

THE SIEGE AND SURRENDER OF DUNSTER
CASTLE, 1645-6.

By EMANUEL GREEN.

The Marquis of Hertford, coming into Somerset in August, 1642, to raise the militia for the king, the county rose against him and drove him from Wells to Sherbourne. This place in turn he soon found to be untenable, and whilst negotiating or pretending to negotiate for a surrender, he suddenly escaped, on the 19th September, having with him about four hundred followers,¹ and made his course to Minehead. The Earl of Bedford, commanding for the Parliament, at once issued warrants for the apprehension of any of his party, and sent off posts to "Master" Luttrell at Dunster to strengthen and make good his castle there.² "Master" Luttrell obeyed quickly and readily, increased his garrison by one hundred men, and, supposing the Royalists would endeavour to cross over to Wales, caused the rudders to be removed from all the ships in Minehead harbour.³ On arriving at Minehead the Marquis fortified himself in a "strong inn," and then, as had been anticipated, attempted to get possession of Dunster Castle. For this purpose sixty of Sir Ralph Hopton's men were sent there to demand an entrance, a demand which was immediately and peremptorily refused. After some parley, as the party declined to leave, "Mistresse" Luttrell commanded the men within to "give fire," a command which the Royalist officer without ordered them not to obey; but "Mistresse" Luttrell again commanded them "upon their lives to do it," "which accordingly they did."⁴ To be fired at from

¹ England's Memorable Accidents.

² "Special Passages."

³ England's Memorable Accidents,
No. 25.

⁴ "Special Passages."

behind a rampart was more than these cavaliers expected, and so forthwith they beat a hasty retreat. Eventually the Marquis escaped in some coal ships to Wales, when there arose a great anxiety lest he should return suddenly, and by surprise get possession of the castle, from which it was considered that ten thousand men could not get him out. Proposals for raising horse and foot to guard it were promptly made, but the "very thoughts" that such a thing might occur caused the Minehead people to forget to entertain the Earl of Bedford when he arrived in pursuit.¹ By Lord Hertford this failure so unexpected was greatly regretted, as the place at this time was considered impregnable, and afterwards in his vexation he charged Sir Ralph Hopton's men with cowardice in the business.

I have acquainted His Majesty [he wrote] of our disastrous fortune at Mineard and Dunster occasioned by the multitude of your countrymen's evil dispositions and cowardly behaviour in them, upon which I remembered a reverent speech of that worthy souldier, Swinden, who was General of Ostend in the time of the Infanta, Arch Duchesse of Flanders, who said that our English nation stood too much upon their owne conceipt and valour, and that he would with a considerable army runne through our whole kingdome, knowing the vulgar sort of our nation to be fainthearted and unexperienced in martiall discipline. This relation of the Generall's happened to be true, for in our best actions and in the midst of our hopefull succeſſe, Capt. Digby's, Sir John Stowell's and your owne souldiers ran cowardly away from us, insomuch that had it not been for that small number of my owne Horse and Foot we had lost our ordnances, hazarded our persons, and lost the honour of that daye's work.

HERTFORD.

To this Sir Ralph Hopton replied :—

May it please your Lordship, with humble pardon, according to my weake ability I have considered your worthy advertisements, and vindicate myselfe and country from your Lordship's mistake. I shall now make it appeare that my actions and those under my command have bin concurrent to your Lordship's command and I have in brieſſe devoted myselfe to answere to every particular of your Lordship's letter. First, whereas your Lordship condemned our endeavours and cowardly behaviour at Mineard and Dunster, your Lordship may well remember and saw, three to one of the Earl of Bedford's forces forsake him, then those of our country under your Lordship's command had good succeſſe considering the great odds (five to one). Secondly, that whereas your Lordship remembered one of the Generall in his speech at Ostend, that our nation stood too much upon their owne strength and valour and that he would with a few experienced soldiers run through our kingdome,

¹ "Special Passages," Nos. 8-9.

My Lord the question herein is not disputable, for nature at home bindeth filiall affection, and one Brother or one nation to fight another is not warrantable by God's lawes, and in that respect there might be faintheartedness in our nation, but my Lord, let the Generall of Ostend or any other forraigne Princes, invade this our land, I know that your Lordship believes that our Nation will not runne or give one foot of ground to such an enemy, for we are all sencible with whom we quarrell, the Father against the Sonne, and the Sonne against the Father, and if Alexander the Great or the Emperor of Persia were now alive, whose armies dranke Rivers of water, yet my Lord it would daunt the hearts of these gallants to destroy their owne bloud.

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

RALPH HOPTON.¹

Early in January, 1643, the Welshmen gave trouble on the Somerset coast. Some blockaded Minehead, and preventing the entry of all boats or barques, kept back the supplies of provisions and coal. Others, about five hundred in number, under Captain Paulet landed there, "invaded" the county, and "constrained the inhabitants to yeeld to any taxation, and to submit themselves servants and slaves to every poore base companion, to save their throats from being cut," an operation daily threatened. This party attacked Dunster Castle, but Mr. Luttrell being prepared, was able to defeat them and secure the town from plunder. In the attack, a shot from the castle killed some of Capt. Paulet's men, which "moved him to wroth," and he vowed he would quarter the "murderer" limb from limb and hang his quarters on the castle as food for ravens. Being thus unsuccessful here, he went on to Barnstaple² with two hundred of his musketeers and forty horse, and Dunster remained intact and held for the Parliament until after the fall of Bridgwater in this year. The royalist successes then added so much to their prestige that many began to think that victory must be a certainty for the king. Mr. Luttrell, amongst others, seems to have been of this opinion and to have trimmed his conduct thereto, for Mr. Francis Windham, at the time, having opportunities for conference with him "found that he had good inclinations in him" to deliver up the castle; inclinations, however, in which he was much "distracted and disturbed"

¹ The Copy of a Letter, &c.

² "Special Passages."

by some persons near him, *i.e.*, "Mistresse" Luttrell, his wife. But, by persistently pressing his advantage, Mr. Windham so "wrought on his fears" that eventually, with a fine of a thousand pounds, the castle was surrendered and garisoned for the king.

After the reverses of the royalist party at Langport, Taunton, and Bridgwater, in the summer of 1645, Dunster Castle remained the only place held for the king in Somerset, but, isolated as it was, it was harmless except as a means of annoyance to the district immediately around it. As it was desirable to stop even this power, Colonel Blake and Colonel Sydenham, taking a small party from Taunton, laid siege to it early in November, and by the sixth had so completely blocked it that its surrender seemed certain, if it were not taken by surprise. Neither of these expectations were realised as the besieged held out, although by the end of the month they were said to be straitened for provisions and had suffered sadly from want of water. It was reported that Colonel Francis Windham, the Governor, about the 20th November wrote to Lord Goring, then commanding the king's forces in Devon, that he could hold out but a fortnight or three weeks longer, and was only enabled to do that from having secured a good supply of water from some late heavy rains.¹ He at least wrote for aid, as in response, Goring sent some foot to Bideford, intending to forward them to Dunster by sea, and a party of horse was got in readiness to march by land to protect them on arrival.² But, possibly not knowing their destination until they arrived at Bideford, and then not getting their promised pay, and finding they were to be out for more than the twenty days agreed for with Lord Hopton, they deserted there and ran. Sir Richard Grenville was quickly after them to bring them back but the plan for this time resulted in failure.³ The design becoming known, Sir Thomas Fairfax placed a party to command the road and prevent or check the repetition of any similar attempt. Thus early in December when another party endeavoured to pass, the others guarding the roads being on the watch about Tiverton and Crediton, encountered them and compelled them to return.⁴

¹ "Perfect Passages," No. 56.

² "Perfect Diurnal," No. 125,

³ "Moderate Intelligencer," No. 38.

⁴ "Weekly Account."

Meanwhile Colonel Blake had repeatedly summoned the Governor to surrender, but always receiving a curt refusal, he had pushed forward his approaches and batteries and worked busily at his mines, as these were "next to determine the business."¹ A summons was again sent in, now with the threat to storm if it were refused. Colonel Windham replied as before, that as he had formerly announced his intention to keep his charge to his utmost, so he was still and would ever be *semper idem*, always the same.

About the 6th January, 1646, Blake received a reinforcement of fifteen hundred horse, and these he quartered some five or six miles from the castle, to keep a sharp look out on the Exeter road.² As relief was constantly attempted and as often prevented, these troopers had a very harassing and hard duty to perform, and this, with the continuance of the siege and the dodging and perpetual activity thereabouts, drew the general attention towards Dunster.

At the very end of December, 1645, or about the 1st of January, 1646, a story was circulated by the royalist party at Oxford, on the reported authority of two men supposed to have come from Dunster, that the castle was relieved and the siege raised. The story was, that the besiegers, having taken prisoner the Governor's mother, sent in a summons thus—"If you will yet deliver up the castle, you shall have fair quarter, if not, expect no mercy; your mother shall be in the front, to receive the first fury of your cannon. We expect your answer." The Governor is supposed to reply, "If you do what you threaten you do the most barbarous and villainous act that was ever done. My mother I honour, but the cause I fight for and the masters I serve, God and the King, I honour more. Mother, do you forgive me and give me your blessing, and let the rebels answer for spilling that blood of yours which I would save with the loss of mine own, if I had enough for both my master and yourself." To this the mother is supposed to answer, "Son, I forgive thee for this brave resolution. If I live I shall love thee the better for it. God's will be done." The story then adds that just at this moment there

¹ "Perfect Occurrences."

² "Moderate Intelligencer," No. 44.

appeared Lord Wentworth, Sir Richard Grenville, and Colonel Webb, who attacking the besiegers, killed many, took a thousand prisoners, rescued the mother, and relieved the castle.¹

This report is here quoted from its original source ; it has been often repeated, but was not true. The siege was not raised, the castle was not relieved at this time, and the supposed chief actors in the affair were then in Cornwall or on the borders of Devon.² The Parliamentary party soon cried it down as "ale house intelligence and a feeble lie."³

As the Governor seemed determined not to surrender, Fairfax wrote to Colonel Blake to proceed with the siege and to spring his mines.⁴ This he did on the 3rd January, fully expecting to have blown up the castle. But they within, aware of what had been going on, had discovered one mine, and had spoilt it by countermining, another was not fired or did not spring, whilst the third, although it exploded fairly, destroyed but a part of the wall, causing a considerable breach, but yet making "more noise than execution."⁵ The road opened by it was altogether too difficult for approach, and proved so inaccessible that the intended attack could not be made. Thus the hoped for opportunity was lost. For the defenders, however, now very short of necessaries, it proved a great annoyance, as they were put to double duty to keep their guards. In this emergency Sir Richard Grenville wrote to Colonel Windham to hold out yet a little longer and help should certainly come to him.⁶ Intending this, two regiments were sent out on the 8th of January, ostensibly to relieve Exeter, but really destined for Dunster. Their plan was either betrayed or assumed by their opponents, as some horse and foot were called from their winter quarters to watch them, and if necessary to go and strengthen Colonel Blake. Seeing their enemy thus prepared, and that relief was impossible, the Royalists once more retired, and the blockade of Dunster was continued without interruption until the end of January.

¹ "Mercurius Academicus," No. 3.

² "Mercurius Civicus," No. 136.

³ "Mercurius Britannicus," No. 114.

⁴ "Perfect Passages," No. 63.

⁵ "Mod. Intell.," No. 44.

⁶ "Weekly Account," No. 2.

Towards the end of 1645 the king's army found itself cooped up in Devon, the Parliamentary forces gathering in Somerset and along the line of its retreat, in high spirits, cheerily concluding that at last the country had a chance of peace and that the royal troops were securely and certainly trapped. A report now came that Goring intended to break through this line and get his whole force away. Orders were at once sent for the reserves in the rear to be ready to meet such a movement, and Major-Gen. Massey immediately busied himself with preparations about Crewkerne.¹ Taking advantage of the attention of the Parliamentary force in Devon being given to this matter, a party of fifteen hundred horse and three hundred foot, sent by Lord Hopton under the command of Col. Finch, managed to reach Dunster, and on the 5th of February relieved the castle with four barrels of powder, thirty cows and fifty sheep.² Having done this they spoilt the mines and destroyed the works thrown up by the besiegers and then returned to Devon, plundering several places as they passed. Finding the relieving party too strong for him, Col. Blake on their arrival retired for protection into a strong house and remained there unmolested. As they left, however, he sallied out on their rear and took a few prisoners, but in turn got himself into an awkward trouble, from which he managed only with great difficulty to make an honourable retreat without great loss.³ Col. Luttrell, the owner of the castle, apparently regretting, under the altered circumstances of the war, his former surrender of it, now offered, by report, to raise a thousand men to help in any other attack, but⁴ Blake determined simply to renew and continue the blockade, until he could be strongly reinforced from the main army. From his better information he may have judged that this would early be possible, as not long afterwards Exeter fell. Sir Thomas Fairfax then, with his usual energy, quickly moved off for fresh work, and on the 8th of April his army was camped around Chard, from whence he sent Col. Lambert's regiment to strengthen the force before Dunster.⁵

¹ "Perfect Passages," No. 65.

² Carte, T.

³ "Perfect Passages," No. 68.

⁴ "Mod. Intell.," No. 50.

⁵ "Mod. Intell.," No. 59.

Col. Blake had gone to meet the general, when, on Thursday night, the 16th of April, those in the castle called to Captain Burrige, who commanded at the time, to know if it were true, as some of his soldiers had stated, that Exeter and Barnstaple had both fallen. Captain Burrige "hearkening" to what was said, they "tendered their desires" to be allowed to send to Barnstaple to get the news confirmed, and if it were true they would capitulate. The captain answered that he "would not by any false way or smooth language go about to beg their castle," and offered himself as hostage if they would send out one of like rank whilst they sent for intelligence, and if what he had said was not true he would forfeit his life, provided they would agree to surrender on a day named if all were confirmed. Weak and reduced, and now barely able to defend more than the fort or keep, this conversation "wrought so much" upon the garrison that on Friday morning it was re-opened and a request again made for leave to go for intelligence. Notice having meantime arrived that Blake was returning and would soon be with him, Captain Burrige desired them to have a little patience and they should get an answer from the colonel himself. About noon Blake arrived, having with him Major-General Skippon's regiment and the remainder of his own. This force he drew up in two bodies on a hill facing the castle, and, in accordance with orders given by Sir Thomas Fairfax, sent in another summons for surrender.¹ Deprived of all hope of relief, Colonel Windham, in reply, demanded a parley, the result being that after having sustained a close siege of about a hundred and sixty days, with a loss of twenty men, he surrendered on the 19th of April on the following conditions :—

1. That the Castle, together with the arms, ammunition, and other furniture of war (except what is hereunder excepted), be delivered up into the hands of Colonel Blake, for his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax, to the use of the King and Parliament.

2. That all Commissioners and officers in the Castle should march away with horses and arms and all other necessary accoutrements appertaining.

3. That common officers and common soldiers, both horse and foot, should march away with their arms and three charges of powder and

¹ "The Taking of Michael's Mount," &c.

bullet, and with three yards of match, for those that had matchlocks, together with colours and drums.

4. That Colonel Windham should carry with him all that was properly his own, and that what property belonged to Lady Windham should be sent to her.

5. That all officers and soldiers with all particular persons of the castle should march forth secure, as many as would, to Oxford, without delay, and those that were otherwise minded should lay down their arms and have "let passes" to their homes, or to any other place they should desire, with protection against the violence of the soldiers.

6. That prisoners to either party be released.

7. That the said Colonel Francis Windham and his soldiers march to Oxford in twelve days.¹

Under this agreement the castle was delivered up on the 22nd April. Six pieces of ordnance and two hundred stand of arms were all the booty found within it. Colonel Blake, writing from Taunton, 21st April, when reporting the event to the Parliament, remarked that, at the price of time and blood, he could no doubt have obtained very different terms, but he was induced to accept these, wishing to follow the exemplary clemency of his general.² A public thanksgiving was now ordered for the many and continued successes of the Parliamentary forces, Dunster being named in the list of places whose capture deserved especial emphasis.³ Minehead, too, rejoiced that her disagreeable neighbour had fallen, and "gave the ringers when Dunster was yielded" four shillings and eight pence.

With this surrender of Dunster the fighting ceased in Somerset. The "trumpet left off his summons, the cannon forbode his chiding," and all the county was hushed into obedience to the Parliament. The war was now virtually over. The royal army, defeated everywhere, was soon disbanded, and the king, a captive, bought and sold, was destined to remain a prisoner till the bitter end.

¹ "Merc. Civicus," No. 152.

² "Four Strong Castles Taken," &c.

³ "Perfect Diurnal," No. 144.