



Sir William Wallace

Chambers Encyclopedia – New Edition Vol. X, 1892

Wallace. Sir William, the Scottish patriot, was born about 1274, the second of the three sons of Sir Malcolm Wallace of Elderslie, near Paisley, by Margaret, daughter of Sir Reginald Crawford, sheriff of Ayr. The name Wallace – otherwise Valeys, Walensis, le Waleys, &c. – means simply Welshman: and the Wallaces may have come north with the Stewarts (q.v.) of whom they seem to have been feudal dependants. Blind Harry associated the hero's boyhood with Dundee, his youthful manhood with Ayrshire; whilst, according to Fordun, he got part of his education from an uncle, the priest of Dunipace, who instilled him into the maxim "*Libertas optima rerum*". But his true history even in the next generation, was so obscure that it now is next to impossible to separate truth from falsehood or exaggeration. He first stands out clearly in the spring of 1297 as a chief of a patriotic force, arrayed against Edward I. (q.v.) of England. To avenge, says Wyntoun, the murder of his young wife, he attacked the English garrison at Lanark and slew William de Hazelrig: he attempted to surprise the English justiciary at Scone; and with a large company he lay in a forest at Selkirk. This last fact (the first that is absolutely certain) appears from a letter written by Cressingham to Edward on 23rd July, a fortnight before which date the Scottish nobles, with the exception of Sir Andrew Moray, had submitted at Irvine to Edward. Edward himself was at the time in Flanders, but his general in Scotland was Warenne Earl of Surrey; and him on 11th September 1297 Wallace utterly defeated in the battle of Stirling Bridge as he was trying to pass beyond the Forth. The whole kingdom submitted to Wallace, whom we find the next month making friendly overtures to the Hanse towns of Lubeck and Hamburg (Germany), and who, crossing the border, harried all the north of England as far south as Newcastle. (Blind Harry absurdly takes him as far as St Albans, Hertford north of London, and makes him have a meeting with the English queen, when English queen there was none.) On his return from this expedition he was appointed 'Governor of Scotland, in the name of King John (Baliol), and by consent of the Scottish nation'. In 1298 Edward in person invaded Scotland at the head of 88,000 men. Wallace adopted a Fabian policy, but was forced to give battle at Falkirk (half way between Glasgow and Edinburgh) on 22nd July, where, deserted by the cavalry, his 'schilttrouns' or circular formations of infantry were shot down by the English archers and totally routed. The Scottish loss is variously estimated by the English chroniclers as being from 22,000 to 100,000 men, but according to Scottish writers the whole army did not exceed the former number. With this defeat Wallace's brief but glorious career terminated. We know that he visited France, whose King, Phillip, came near to surrendering him to Edward; we know also that he contemplated a visit to Rome; and then, on 3rd August 1305, seven years after the battle of Falkirk, we have his capture near Glasgow, by Sir John Menteith, Edward's Scottish governor of Dumbarton. He was brought to London, and, crowned with laurel in mockery, was tried for treason in the great hall of Westminster. He pleaded, and truly, that he had never been King Edward's vassal or subject; but he was condemned and executed that very same date at West Smithfield (meat market?) – hanged, disembowelled, beheaded, and quartered, the quarters being sent to Newcastle, Berwick, Stirling and Perth.