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HISTORY

OF

Sir William Wallace

The Renowned

Scottish Champion.

Containing an Account of his Valliant Transactions against the English, and his mournful fate at London, after he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies ; how he was put to death, and his body quartered, and sent to various places.



GLASGOW :

PRINTED FOR THE BOOKSELLERS

HISTORY

Sir William Wallace
The Renowned
Scottish Champion.

Containing an Account of the Life of the Famous
Scottish Hero, and the manner of his
Death, with a Description of the
Battle of Bannockburn, and the
other remarkable Events of his
Life.



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HISTORY
OF
SIR WILLIAM WALLACE.

It was in times of the deepest calamity, when Scotland as it were was overwhelmed with affliction, and sinking into the deepest despair, by the base conduct of an ignominious monarch, that Scotland was betrayed into the hands of the King of England, who put Scotland in a state of cruelty and oppression, and sent blood and carnage over the land that Divine Providence, raised up Sir William Wallace, for a deliverer of his country, from the slavish submission to the English monarch, and a champion to avenge her wrongs.

This remarkable hero was the son of Sir Malcolm Wallace, the proprietor of a small estate called Ellerslie, near Paisley, in the county of Renfrew. The exact period of his birth is not known; but it is supposed that at the time of his father's death, who was killed at the battle of Loudon Hill, in 1293, he was about fifteen years of age. His mother, after this disastrous event, fled with her son to the house of an uncle, where Wallace lived between two and three years. when a boy he had witnessed the se-

eurity and happiness of his country during the reign of Alexander III, and now when she was degraded and oppressed by the tyrant Edward, his countrymen despoiled of their goods, and their wives and daughters wantonly insulted by his English followers, the contrast was of such a nature as to arouse the keenest feelings in a heart which from its earliest stirrings was animated by a love of liberty to his country, which nothing but death could extinguish.

Whilst brooding in secret over his country's wrongs, an event occurred which stimulated the powers of his mind and body into ætieve existence, and for ever banished all hope of conciliation betwixt him and the enslavers of his country. He had formed an attachment to a beautiful young woman in the town of Lanark, and when passing through that burgh, well armed and somewhat richly dressed, he was recognised by a troop of English soldiers, who surrounded and insulted him. Wallace at first would have prudently got clear of their insolence; but a contemptuous stroke which one of them made against his sword, provoked him to draw, and he laid the culprit dead at his feet. A tumult now arose, and, almost overpowered by numbers, he escaped with difficulty into the house of his sweetheart, and through it, by a back passage, into the neighbouring

woods. For facilitating his escape, the unfortunate girl was seized next day by the English sheriff, and with inhuman cruelty condemned and executed. But Wallace's revenge, when he heard of her unmerited fate, was as rapid as it was stern. That very night he collected thirty faithful and powerful partisans, who, entering the town when all were in their beds, reached the sheriff's lodgings in silence. It was a building constructed of wood, and the sheriff's apartment communicated with the street by a high stair. Up this Wallace rushed at midnight, and, beating down the door, presented himself in full armour, and with his naked weapon, before the affrighted officer, who asked him whence he came, or who he was? "I am William Wallace," he replied, "whose life you sought yesterday: and now thou shalt answer me for my poor maiden's death." With these words he seized his naked victim by the throat, and passing his sword through his body, cast the bleeding wretch down the stair into the street, where he was immediately slain. He then speedily withdrew with his followers into the woods which surrounded the town. For this daring act of retaliation he was accused by the government of murder, and sentence of of proscription and outlawry being passed against him, an immediate and eager pursuit was adopted. Wallace,

however, was intimately acquainted with the country, and found little difficulty in defeating every effort for his apprehension.

Before proceeding further, however, in the detail of Wallace's personal history, and in order better to understand the narrative which follows, it becomes necessary to take a short review of the state of matters at that time in Scotland, and the course of events which led to the series of transactions.

Upon the death of Alexander III. a number of candidates appeared for the Scottish crown; and among others were Robert Bruce and John Baliol, both descendants of David I. The right of the former was certainly the preferable one; but when the right of succession was not distinctly settled, the claims of both had supporters. It was at last proposed, to refer their claims to Edward I. of England, one of the most powerful monarchs of that day. Edward, who had long cherished ambitious designs upon Scotland, was delighted with this proposal, and by way of adjusting the matter, which he now affected to look upon with a great deal of solemnity, summoned the Scottish nobles to Norham, where, he soon prevailed on all present, not excepting Bruce and Baliol, to acknowledge him Lord Paramount, and swear fealty to him in that character.

It was on this occasion maintained by Edward, that the English monarchs were the natural and acknowledged superiors of the kingdom of Scotland, which only an appanage of the English crown; and that at different periods this right had been authenticated by the homage of the Scottish princes. Now the fact was, that these acts of fealty were only rendered for possessions of the Scottish sovereigns lying on the northern frontier of the English dominions. These territories, from their being situate on the threshold of the two kingdoms, had formed the theatre of many sanguinary conflicts; and had at divers times changed masters, till they came at last to be considered as belonging to Scotland. For these possessions it had been the practice of some of the Scottish kings, at different periods, to do homage, to those of far inferior note, for tracts of land acquired in this manner; and instances were not wanting of the English monarchs themselves, rendering that sort of subjection to the kings of France. It was now contended, however, by Edward, that the homage or fealty on these occasions had been done for the entire kingdom of Scotland.

This was the first step in Edward's ambitious views. Under pretence of transmitting the full authority into the hands of the successful can-

didate, he next demanded the temporary possession of all the fortresses of the kingdom: which strange to say, were passively yielded into his hands, with the exception of the castles of Dundee and Forfar, then held by Gilbert de Umfraville, who refused compliance with this unlooked-for mandate, unless a written indemnity should be given at the hand of the Scottish nobles, freeing him from all share of blame. The claim of Baliol was at last, 17th December 1292, declared the preferable one, and that personage having again acknowledged the English king as his liege lord, was placed by him on the Scottish throne.

The insults and degradation to which he was subjected at last roused even the complying spirit of Baliol, and in the bitterness of his soul he could not help communicating his feelings to the nobles of his court, who, at his instigation, now unanimously disclaimed their hasty allegiance to the English monarch. "The silly traitor," exclaimed Edward in derision, when Baliol's refusal to attend his summons was communicated to him, "if he will not come to us we will go to him."

Edward now entered Scotland with a large army; one stronghold after another yielded to the conqueror; Edinburgh Castle surrendered after

a slight resistance; Stirling Castle almost without a struggle; others were abandoned: the spirit of the nation was extinguished: and Baliol again submitted to the terms of the conqueror. In this invasion Edward had been joined by Bruce and his adherents, who conceived a prospect was opened up of that nobleman obtaining the crown. But Edward, when order was restored, and the matter hinted to him, contemptuously replied, "Have we nothing else to do but to conquer kingdoms for you?" Bruce made no reply, but retired into obscurity, and passed the remainder of his days in quietness and opulence.

It was in the month of July 1296 that Edward finished at Elgin his expedition northward against the Scots. On his return to the south his army committed the most dreadful excesses; and still more to complete the subjugation of Scotland, the English monarch ordered all the charters and public papers which could in any way exhibit proof of the independence of the realm to be destroyed. He also carried off the celebrated stone, belonging to the coronation-chair of the Scottish kings, from the palace of Scone, where it had been kept for ages, and deposited it in Westminster Abbey. But all these indignities, added to the oppression and misrule of Edward's lieutenants in Scotland, only served

to exasperate, and at last to rouse into fearful action, the slumbering hatred of the nation. Among the foremost of those who banded themselves against the English was Wallace, who now first publicly appeared on the scene. He was a man eminently fitted for his perilous enterprise; for to the most ardent love of his country, unshaken resolution, and prodigious strength of body, he added those firm yet conciliatory manners which are necessary to govern rude and tumultuary ranks; while the personal and family injuries he had sustained at the hands of the English gave tenfold vigour to his efforts. A prediction also of Thomas the Rhymer, asserted that by the arm of Wallace was the independence of Scotland to be achieved.

To be acquainted with the strength and resources of the English, Wallace often disguised himself, and visited their garrisons and towns.

He took precaution to wear a light coat of mail under his common clothes; his bonnet, which to common sight was nothing more than a cap of cloth or velvet, had a steel basnet concealed under it; a collar or neck-piece, of the same metal, fitted him so closely, that it was hid completely, and below his gloves he had strong gauntlets of plate. Relying on his Herculean strength and secret armour, he fearlessly ventured into the very

middle of his enemies, and when they ventured to taunt or assail him, found that they had to do with an assailant in full armour and of undaunted courage.

While thus disguised, personal encounters with his enemies were of frequent occurrence. He slew a buckler-player at Ayr, and put to flight a number of soldiers, who attempted to rob him of his day's sport as he fished in Irvine water. He repaid the rudeness of Squire Long-castle by a mortal thrust in the throat with his dagger; and by many such bold and daring adventures he slew many of his foes.

In the spring of the year 1297, the people were suffering grievously from famine, to relieve the English garrison of Ayr, a large train of waggons, under the protection of John de Fenwick, took their journey from Carlisle to that town. Of this Wallace was informed, and although he could then only muster about fifty soldiers, he determined to attack it. Having occupied a strong position within a wood, he put up a temporary fortification, and passed the night. In the grey dawn of the morning, he and his men left their horses, and occupied a narrow valley which the convoy was to pass. Forward came Fenwick at the head of a force which far outnumbered them, and, confident in his own numbers,

he did not hesitate to attempt forcing the pass but he was soon convinced of his error. Encumbered by the train of waggons, and carriages he was thrown into irrecoverable confusion, and the Scots, after a great slaughter, captured the whole convoy, which, besides wine, and forage, included two hundred horses, and a considerable plunder in arms and accoutrements.

Wallace having been thus successful in various partial encounters, many of the barons and other persons of high rank flocked to his standard.

Edward now prepared a fresh army, which, under the command of Sir Robert Clifford and Sir Henry Percy, a second time invaded Scotland. Hastening to quell the insurrection, they came up with Wallace and his army, occupying an advantageous position in the neighbourhood of Irvine, in Ayrshire, and much superior to the English in numbers, but far inferior in discipline and appointments. By that sort of fatality, which seems inherent in divided command and undisciplined masses, when they are most required to act in concert, and which always leads to distrust and perplexity, the commanders, on this occasion, were determined to be each independent, and were therefore intractable. They could agree upon no measure, Dissension and heartburnings were every where: and Sir Richard Lundin, who

had been most vehement in his hostility to the invaders, deserted the cause of his country, and went over to the English, "I will remain no longer with a party that is at variance with itself."—Stewart, Lindsay, and Douglas, followed this example, and basely yielded themselves to the authority of Edward's officers.

The Scottish champion, finding himself thus basely deserted, by the leading men who surrounded him, retired northward. On his march with those who still remained faithful to his fortunes, he was joined by many new followers, and even received considerable accessions to his ranks from the vassals of several barons. Finding his army, by reason of these accessions, once more on a formidable footing, Wallace renewed the war, and commenced operations by laying siege to Dundee, a place of considerable strength.

The English leaders were no sooner apprized of Wallace's movements in that quarter than they hastened to meet him, and with that intent advanced in the direction of Stirling. Intelligence of their march having been speedily communicated to the Scottish champion, he instantly resolved to meet them on their approach. He then charged the citizens of Dundee, under pain of death, to continue the blockade, and commenced his march, hastening to seize the important pass

which divides the Ochil from the Grampian Hills, so that the English forces, when ready to pass the Forth by the bridge at Stirling, were astonished to see the Scottish army drawn up on a rising ground near the Abbey of Cambuskenneth, and prepared to oppose their passage. Edward's governor, here attempted to practise the same arts which had been so successful while at Irvine. The men which Wallace now had, were of a very different stamp from those dastardly and perfidious barons with whom it was his misfortune on that occasion to be allied. All terms of compromise were promptly and sternly rejected. "Return," said Wallace to the two friars sent by Warréne to propose an accommodation; "We came not here to treat but to assert our rights and set Scotland free. Let them advance, they will find us prepared"

Thus the English commanders were thrown into perplexity as to what plan of operations they should follow. To attempt to force a passage along the bridge, in the face of an enemy so advantageously posted and so full of zeal and high hopes, would be a step fraught with manifest danger. On the other hand, to decline the contest with an enemy inferior in many respects would be held disgraceful. While engaged in these deliberations, the danger of assaulting

The Scots in their present position appeared more and more hazardous to all the English commanders, except Cressingham the treasurer, who exclaimed " Let us fight, as is our bounden duty." The boisterous eloquence of Cressingham prevailed, and the rest of the leaders yielded a reluctant assent, contrary to the advice also of one of Wallace's late perfidious associates, Sir Richard Lundin, who offered to point out a ford at a short distance, by taking advantage of which they could fall on the rear and flanks of the enemy.

Wallace, Exhorting his followers solely to abide by his orders for the moment of attack, Wallace allowed about a third of the English army fairly to clear the bridge; when rushing down, while the others were defiling along the bridge, with an unlooked for and almost incredible impetuosity, the Scots precipitated themselves on their yet unformed ranks. The shock was like that of a mountain-torrent. The English seemed to have been, as it were, instantaneously swept off the earth. Thousands were slain on the field or drowned in the river; among the rest their rash adviser, Cressingham, whose dead body was treated with great indignity by the Scots, who abhorred him for the tyranny which he had always displayed against their country. A panic seized the English, who had witnessed this sud-

den overthrow and destruction of their companions: they hastily burned the bridge to secure their retreat, and, fleeing with the utmost rapidity, they scarcely halted till they had reached Berwick, leaving all their baggage and other ammunition in the hands of the victors. Few among the Scots fell in this engagement. This battle, so fatal in its issue to the English, took place on the 11th September 1297.

Wallace pushed on with rapid steps to Dundee, which in a short time capitulated. One stronghold after another fell into the hands of the patriots, and the country was soon freed from the tyranny of her oppressors.

By reason of bad seasons and want of cultivation, the country was reduced to a most deplorable state of privation and want, amounting almost to famine. To relieve in some measure the general pressure, as well as to retaliate on the invaders, an expedition into England was put under the command of Wallace, and the young Sir Andrew Murray, whose father fell at Stirling. The Scots poured into the northern counties, Berwick was taken, and the whole country completely overrun and wasted; and so great was the revenge of the Scots at this time, that Wallace himself and the other commanders were altogether unable to restrain their excesses.

Many wonderful facts are told of Wallace's exploits he defeated the English in several combats, chased them almost entirely out of Scotland, regained the towns and castles of which they had possessed themselves; and recovered the complete freedom of the country. He even marched into England, and laid Cumberland and Northumberland waste; and humbled the English.

In the north of Scotland, the English had placed a garrison in the strong castle of Dunnotar, which, built on a large and precipitous rock, overhangs the raging sea. Though the place is almost inaccessible, Wallace and his followers found their way into the castle, while the garrison in great terror fled into the church or chapel, which was built on the very verge of the precipice. This did not save them, for Wallace caused the church to be set on fire. A number of the terrified garrison, involved in the flames; ran upon the points of the Scottish swords, while others threw themselves from the precipice into the sea, and swam along to the cliffs, where they hung like sea-fowl, screaming in vain for mercy and assistance.

The followers of Wallace falling on their knees before the priests who chanced to be in the army, they asked forgiveness for having committed so much slaughter within the limits of a church de-

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dicated to the service of God. But Wallace had so deep a sense of the injuries which the English had done to his country, that he only laughed at the contrition of his soldiers,—“ I will absolve you all myself,” he said. “ It is not half what the invaders deserved at our hands?” So deep-seated was Wallace’s feeling of national resentment, that it overcame, the scruples of a temper which was naturally humane.

The Scots returned from England in triumph, laden with plunder; where they had spread terror along the whole border, to the gates of Newcastle.

Edward once more resolved to invade Scotland; at the head of 80,000 infantry and 7000 horsemen, he in person led on the march, holding his course northward he passed through Edinburgh, and fixed his head-quarters at Templeliston, a village between that city and Linlithgow, where he resolved to abide till his victualling-ships should arrive. While stationed here he received intelligence that the Scots were advancing upon Falkirk, a town about 12 miles distant. He resolved to give battle. But while the English passed the night under arms on a heath, an accident happened to their king which threatened for the present to suspend the attack. As he lay on the ground, his war-house struck him with a

tolence which broke two of his ribs; but, disregarding the pain, he mounted the horse and instantly led his troops to battle.

The Scots were formed in a stony field on a slightly rising ground, in the near vicinity of Falkirk. Their infantry were drawn up in four circular bodies, while the archers were disposed in the intervals. The horse, amounting only to a thousand, were posted in the rear. In front of the whole lay a morass. "Now," said Wallace, "I have brought you to the ring; hop gif you can;"—that is, "dance if you have skill." Edward's chief dependence was on his cavalry, 4000 of whom were cased in complete armour. These were ranged in three lines. The first was led by the Count of Artois, Earl Marshal, and the earls of Hereford and Lincoln; the second by the bishop of Durham, following under him Sir Ralph Basset of Drayton; the third, to act as a reserve, was commanded by the king in person. The assault was begun by the English horse, who, finding the passage of the morass, which lay in front of the Scots, to be impracticable, made a simultaneous attack on the right and left flanks of their enemy. The left flank made a determined and bloody resistance; but the Scots cavalry, panic-struck by the overwhelming appearance of the English horse, which, as well as their riders, were equipped in

heavy plates of steel, fled on their near approach. Wallace with his gallant infantry had now to sustain, unsupported, the whole shock of the English army, who again and again threw themselves with headlong fury upon the Scottish circles; but, "they could not penetrate into that wood of spears." After sustaining these repeated charges with the most determined resolution, the outer ranks were at last broken by dense showers of stones and arrows, which the English poured upon them in aid of the heavy onsets of the horse. Maeduff and Sir John Graham had by this time fallen, as also Sir John Stuart, who commanded the archers; almost all of which last had perished by the side of their beloved commander, whose death by their devoted bravery they so amply revenged. The rout was now becoming universal, when Wallace, collecting the shattered remains of his forces, commenced a retreat across the Carron,—a movement which, by his precaution caused little loss.—Among those who most eagerly pressed on their rear was Bruce, who on this occasion had again leagued himself with the English. Exasperated at the sight of this selfish traitor, Wallace suddenly darted forward, and with his two-handed sword dealt him a blow which, though it missed Bruce's head, was yet aimed with such prodigious strength as to cleave

his horse to the ground. With Sir Brian le Jay, a knight-templar of high military renown, the Scottish hero was more successful. With a single blow of his battleaxe he laid him dead in the midst of his followers.

Wallace now retreated across the Forth. But previous to this movement, and while wandering on the banks of the Carron, Wallace was recognised by the misguided Bruce, who descried him from the opposite bank, and, with the view perhaps of justifying his own dastardly conduct, ascribed to ambitious motives, in his opposition to the English. "No," said Wallace, "my thoughts never soared so high; I only mean to deliver my country from oppression and slavery, and to support a cause which you and others have abandoned. If you have but the heart, you may yet win a crown with glory, and wear it with justice. I can do neither: but will—live and die a free born subject."

The generous mind of Bruce was much struck with these glorious sentiments; he repented that he had joined Edward; he felt that he had betrayed his country and his own right; and he secretly determined to seize the first opportunity of joining his oppressed countrymen.

In this battle, the loss on both sides was very great. The number of the English, according

to historians of credit, amounted, as before stated, to nearly 90,000 men, while that of the Scots scarcely reached to a third part of the amount. Among the Scots who fell none was more regretted than Sir John the Graham, whose death was deeply mourned by Wallace. Sir John was buried at Falkirk, where a monument was erected to his memory, on which there is the following inscription:—"Graham is buried here, slain in battle by the English: he was strong in mind and body, and the faithful friend of Wallace."

The battle of Falkirk led the way to further successes on the side of the English; and almost the whole of the southern districts were reduced under their power. The Scots still held possession of the country north of the Forth. In the mean while Wallace, mortified by the treachery of the nobles, who threw every obstacle in the way of his being of any efficient use in the cause of his country, and disgusted with their quarrels and jealousies, retired for a while into obscurity. About this time, he took a voyage to France, with a small band of trusty friends, to try what his presence might do to induce the French monarch to send to Scotland a body of auxiliary forces, to aid the Scots in regaining their independence, but in the mean time bishop Lambertson, Bruce, earl of Carrick, and John Cumming the

younger submitted to Edward, but Sir William Wallace, with a very small band of followers refused either to acknowledge the usurper, Edward, or to lay down his arms. He continued to maintain himself among the woods and mountains of his native country, for no less than seven years after his defeat at Falkirk, and for more than one year after all the other defenders of Scottish liberty had laid down their arms. Many proclamations were sent out against him by the English, and a great reward was set upon his head; for Edward did not think he could have any secure possession of his usurped kingdom of Scotland while Wallace lived. At length he was taken prisoner; and, shame it is to say, a Scotsman, called Sir John Menteith, was the person by whom he was seized and delivered to the English. It is generally said that he was made prisoner at Robroyston, near Glasgow: and the tradition of the country bears, that the signal made for rushing upon him and taking him at unawares, was, when one of his pretended friends, who betrayed him, should turn a loaf, which was placed on the table, with its bottom or flat side uppermost. And in after-times it was reckoned ill-breeding to turn a loaf in that manner, if there was a person named Menteith in company; since it was as much as to

remind him, that his namesake had betrayed Sir William Wallace, the Champion of Scotland.

Edward having thus obtained possession of the person whom he considered as the greatest obstacle to his complete conquest of Scotland, resolved to make Wallace an example to all Scottish patriots, who should in future venture to oppose his ambitious projects. He caused this gallant defender of his country to be brought to trial in Westminster-hall, where he was accused of having been a traitor to the English crown; to which he answered, "I could not be a traitor to Edward, for I was never his subject."

Notwithstanding this most honourable defence, Wallace was shamefully condemned to be executed as a traitor! and Edward to his infinite reproach and disgrace, ordered Wallace to be dragged upon a sledge to the place of execution, where his head was struck off, and his body divided into four quarters, which, in conformity to the cruel practice of the time, were exposed upon pikes of iron upon London Bridge,—his right arm above the bridge at Newcastle,—his left was sent to Berwick,—his right foot and limb to Perth, and his left quarter to Aberdeen,—and termed the limbs of a traitor! He was executed on the 23d of August, 1305.

FINIS.