# A Visit to Edgehill.

*By Walter Money, F.S.A.*

THERE is no period of English history which has such a fascination for the majority of people as that of the Great Rebellion of the Seventeenth Century, and the reason is not far to seek, for the fighting took place in our own native land; and there is scarcely a village or hamlet in the kingdom but what has some memorial of this civil conflict.

It is indeed surprising to find how traditions and legends of these stirring days have been handed down from father to son, generation after generation, from those who had fought under the standard of the King, or drawn the sword in the cause of Parliament. Many such incidents we have ourselves heard, which tend to prove that tradition is even more reliable than history itself, for in the course of investigating local circumstances connected with this particular period innumerable proofs have been afforded of the correctness of the legends we used to listen to with breathless attention on many a winter's night long years ago, from the lips of one whose great great grandsire fought at Edgehill, both Newbury fights, Old Basing and finally at Naseby, as an officer of the Parliament. But the father was a staunch old Royalist Yeoman, who followed the fortunes of the King with several of his sons and relatives, and would never forget the disloyalty of his first-born, whom he describes in his Will as "my rebellious son," and accordingly cut him off with the sum of "one shilling sterling," although he had only adopted the cause he believed to be best serving the interests of the country.

While we were familiar with most of the scenes of the chief events in the chronology of the civil war we had never visited the spot which signalised that day so memorable in English annals as that on which was fought the first battle between the contending forces of King and Parliament—a pilgrimage we have at length accomplished.

It was on a beautiful morning in June that we arrived at Banbury—a town famous for its "zeal, cakes and ale," which was held for the King and stood two sieges; one of 13 weeks duration, 1644, under Colonel Fiennes, of Broughton, when the brave garrison was relieved, having eaten all their horses but two; the other in 1646, after which the Castle was pulled down by order of Parliament, and no trace remains save a bit of the wall and part of the moat.

There is nothing to attract the stranger in Banbury beyond the hideously ugly Church, in a sham Italian style in that execrable period of ecclesiastical architecture, the latter part of the last century. The older Church which was one of the most beautiful structures of its kind in the whole kingdom, with a central battlemented tower, terminating in eight pinnacles, was ruthlessly pulled down, in order, it is said, to find profitable employment for certain local builders. Its partial re-erection without a spire, and the character the town had for uncleanness gave rise to the rhyme here:

"Dirty Banbury's proud people
Built a Church without a steeple."

This reproach has been long wiped out, for the town is now noticeable for its clean and bright appearance.

Wishing to see both positions of the opposing armies which fought at Edgehill, we first made for Kineton, alighting at Fenny Compton station, and walked over the hills by the remarkable beacon tower of Burton Dassett. It is one of the three old beacons which in time past cast their lurid glare from cresset and tower over the undulating face of Warwickshire. The tower, which is built of stone, is very rude in construction, and was erected in the 14th century for the Belknaps, lords of Basset, who held their lands under the condition of providing a beacon on this oolite ridge, which forms a spur of the Edge hills. A spectator on this hill could have discovered the march of the troops of Royalist and Roundhead prior to that fatal Sunday in October, when King and Parliament first met in hostile array in the fair plain beneath. It was from Burton Dasset Hill that a Parliamentary soldier fired the beacon which flared the news to the country-side, and from thence to London, that the men of the Parliament had met those of the King, and had not been beaten. The light was seen at Ivinghoe, in Buckinghamshire, and on the beacon there being fired it was seen at Harrow-on-the-Hill, and the news thus reached London.

Descending from the highlands of Burton, which, with those of Warmington and Arlescote were occupied by the pickets of Prince

Rupert on the morning of the memorable battle, we walked to Kineton, and thence over the very centre of the battlefield to Radway. The latter is a very picturesque village at the foot of the "Round House" at Ratley, which is the landmark for the whole country hereabouts, and during the summer is visited by thousands of people from Birmingham, Leamington, and the surrounding district. The view from the top of this "Round House," which is built on the spot where the King stood in the early morning of the battle, is one of the most magnificent in the kingdom, and embraces no less than eleven counties, besides the more remote hills in two of the Welsh counties, which can be discerned on a clear day. Warwick Castle and Coventry spires are among the distinct objects, and still more distantly, in a wider circumference, are to be seen Stow Hill in Gloucestershire; Breedon, Broadway, and Malvern in Worcestershire; the Wrekin in Shropshire; the Bardon Hills in Leicestershire; and Shuckburgh Hills on the borders of Northamptonshire. On the other side, into Oxfordshire, the views are not so extensive, because Edgehill is truly an edge, that is, it is a step where the country takes an abrupt rise, and when you gain the summit you find yourself, not so much on a hill, as on the level of a higher country.

Below, on the campaign, at a distance of three miles, lies the little town of Kineton, the head quarters of the Parliamentary army, and midway between it and Radway is the spot where the battle took place. To the left of the "Round House," at a distance of a mile, nearly opposite Tysoe Church, there was formerly cut in the side of the hill the figure of a horse, which from the colour of the soil was called the red horse, and the low grounds adjacent are still termed the Red Horse Vale.

The night before the battle, the King was at Edgcote, and the outlying pickets overlooking the Vale of Red Horse, saw the camp fires of the Earl of Essex, who had left Worcester on the 14th of October, and had marched along bad roads and miry lanes in a line nearly parallel with the King, but in profound ignorance of his whereabouts. Hampden and Lord Brooke were about a day's march in the rear of Essex, for they had crossed the Avon at Stratford on the 18th. It was early in the morning of the 23rd of October when Prince Rupert, dashing on, as usual, with his gallant curaissiers found himself on the top of Edgehill. His quick eye caught at once the object of his search—the army of the Earl of Essex; its dark masses drawn up along the vale below, in compact

order of battle. The King's army," says an eye witness, "made a very fine appearance; and indeed they were a body of gallant men as ever appeared in the field, and as well furnished on all points. The horse exceedingly well accoutred, being most of them gentlemen and volunteers; some whole regiments serving without pay. Their horses were very good, and fit for service as could be desired. The whole army not above 18,000 men, and the enemy not above 1,000 over or under, though we were told they were not above 12,000; but they had been reinforced with 4,000 men from Northampton."

Standing at the "Round House," nothing could be more obvious than the situation of these rival English armies. The right of the King's forces, which had marched by way of Edgcote, Cropredy and Warmington to Edgehill, rested on Bullet Hill, beneath the old British camp at Nadbury, above Arlescote, and the left at Sunrising, where the road comes up from Stratford. The Parliamentary army were in the bottom between Edgehill and Kineton.

Anything more suicidal than the King forsaking the advantage of the hills and marching down to the Parliamentarians in the plain below it is impossible to conceive, for it was plainly taking an advantage out of his own hands, and putting it in the hands of the enemy. But it was a case of hasty and divided counsels, and the King in this movement acted against his own measures; for he had himself laid the design of getting the start of Essex and marching to London. There was no unity of purpose, and Charles allowed his own judgment to be overruled by a majority of voices, an error again shewn in two of the greatest battles of the time, that of Newbury and the final rout at Naseby. Advantages let go in war are never recovered.

The conflict did not last long. Prince Rupert, "hot and forward," and impatient to come to close terms with his opponents, charged with headlong fury, and pushed the left wing of the Parliament army so effectually, that in a moment all was terror and confusion. Partly from the furious charge made upon them by the Prince, and the desertion of a whole troop of their horse to the King, the Parliamentary cavalry immediately fled, and were pursued for two miles into Kineton. The right wing of the Parliament had no better success. The King's reserve, impatient to take some share in the action, followed the chase which their left wing precipitately led them. Their opponents perceived the advantage, and the moral effect of the fight was that of a Parliamentary victory.

The dead were buried in two spots which are yet conspicuous, one of these being planted with fir trees is said to have been a pit at the time of the battle into which 400 bodies were thrown. The farm to which it belongs is still called "Battle Farm," and the two places of the burials "The Grave Fields." They lie about halfway between Radway and Kineton, and indicate the site of the hottest part of the fight.

Many incidents in the battle were related to us. One of these was that a Roundhead gunner, seeing a Cavalier officer on a white horse ascending the hill, he fired at him with his field piece, struck him on the thigh and mortally wounded him. He died, and was buried in the churchyard at Radway. Here twenty-eight years afterwards, his mother, Lady Bridget Kingsmill, of Sidmonton, who rests in Kingsclere Church, erected a monument to his memory, and we viewed the mutilated remains of the reclining figure of the gallant captain of foot—Henry Kingsmill, under the tower of Radway new Church. We were also shown the traditional spot where fell Colonel Charles Essex, of Lambourn Place, reputed the most able officer under the Earl of Essex; and it is a singular circumstance that his father served as a private soldier in the ranks of his son's regiment. Another anecdote told us was that of the parish clerk of Tysoe, who ran from Church with the congregation to see the fight, among them being the village tailor, who received a mortal wound as the reward of his curiosity.

From Edgehill we followed the route of King Charles, and marched on to Banbury. The next day we paid a visit to Broughton Castle, one of the most interesting houses it has been our good fortune to see, and subsequently pushed forward to Oxford.