.

IN 1307—the year of the death of England's Edward I., of the inglorious retreat of the young Edward II. from Cumnock, and of the commencement of general disheartening among the Scottish partisans of the English usurpers—Robert Bruce crossed the Grampians, overran a large portion of the north of Scotland, and endeavoured to win the northern chiefs by patriotism or policy or terror. But he had a very small army, and had sustained a disastrous defeat in the preceding year at Methven, and was suffering excessive privation of food and clothing and shelter; and never, in the whole course of his thousands of adventures, did he need to rely more than now upon the vigour of his body, the heroism of his mind, the nobleness of his cause, and the celerity and skill and energy of his movements. He achieved his incursion without any material hindrance; but on his way back, he encountered and routed a tumultuary mob of troops brought against him by the Earl of Buchan; and at

Inverury, he fell sick and lost all appetite and became so enfeebled that his friends around him ceased to cherish hopes of his recovery; and having been placed in a litter, he was carried to the Sliach, a fortification of some strength in the parish of Drumblade.

In winter, while Bruce was ill, and when the ground was covered with snow, the Earl of Buchan, with Sir John Mowbray and Sir David Brechin, eager to wipe away the recent disgrace, and anticipating slight resistance and an easy victory, raised a comparatively numerous army, and marched against Bruce. The Earl inspirited his men with music and parade and the conferring of military honours, and approached the Sliach "trumping and making meikle fare;" but he found Bruce's party all alert, and ready to give him a hot reception—determined, indeed, not to offer battle or to leave their fortifications, on account of their master's illness,—yet resolved nevertheless to hold the Earl at arm's length, and to pay him back with interest any favours he might send them; and he felt obliged to sit down at a fair distance, and to content himself with a series of skirmishings in archery. And, says Barbour, who possibly was a witness of the affair—

“ And when the Earl's company  
Saw that they wrought so wisely  
That they their strength shuip to defend  
Their archers forth to them they send  
To bicker them, as men of main;  
And they sent archers them again  
That bickered them so sturdily  
Till they of the Earl's party  
Into their battle driven were.  
Three days on this wise lay they there  
And bickered them everilk day;  
But their bowmen the war had ay.”

The forces of Bruce, however, were at last compelled by famine to quit their defences; and, placing the King on a litter, and arming themselves to the teeth, they sallied out with a bold bearing, anxious only to make their way unscathed, yet prepared to repel promptly and fiercely any assault which might be offered them. The Earl was awed by their bravery, and allowed them quietly to pass; and then dismissed his army, or perhaps could not for the present hold it any longer together. And Bruce's forces marched to Strathbogie, and remained there till their master began to be convalescent, and then went to Inverury.

The Earl and Mowbray and Sir David Brechin, in the meanwhile, assembled another army, and encamped at Old Meldrum. This army was upwards of a thousand strong; and after they had been in camp only one night, a small party of them, headed by Sir David Brechin, rode to Inverury, and made a sudden onslaught at the west end of the town, killing several of the King's troops, and driving all the rest to their quarters. Bruce was lying at the east of the burgh, still an invalid and excessively feeble; and, on getting tidings of the onslaught, he started up like a strong man in wrath, and called for his horse, and bade his followers turn out for pursuit and battle.

“ Then said some of his privy men  
‘ What think you, Sir, this gate to fare,  
To fight and not recovered are?’  
‘ Yes,’ said the King, ‘ withouten weer  
This boast has made me hail and feer,  
For should no medicine so soon,  
Have cured me, as they have done;  
Therefore so God himself me see  
I shall have them, or else they me.’  
And when his men had heard the King  
Set him so whole for the fighting,

Of his recov'ring all blythe were  
And made them for the battle yare."

The royal force, in number about seven hundred, marched right to Old Meldrum, and almost caught the Earl by surprise. They arrived in furious spirit, with banners flying, and keen for the conflict; and as soon as they got sight of the foe, they rushed down upon him like a whirlwind. The Earl's men had barely time to arm and form; and, when the shock came, they wavered, gave way, and ran,—and in a few minutes, some were captured, some cut down, and all the rest in headlong flight, the fleetest horsed the foremost. The battle was ruin to the defeated; and Bruce, after the barbarous fashion of the period, made awful reprisals on his foes, and so terribly desolated the district of Buchan with fire and sword that it continued to be a theme of lamentation for fifty years. The Earl and Mowbray fled to England, and died there; and Sir David Brechin soon after espoused the cause of Bruce.

Many popular traditions of the battle are still afloat among the peasantry of the district around Inverury and Old Meldrum; and the chief of these, together with their legendary exaggerations, we are told in the New Statistical account of the parish of Bourtie, may be incorporated as follows:—  
“On a time lang syne, when the English wished to tak awa our liberties, the fause Comyn cam up frae Buchan wi' a' his fallowers and a fouth o' English forbye, to win the crown to the English tirran Edward. In ae nicht, they biggit a' that camp o' the Hill heed, for the country was mensely agen them. But they thocht themselves that they had the ba' fairly at their fit noo, for Bruce was lyin at death's door at Inraurie; and frae the time that he took ill, his folk, thinkin' a' was o'er wi' them, had turnit few in number. But fan the nicht's mirkest, its nearest the crawin' o' the cock. Fan he heard o' their bein' at's very door as 'twar,

up he sprang frae his bed, like a fey man, and cryin' for's sword said, 'I'se make a speen or spoil a horn. These loons are physick to me.' So out he gaed amang's folk, and fan they were dwindled awa till a handfu' amais; and sair he seem't dishertent, but only said, 'Fat we wint o' folk, we wan men wi' can.' So he order't them a' to be ready by 12 at nicht, wi' a' the nowt and horse they could gather. A'well aff they set, but nae by the stracht road, but ower the tap o' Lawel Side, which they cam till jist afor' the sky; and for as bare as it is noo, it was then, as I'm tauld, a brow forest coveret wi' bonny trees. Bruce noo tied lights to the horns o' the nowt, and reed cloth and white napkins to the horse necks, and dreve them here and there through the wood, orderin's folk to mak a' the din they could. The heart o' the Comyns lap to their mou', for they thocht the haill o' Scotlan' was risen agen them. Jist at this time when a stir began amo' them, Sir William Wallace, as was agree't on wi' the Bruce, up's wi' a stane like a house-side, and wi' the strenth o' ten Galiahs, bungs't frae the tap o' Benachie; and that they nicht ken fa the compliment cam' frae, he first prented the initials o' his name (W. W.) i' the side o't. Fung it gaed thro' the air, and lichtin' i' the middle o' the camp kill't not a few, and gart the yird stot to the very clouds. The hurly wus noo compleet, and oot they ran oot o'er ither's heeds like as many sheep oot o' the fauld. In this confesion, the Bruce and his folk cam upo' them; and tho' they focht hard, they war' sae sair defait that they could never hand up their heeds ahint it. The King's spirits waur noo high, as ye may believe; but he wus doom't to get a sair heart-brak afor' nicht. His bosom comarade, the brave Englishman, Sir Thomas de Longueville, was mortally wounded i' the battle; but he continnet to fecht while it lasted. He raid off the field 'till he cam' to the Dykes o' Fala, but there fell frae his horse. Callin' to the King 'Noo, Robin,' he said till him, 'my een will soon be clos't, and I've ae request

to mak. Ye maun jist lay my banes wharever this arra fa's.  
So drawin's bow, he sent the arra wi' a' his micht through the  
air, and it fell i' the kirk yard o' Bourtie here, twa mile  
awa."