

his claims to be decided by a free Parliament. In a subsequent manifesto he took other ground. Rash and impolitic as were many parts of Monmouth's Declaration—"full of much black and dull malice," as Burnet describes it—there were others besides the clowns and mechanics of the western shires who regarded "the Protestant duke" as their deliverer. The Independents of Axminster recorded in their "Church Book" their hopes "that the day was come in the which the good old Cause of God and religion, that had lain as dead and buried for a long time, would revive again."* The fervid expectations excited by the landing of Monmouth were not entirely local in their character. Daniel Defoe, then twenty-four years of age, joined the blue banner of the duke, in the confidence that he came to do battle for civil and religious liberty. Defoe subsequently recorded some of the incidents of this short warfare—happily the last occasion in which Englishmen had to meet Englishmen in a deadly encounter for great principles.

A royalist force had collected at Bridport, and Monmouth resolved to attack them. He had landed from his ships four pieces of cannon. He had fifteen hundred suits of defensive armour, a small number of muskets, carbines, and pistols, and about a thousand swords and pikes. On the day after his landing, he had a thousand foot under his command, and a hundred and fifty horse. On that day dissension broke out amongst his followers. The celebrated Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, who was in command of Monmouth's horse, had received an insult from Thomas Dare, one of Monmouth's followers, who had been a goldsmith at Taunton; and the fiery Scot shot the Englishman, who instantly died. Such summary vengeance was unsuited to the national character, and Fletcher was obliged to fly to Monmouth's ship. This was an ominous commencement. On the 14th Lord Grey marched to Bridport; fought with the militia there; and then retreated in disorder to Lyme. In spite of quarrels and disasters numerous recruits flocked to Monmouth's head-quarters at the George inn at Lyme—an antique hostelry, which was burnt down about forty years ago. The duke of Albemarle, Lord Lieutenant of Devonshire, marched from Exeter, with four thousand of the trained bands. On the 15th he was met at Axminster by a large body of the insurgents. He thought it judicious to retreat. His men were not staunch. They threw away their arms and clothes; and the road to Exeter was free to Monmouth. He was satisfied to march to

* Roberts, vol. i. p. 232.

Taunton, which he reached on the 18th of June. Situate in a valley of unrivalled fertility, and abundantly prosperous in its serge manufacture, Taunton had long been conspicuous for its resolute adherence to the old spirit of puritanism. Oppressed as was its dissenting population under the various Statutes against Non-conformists, the principle of resistance was not extinguished amongst them. Their pulpits were burnt; they evaded the statutory penalties for non-attendance at church, by joining in the Liturgy beneath the tower of St. Mary Magdalen. But this was only surface obedience. Monmouth approached the town, and found that the population had possessed themselves of the arms stored in the belfrey of their church, ready for his service. Hundreds went out to meet their idol. They thronged around him in their narrow streets, every man with a green bough in his hat. The ways were strewn with flowers; the windows were hung with garlands; maidens of good families went in procession to offer him twenty-seven standards which they had worked with their own hands. One of them was "The Golden Flag," embroidered with J. R., and a crown. This reception at Taunton probably decided Monmouth to proclaim himself King. That resolve was not in accordance with his first Declaration. It was offensive to many of his followers, who cherished the notion of a republic. Welwood says, "Ambitious he was, but not to the degree of aspiring to the Crown, till after his landing in the West; and even then he was rather passive than active in assuming the title of King. It was impotency alone that prevailed with him to make that step; and he was inflexible, till it was told him, that the only way to provide against the ruin of those that should come in to his assistance, in case he failed in the attempt, was to declare himself king; that they might be sheltered by the Statute made in the reign of Henry VII., in favour of those that should obey a king de facto."* This forced application of the statute of Henry VII. was altogether fallacious. Monmouth was himself too ready to forget its real meaning. Had Monmouth been king de jure, James was king de facto. And yet Monmouth proclaimed the adherents of James as rebels and traitors. The assumption of the regal title secured Monmouth no real accession of strength. Not a nobleman joined him; not even any head of a rich and influential Whig family. His pretensions were ridiculed even by those of the higher classes who had no affection for the existing government. He issued Proclamation after

* "Memoirs," p. 148.

Proclamation, "from our camp at Taunton, in the first year of our reign." The Assembly sitting at Westminster, voting and acting as a Parliament under the usurper, James duke of York, were desired to disperse, under the penalties of treason. All who collected and levied taxes for James duke of York were declared to be rebels and traitors. Christopher, duke of Albemarle, and his adherents, "now in arms at Wellington," were to be pursued as rebels and traitors. Monmouth marched out of Taunton on the 22nd of June. Albemarle marched into Taunton on the 23rd. He immediately wrote a few brief words to Sunderland: "I came hither this night, where I found these several Proclamations, which I send to your lordship only for your diversion."*

Monmouth marched from Taunton to Bridgewater with six thousand men. Many were armed with scythes, fixed on upright handles. This rustic weapon was so important, that warrants were issued to the tything-men "to search for, seize, and take all such scythes as can be found in your tything, paying a reasonable price for the same."† The large numbers that gathered round Monmouth's standard was rather an embarrassment than an aid. They could not be provided with arms. They were a burthen upon the country through which they marched. But the general disposition of the humbler ranks of people to join Monmouth is evident from this fact: the Lords Lieutenant were ordered to call out the Militia, not so much to oppose the duke, "as to hinder the country from flocking in to him; for the king could have little confidence in the Militia of those parts, who were framed, to be sure, of the same mould and temper of their neighbours, who so readily had joined the invader."‡ On the 22nd of June the insurgents had marched to Glastonbury. The monastic ruins, and the churches, gave shelter to the wearied men, who had travelled through a swampy district under a drenching rain. The next day they had reached Shepton Mallet. The object of the march was to attack Bristol. On the 25th they crossed the Avon at Keynsham. The night before, a ship had taken fire at the quay at Bristol. It was afterwards alleged against the Bristowans that they had fired the ship as a signal to the rebels. They were suspected by the authorities, for the duke of Beaufort, having a considerable body of Gloucestershire train bands with him at Redcliffe Mead, threatened to fire the city if they afforded any aid to Monmouth. The king's forces now sur-

* Ellis, "Original Letters," First Series, vol. iii. p. 340.

† Roberts, vol. i. p. 328.

‡ "Life of James II." vol. ii. p. 29.

rounded the insurgents. They became irresolute; and marched away to Bath. Monmouth grew dejected. The large reward of five thousand pounds had been proclaimed for "any who should kill him."* He was deeply mortified at the manifest unwillingness of the country gentlemen to engage in his support. He expected some of the royal army to come over to him. He had himself commanded a regiment, and was personally beloved. But those who knew him best knew the weakness of his character. He was brave in the field; but he had none of those high qualities which fitted him to contend, even with the enthusiastic support of large bodies of people, against the organised power of a government that was capable of inspiring dread if it failed to secure affection. Monmouth made no attack upon Bath, which had a strong garrison. He marched to Philip's-Norton, half way between Bath and Frome. On the morning of the 27th the advanced guard of the king's army, under the earl of Feversham, was close to the insurgents. That guard was commanded by the duke of Grafton, the youngest of the illegitimate sons of Charles the Second. Through a narrow lane which led into Philip's-Norton, Grafton led his grenadiers against his eldest half-brother. A barricade stopped their progress; and Monmouth attacked them in flank. Grafton cut his way through; and got back to the main body of the royal army. There was fighting for several hours; and the cause of the insurgents was strengthened by the proof, that, raw and undisciplined as they were, they could stand up against regular troops. The royal army retreated to Bradford. Defoe says, that if Monmouth had pursued his advantage, he would have gained a complete victory.† The same night the insurgent army marched, under incessant rain, to Frome. This night-march, and the morning engagement, greatly reduced the number of Monmouth's followers. Many had thought of the glories of war—of a pleasant march to London where their beloved duke would establish the liberties of his country, and reward his trusty friends. They had seen some of the dangers and miseries of real warfare, and they hastened to escape from them.

At Frome Monmouth heard of the defeat and capture of Argyle. At Frome there were no joyful congratulations as at Taunton; for the earl of Pembroke had a few days before put down a popular demonstration of those termed in the London Gazette "the rabble."

* Evelyn.

† Wilson, "Life of Defoe," vol. i. p. 108. Philip's-Norton is erroneously called Chipping-Norton, in the passage quoted by Wilson.

The prospects of Monmouth became more and more dark. He was advised, according to some authorities,—he himself meditated, according to other accounts,—to leave his followers to their fate, and escape to some foreign place of refuge. He had a devoted mistress to fly to, lady Wentworth, whose passionate attachment might console him for all the disappointments of his ambition. Lord Grey opposed this dastardly hope of the unhappy man, and he remained for a last struggle. At Wells his army had become unmanageable. They lived at free quarters, and attempted to deface the cathedral. On the 2nd of July they marched on towards Bridgewater. A deputation from the people of Taunton came now to entreat Monmouth not to return to their town. There were symptoms enough that his cause was now desperate. He had marched out of Bridgewater with a confident army on the 22nd of June. He was again at Bridgewater with a broken and dispirited force on the 4th of July. In these eleven days he had accomplished nothing. On Sunday, the 5th, the earl of Feversham, at the head of the royal army, entered the great moor, called King's Sedgmoor, which stretches in a south-easterly direction from below Bridgewater to Somerton. He encamped on this morass, on the west side of which flows the river Parret, and whose deep and broad ditches, called Rhines, and high causeways, showed how gradually the labour of man had converted this dismal swamp into a region comparatively fertile. In this ancient region of waters Alfred had found refuge in its Isle of Athelney. The names of the villages, compounded of "Zoy"—zee, sea—showed the maritime origin of the district. Feversham's horse were quartered in the village of Weston Zoyland. His infantry were under canvas. On that Sunday the determination was taken by the insurgent leaders to attack the king's army at night, to anticipate the expected assault of Feversham. Monmouth, says Defoe, "went up to the top of the steeple, with some of his officers; and viewing the situation of the king's army, by the help of perspectives, he resolved to make an attempt upon them by way of prevention. He accordingly marched out of the town in the dead of the night to the attack."* Monmouth from the elevation of Bridgewater church could distinguish the regiment that he had once commanded. If he had these men with him, he exclaimed, he could not doubt of success. He had been told that the royal army was not entrenched. He saw a plain beneath him intersected by great ditches. He was promised to be led safely across them by guides.

* "Tour through Great Britain," quoted by Wilson.

He would not take the direct road from Bridgewater to Weston Zoyland, but would advance along the Eastern Causeway, across the North Moor and the Langmoor, and surprise his sleeping enemies in their camp. By this circuitous route of six miles, Monmouth would avoid the royal artillery that commanded the direct road. But he had undertaken a night march of extraordinary difficulty. The biographer of Monmouth, whose local knowledge is evidently complete, says, "A guide was needed in the lanes, but was indispensable after the forces reached the open moor. Indeed, any person desirous of traversing the moor by daylight at the present time, would be glad of direction to make a way to the cradle bridges across the great drain or cut."* The front of the royal army was covered by this great drain or cut, called the Old Bussex Rhine. It was filled by the recent heavy rains. Defoe, who may be regarded as an actor in these events, says of Monmouth, "Had he not, either by the treachery or mistake of his guides, been brought to an impassable ditch where he could not get over—in the interval of which the king's troops took the alarm by the firing of a pistol amongst the duke's men, whether also by accident or treachery is not known—I say, had not these accidents and his own fate conspired to his defeat, he had certainly cut the lord Feversham's army all to pieces."

The report of the pistol was heard in the royal camp. The mist lay heavy upon the moor, but the moon was at the full; and in the uncertain light a body of men was seen approaching. The alarm was sounded by the beat of drum. Grey had advanced with the cavalry; Monmouth was following at the head of the infantry. Suddenly the great Bussex Rhine intercepted their progress. Concealment was no longer possible. King Monmouth! was shouted, with the old rallying word of the Puritans, "God with us!" The king's troops fired across the ditch; and the untrained cavalry horses of the insurgents were scattered about the peat-moor. Monmouth came up to the edge of the Rhine; and shots were exchanged across that impassable ditch for some time. The whole royal army was now roused. Passing along the Weston Zoyland road they could soon be in the open plain. The sun was rising as the Life Guards scoured the moor, and the foot-guards and other regiments advanced in compact ranks. Monmouth fled from the field when he saw that his horsemen and his waggons had gone. The king's artillery was brought up, the bishop of Win-

* Roberts, vol. ii. p. 63.

chester having applied his carriage-horses to drag the guns along the Bridgewater road. Yet the peasants and cloth-workers made a brave stand with their scythes and pikes. Their muskets were useless, for in vain they shouted "For God's sake, Ammunition!" Another race of hardy men stood their ground to the last. "The slain," says Evelyn, "were most of them Mendip miners, who did great execution with their tools, and sold their lives very dearly." It is impossible to regard the fate of Monmouth without a large amount of commiseration. Bred up amidst all the follies and vices of a luxurious Court; pampered with every indulgence by his imprudent father; rendered independent at a very early age by marriage with a rich heiress; raised to the highest honours and employments; made the tool of a party, unqualified as he was for any consistent political action; bewildered with popular applause; he finally engaged in a desperate enterprise against a stern and relentless enemy. When he fled from the field of Sedgemoor, he had about him a pocketbook, in which there were certain entries which indicate that Charles the Second had a design to get rid of the control of the duke of York, and restore Monmouth to his former position. On the 16th of February is this expressive memorandum: "The sad news of his death, by L. O cruel Fate!"* After his defeat there was no hope for Monmouth. The price set upon his head made escape from the kingdom almost impossible. Before four o'clock of that July morning the fugitives from the fatal moor were hiding in every ditch and every hovel from their pursuers. By six o'clock Monmouth, with Grey, and two or three others, was twenty miles from the field in which he had better have died fighting. They rode all day towards New Forest, till their horses were exhausted. Disguised as countrymen they proceeded on foot. Parties of militia were on the look-out on every side. Grey was taken early on the morning of the 7th, near Ringwood. Two men had been seen entering some enclosed grounds, intersected with hedges, some of the fields affording the shelter of standing crops, and some overgrown with fern and brambles. The two men were Monmouth and Busse, a German. The place was surrounded all night with soldiers, after a fruitless search. Early on the morning of the 8th Busse was discovered. The soldiers were stimulated to greater exertion by the announcement that the reward offered for Monmouth's apprehension would be divided amongst his captors. The unhappy man, worn out with fatigue, starving, was

* Wellwood's "Memoirs," Appendix, xv.

found in a ditch, in the garb of a shepherd. The same pockets that held the raw pease which had been his only food, contained the George with which Charles had invested his first-born son. The prisoner was conveyed to Ringwood, about six miles distant from the field now known as Monmouth's Close. The real character of him who had led so many devoted followers to ruin was now displayed. He did not rise out of misfortune a nobler man, as Argyle had risen. His first act was to write an abject letter to king James, expressive of remorse for the wrongs he had done him. He had assured the prince and princess of Orange that he would never stir against his majesty, but horrid people had led him away with false arguments. He could say many things to move compassion, but he only begged to have the happiness to speak to the king, for he had that to say which he hoped would give his majesty a long and happy reign. He had one word to say of too much consequence for him to write. After remaining at Ringwood two days, Monmouth and Grey were conducted to London under a strong escort. They were three days on the road. Monmouth was prostrated by his fears; Grey was unmoved by his impending danger. Arrived at Whitehall, a scene ensued which the French ambassador, Barillon, considered opposed to the ordinary usage of other nations. The sovereign saw the prisoner whose life he had determined not to spare. Monmouth was brought pinioned into his uncle's presence. "He fell upon his knees, crawling upon them to embrace those of his majesty; and forgetting the character of a hero, which he had so long pretended to, behaved himself with the greatest meanness and abjection imaginable, omitting no humiliation or pretence of sorrow and repentance, to move the king to compassion and mercy." This is the account given upon the supposed authority of king James's papers. It is not contradicted by other narratives. The mean motive of the king in granting an audience which in ordinary cases implied a pardon, is exhibited in this statement: "There appearing no great matters of discovery, there was no advantage drawn to either side by this unseasonable interview."* The "one word," if spoken, was of no avail to save the prisoner's life.

Detailed narratives of executions for State offences occupy a considerable portion of most English histories; and, we presume, they are attractive to the general reader. Whether those who died by the axe under Plantagenet, Tudor, or Stuart, were innocent, or

* "Life of James II.," vol. ii., p. 36.

guilty, were of pure or corrupt lives, the fortitude with which they looked death in the face—without shrinking even from the disgusting preparations for the barbarities that accompanied death for high treason—is an almost universal characteristic of their untimely ends. The abjectness which Monmouth displayed when he deluded himself with hopes of life, appeared to the French ambassador very different to the ordinary fortitude of Englishmen. Monmouth, however, recovered his courage when the last great trial was at hand. He had seen his wife in the presence of lord Clarendon, on the Monday when he was committed to the Tower. He saw her again on the Wednesday of his execution. The nature of these interviews is perhaps correctly given by Evelyn, who says that the duke received his duchess “coldly, having lived dishonestly with the Lady Henrietta Wentworth for two years.” The duchess was far more affected than her husband; but he showed a proper consideration for her future safety by maintaining that she had been averse to his behaviour towards the late king, and knew nothing of the circumstances of his recent attempt. In his prison, and on the scaffold, Monmouth was attended by the bishop of Ely and the bishop of Bath and Wells. The conduct of these prelates, Turner and Ken, towards the unhappy man has been compared to that of “fathers of the Inquisition.”* On the other hand it has been said, “they appear to have only discharged what they considered a sacred duty.”† They pressed him to acknowledge the doctrine of Non-Resistance to be true, if he were of the Church of England. He would do no more than acknowledge the doctrines of the Church of England, in general. Again and again he was exhorted to a positive declaration upon this point. Upon one subject his opinions were singularly illustrative of his defective moral training. He maintained that his intercourse with lady Wentworth was not sinful; for she had reclaimed him from licentiousness, and their mutual attachment was profound and enduring. His disrespect for the conjugal tie was considered by the prelates as a reason for not administering the Sacrament to one so imperfectly repentant. He was urged to speak to the soldiers, and say that he stood there, a sad example of rebellion. He was urged to entreat the soldiers and the people to be loyal and obedient to the king. His answer was emphatic: “I have said I will make no speeches: I will make no speeches: I come to die.” His death was a horrible butchery, through the

* Roberts.

† Macaulay.

unskilfulness of the executioner. The multitude around, who, for the most part, regarded the duke as martyred for the Protestant religion, yelled with fury when they saw their idolised favourite thus mangled; and as they dipped their handkerchiefs in his blood, the thought must have crossed many minds that the day would still come when new Monmouths should arise, to uphold the Cause with happier results.

One of the dying man's answers to the questions with which he was assailed was expressive of his consistent humanity: “Have you not been guilty,” he was asked, “of invasion, and of much blood which has been shed?” He replied, “I am sorry for invading the kingdom and for the blood that has been shed.” Again pressed upon this matter, he said, “What I have done has been very ill; and I wish with all my heart it had never been. I never was a man that delighted in blood: I was very far from it.” Could the soft hearted Monmouth have looked forward to the slaughters that were still to be perpetrated upon his poor followers, he would have had still heavier reason for lamenting his brief career of civil warfare. It is horrible to know that a king sat upon the English throne, in times not barbarous, who could command and sanction the execution of nearly four hundred of his subjects for their rash participation in a sudden revolt. It is still more odious to know that, not two centuries ago, there was an English judge so eager for bloodshed, and English juries so awe-stricken, as to condemn three hundred and thirty-one persons to the death of traitors, during one terrible Assize. In addition to those who suffered the extreme penalty, eight hundred and forty-nine of the insurgents were transported; and thirty-three were fined or whipped. The record of such circumstances is chiefly valuable to show us the nature of the tyranny from which we have escaped. The professional atrocities of a colonel Kirke, however exaggerated, were natural results of the uncontrolled power of a brutal captain of a brutal soldiery. The calculating barbarities of a Chief Justice Jeffreys, under the forms of law, exhibit the excesses of an authority far more dangerous to freedom than the passing inflictions of drum-head tyranny. When Kirke and his officers sit carousing at the White Hart at Taunton: and at every toast of the drunken crew a prisoner was hanged up for their merriment, and the drums were ordered to beat to give the quivering limbs music for their dancing,—we trace the degradation of the unchristian warriors, who brought the habits of their warfare with barbarians to be the

scourges of their own countrymen. But when the Chief Justice of England strains every faculty of his depraved intellect to procure the condemnation of a lady, whose only crime was giving a meal and a lodging to two fugitives, we may well believe that there is no more direct evidence of the fatal course of arbitrary power than its capacity to make the sword of Justice a far more terrible weapon of oppression than pike or gun, and to degrade the head of a learned and liberal profession to an office lower than that of the hangman. The lady Alice Lisle, then seventy years of age, calmly slept at the bar while Jeffreys charged the jury against her with the vehemence of an advocate; and she went to the scaffold with a composure which her furious judge must have resented as the proof of his impotence to kill the soul. Alice Lisle was his first victim, and the only one at Winchester. Every exertion was made to obtain her pardon, but king James was inexorable. It was nothing to the revengeful Stuart that the venerable lady had been illegally convicted as an accessory in concealing a traitor, before the trial and conviction of the said traitor himself. It was enough that she was the widow of John Lisle, the member of the Long Parliament and of the High Court of Justice. Jeffreys only fleshed his fangs upon Alice Lisle. In Dorsetshire he executed seventy-four persons. In Devonshire a mere thirteen were put to death. In Somersetshire two hundred and thirty-three suffered all the barbarous punishments of high-treason. The pitch cauldron was constantly boiling in the Assize towns, to preserve the heads and limbs from corruption that were to be distributed through the beautiful western country. As the leaves were dropping in that autumn of 1685, the great oak of many a village green was decorated with a mangled quarter. On every tower of the Somersetshire churches a ghastly head looked down upon those who gathered together for the worship of the God of love. The directing post for the traveller was elevated into a gibbet. The labourer returning home beneath the harvest moon hurried past the body suspended in its creaking gimmaces (chains). The eloquent historian of this reign of terror has attested from his own childish recollections, that "within the last forty years peasants, in some districts, well knew the accursed spots, and passed them unwillingly after sunset."*

The barbarous executions of this evil time can only be matched by the infamy of the great, in seeking to make a money advantage

* Macaulay, vol. i. 8vo, p. 645.

in proportion to the number of prisoners to be transported. It was calculated that a thousand of these unfortunates were to be distributed amongst certain favoured persons; and Sunderland, writing to Jeffreys by order of the king, says, "the queen has asked for a hundred more of the rebels." They were to be sold by these merchants in human flesh for field labour in Jamaica, Barbadoes, and the Leeward Islands. Jeffreys did not approve of this courtly generosity, that would assign to others the proper wages of the king and his instruments; and he writes to James, "I beseech your majesty that I may inform you that each prisoner will be worth ten pounds, if not fifteen pounds a-piece; and, Sir, if your majesty orders them as you have designed, persons that have not suffered in the service will run away with the booty."* The most notorious of these transactions was that of the claim of the Maids of Honour to make a profit out of the pardon of the young girls of Taunton, who had presented the embroidered banners to Monmouth on the day of his triumphal entry. More than two thousand pounds were paid to these ladies of the queen of England, to avert a prosecution of the innocent children who had graced the procession of the handsome duke whom they were told was their rightful king.

Jeffreys returned from his bloody Circuit to be rewarded with the Great Seal. He boasted that he had hanged more for high treason than all the judges of England since William the Conqueror. In his proceedings he had a double gratification. He had a pleasure in hanging, and a more solid delight in reprieving. He sold his pardons for enormous sums; and he was enabled by his lawful earnings in this fattening time to purchase estates of the value of thirty-four thousand pounds.

* Roberts, vol. ii. p. 241.