

THE BATTLE OF ANCRUM.*

A.D. 1544-5.

IN the sequestered parish of Ancrum, in the county of Roxburgh, there is still a stone, broken and defaced, which once contained an inscription in doggrel rhyme—

“ Fair maiden Lilliard lies under this stane,
Little was her stature, but great was her fame,
Upon the English loons she laid many thumps,
And when her legs were smitten off she fought upon her stumps.”

* Holinshed's Chronicle ; Leslie, De Rebus Gestis Scotorum ; Buchanan's History ; Ridpath's History of the Borders ; Sir Walter

This refers to a tradition that in the battle, which is the subject of the present narrative, a young Scottish woman named Lilliard followed her lover, and when she saw him fall she rushed forward, and by her gallantry aided to turn the fight in favour of her countrymen. The heroine was slain in the engagement, and the spot on which she fell and was buried was indicated by the stone now mentioned. From her interference the fight is often termed the battle of *Lilliard's Edge*, because fought on the brow or edge of a rising ground.

Henry VIII., to revenge the rejection of his offers to marry his son Edward to Mary Queen of Scots, both of whom were then children, resolved to invade Scotland. The English, who mustered in considerable force, were commanded by two knights—Sir Ralph Evers and Sir Bryan Laton—and overran without opposition the counties of Berwick, Roxburgh, and the adjacent districts. Having achieved these conquests they proceeded to London in expectation of a reward, but they were induced to return to Scotland and renew their depredatory warfare.

The Earl of Angus, who had large estates in the ravaged districts, was greatly exasperated against the English both on account of the losses he had sustained, and also because they had some time previously defaced the tombs of his ancestors in Melrose Abbey. The Earl of Arran was at this time Regent during the minority of the young Queen, and her absence in France, and the complaints of Angus respecting his own private losses and the public disgrace at length roused him from his timid indolence. The Regent took the field, accompanied by Angus, with only a few hundreds of men to oppose five thousand English. A

considerable reinforcement was expected by the Regent, for the body of men whom he commanded seems merely to have been designed to check the predatory parties of the English, and to protect the inhabitants of the Borders until a suitable army was mustered to drive the enemy out of the country.

The English were at Jedburgh when the Regent and Angus arrived at Melrose, where they resolved to wait for their reinforcements before they took the field against the enemy. Aware of the limited numbers of the Scots the English marched from Jedburgh with the intention of overpowering them by numbers at Melrose, but the former were duly informed of their approach, and prudently withdrew from the town to the neighbouring hills, while the English returned to Jedburgh. The Scots continued their march southward, during which they were reinforced by three hundred men from Fife under Norman Leslie, son of the Earl of Rothes, and by various companies of the Border troopers, so that their force in all amounted to about 1700 men, according to some authorities, while others limit them to 1500, of whom a considerable number were gentlemen.

The English followed the Scots, who were now reinforced by Walter Scott of Buccleuch. This bold Border chief hung over their march, and suggested to the Regent the propriety of giving them battle in the neighbourhood of the village of Ancrum. The Baron of Buccleuch, who knew the country, instantly advised the Regent to draw up his forces in a kind of ambush, where they would not be perceived by the pursuing enemy. Arran adopted this recommendation, and having dismounted his cavalry, sending the horses to some eminences in the rear, the Scots were drawn up on low ground, where they were in a great measure concealed.

When the English perceived at a distance the apparent

confusion among the Scots caused by their dismounting, they imagined the latter were already in the act of flight. They advanced with the greatest precipitation, as if secure of their prey, with the wind and sun directly in their faces. It was towards evening, when to their surprise they came suddenly upon the Scots drawn up in good order. Breathless by their rapid march, and exhausted by previous fatigues, the English were in no condition to fight, but trusting to their numbers they stood to their arms. No time was lost in commencing the attack, which was done with the utmost impetuosity by the Scots, who fell upon them in a manner no less fierce and resolute than unexpected. The English were soon thrown into irretrievable confusion, which was assisted by a strong wind and the declining rays of the sun falling right on their faces, but chiefly by the defection of seven hundred Scottish Borderers who served in the English army. Those were the Halls, Olivers, Turnbulls, and some others; for in a letter written by Sir Ralph Evers, dated 14th September 1544, those Border septes are mentioned as having entered into a bond with England, and the battle now narrated was fought on the 17th of February afterwards. We are told by Buchanan that "the first line of the English, impeded by their own perturbation, and charged by the Scots, were driven back upon the second, and the second upon the third; and, impelled the one upon the other, their ranks were broken, and such rout and terror spread every where, that it was impossible to distinguish either banner or leader, and every one consulting his own individual safety, no one ever thought of the public danger or disgrace. The Scots, following close upon this rabble, there was no longer a battle, but a slaughter."

The English fled in all directions closely pursued by the victors. Sir Ralph Evers, Sir Brian Laton, and several gentlemen of distinction, were slain, and five hundred sol-

diers fell in the pursuit. Above one thousand prisoners were taken, among whom were eighty persons of rank. It is stated that one of the prisoners was an alderman of London named Read. This gentleman had obstinately refused to advance his share of a sum demanded by Henry VIII. in the preceding month of January from the citizens of London in the way of benevolence, and he was sent as a punishment to serve in the war against the Scots; but he eventually found that he was obliged to pay more money for his ransom than his share of Henry's demand would have cost him.

The Scots, greatly exasperated against the English, are said to have treated their enemies with great barbarity on this occasion. It is asserted that they lost only *two men*, and that those two were killed by their own weapons. If this is the fact, the tradition of the fair Lilliard rushing into the battle when she saw her lover fall, and contributing to the defeat of the English by her bravery, must be rejected as a fable. But the Scots lost a considerable number of men, though not nearly in proportion to the English, and from the tradition of Lilliard's exploits it is evident that in some parts of the field the battle was hotly contested. The Regent Arran complimented the Earl of Angus for his distinguished conduct in this battle, and also the Earl's brother, Sir George Douglas, declaring in presence of the army that their actions had entirely removed all suspicions of their favouring the English interest. The bold Baron of Buccleuch, Normarr Leslie, and other gentlemen, were specially noticed. The Scots returned to Jedburgh, and there refreshed themselves with the provisions collected by the English, who, confident of victory, had resolved to return to that town.

It is related that the Earl of Angus, when about to plunge into the thickest of the battle, exclaimed—"O that I had my white gosshawk here! We should all yoke at

once." This was occasioned by the Earl seeing a heron flying over the army. Henry VIII. bitterly inveighed against Angus, whom he accused of ingratitude for some previous favours, and vowed to be revenged. When this was intimated to the Earl, he indignantly exclaimed, alluding to his relationship to the King, having married the Princess Margaret of England—"What! Is our brother-in-law offended because I am a good Scotsman, and have avenged the defacing of the tombs of my ancestors at Melrose upon Ralph Evers? They were better men than he is, and I ought to have done no less. Will he take my life for that? Little knows King Henry that I know where to keep myself secure from all his English host!"

Such was the battle of Ancrum Muir, otherwise Lilliard's Edge, in which the fair heroine Lilliard is reported to have "done the deed which gilds her humble name." Some English historians designate it the battle of Panier-haugh, or of Broomhouse. It is related that Sir Ralph Evers had burnt the tower of Broomhouse in the neighbourhood, with its lady, her children, and the whole family, and that after the rout of the English, the cry of the Borderers, who with their red crosses had waited the event, was to revenge this act of cruelty. This probably accounts for the defection of the seven hundred Borderers in the service of the English already noticed. Sir Ralph Evers and Sir Brian Laton were interred in Melrose Abbey—a fact which shows that the Earl of Angus cherished no resentment against the dead. We are informed by an eccentric authority that in 1812 or 1813, when he happened to be in Melrose, some workmen were clearing out the floor of the old abbey, and he saw a stone coffin inscribed *DNS IVERS*—the contraction for *Dominus*. It was an entire stone, fitted to the head, neck, and body. The skeleton was entire, but soon mouldered into dust. The coffin of Sir Brian Laton was only flag-stones. Sir Ralph Evers was a Border baron, and

his character is thus intimated in a verse of an ancient minstrel ballad—

“ And now he has in keeping the town of Berwick,
The town was ne'er so well kept I wot ;
He maintained law and order along the Border,
And ever was ready to prick the Scot.”

In a document, entitled “ Exploits done upon the Scots from the beginning of July,” in the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Henry VIII. (1544), there is an appalling catalogue of the devastation committed on the Scottish frontiers in 1544 by Sir Ralph Evers, Sir Brian Laton, Lord Wharton, and their colleagues, to whom Henry had committed the task of avenging his disappointment at the breach of the match between his son Edward and the infant Queen of Scotland. The English were evidently masters of all the Border counties, and Henry is said to have bestowed the districts of Merse and Teviotdale upon Sir Ralph Evers and Sir Brian Laton. Some of the inroads of those marauding barons will form no inappropriate conclusion to the present narrative, more especially as the Scots, though weakened by domestic quarrels and dissensions, were enabled to revenge the depredations by the defeat of Ancrum Muir. On the 17th of July 1544 Sir Ralph Evers writes—“ John Carr's son, with his garrison, took a town in the Merse called Greenlaw, and slew one of the Redpaths, brought away sixty-eight kine and oxen, eighty sheep, nine horses and nags, one Scot slain. Sir George Bowes, Sir Brian Laton, Henry Evre, and others, burnt Dunse, a market town, and brought away diverse prisoners, much *insight geir*, sixteen nags; five or six Scots slain.” But this was trifling when compared with some of the other predatory excursions. The people of Bedrule in Roxburghshire were plundered of three hundred cattle, six hundred sheep, and much *insight*, besides having their residences burnt to the ground.

Lord Ogle, Sir John Witherington, and other gentlemen of Northumberland, at the head of 2300 men, burnt several towns, and then forayed to Mackerston and Rutherford. In these expeditions they plundered the people of 320 head of cattle, 200 sheep, and sixty horses, taking twelve troopers and twenty footmen prisoners, and slaying several persons. In short, the whole country was ravaged by those plundering barons appointed by Henry VIII., to revenge himself upon the Scots ; and their deeds of rapine, slaughter, and robbery, are mentioned in their letters with the utmost indifference. It appears that the Scottish Borderers in those times were unable to resist the temptation of English gold, and not a few of them are mentioned as assisting in the forays, and as particularly active in securing plunder. To this they were probably the more readily induced by their own hereditary animosities and private quarrels, and nothing can be more deplorable than the picture of the state of the Border counties at this period, until the English were completely defeated at Ancrum Muir. Almost every town, village, and farm-steading, was ravaged, plundered, or burnt ; the whole country was scoured by lawless and savage troopers, and every thing valuable on which they could lay their hands was carried away. The sum total of the loss sustained by the inhabitants of the Border counties in the devastation committed by Sir Ralph Evers and Sir Brian Laton is thus enumerated :— Towns, towers, parish churches, farm-steadings, 192 ; Scots killed in the forays, 403 ; prisoners, 816 ; head of cattle, 10,386 ; sheep, 12,492 ; horses, 1296 ; bolls of corn, 850 ; insight geir, &c., to an amount apparently unknown. The English made the Borderers in their pay the chief actors in all these expeditions. It is stated by a competent authority, that “ the inhabitants of Liddesdale, also comprehending the martial clans of Armstrong, Elliot, and others, were apt on an emergency to assume the red cross, and for the time become English

subjects. They had indeed this to plead for their conduct, that the sovereigns of Scotland had repeatedly abandoned them to the vengeance of English retaliation, on account of hostilities against that country which they were unable to punish. These clans, with the Rutherfords, Crossers, Turnbulls, and others, were the principal instruments of the devastation committed in Scotland in 1544-5. They expiated this fault, however, by a piece of treachery towards their English allies, when, seeing the day turn against them at Ancrum Muir, these assured Borderers, to the number of 700 men, suddenly flung away their red crosses, and, joining their countrymen, made great and pitiless slaughter among the flying invaders."
