

**THE DAYS OF BRUCE: A
STORY FROM
SCOTTISH HISTORY, IN
TWO VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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The Days of Bruce: A Story from Scottish History, in Two Volumes, Vol. II by Grace Aguilar

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GRACE AGUILAR

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THE
DAYS OF BRUCE;

A Story

FROM
SCOTTISH HISTORY.

BY
GRACE AGUILAR,
AUTHOR OF "HOME INFLUENCE," "THE MOTHER'S RECOMPENSE,"
"WOMAN'S FRIENDSHIP," "THE VALE OF CEDARS,"
ETC. ETC.

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THE DAYS OF BRUCE.

CHAPTER I.

CHANGED indeed was the aspect of Scotland and the fortunes of her king, in the autumn of 1311, from what we last beheld them, at the close of 1306. Then heavier and blacker had the wings of the tempest enshrouded them; night—the awful night of slavery, persecution, and tyranny—had closed around them, without one star in her ebon mantle, one little ray to penetrate the thick mists, and breathe of brighter things. But now hope, hand in hand with liberty, stood on the broad fields and fertile glens of Scotland; her wings unloosed and bright; her aspect full of smiles, of love; her voice thrilling to every Scotsman's heart, and nerving him with yet stronger energy, even when freedom was attained. One by one had stars of resplendent lustre shone through the misty veil of night; one by one had mists and clouds rolled up and fled, and the pure and spangled heavens looked down upon the free. The day-star was lit, the sun of glory had arisen, and Robert Bruce, in the autumn of 1311, was king in something more than name!

Yet not without the most persevering toil, the most unexampled patience, the most determined resolution, foresight, and self-control, not without a self-government of temper, passion, spirit, which man has seldom equalled, and most certainly never surpassed, had these things been accomplished. Destined in the end to be the savior of his country, it did indeed seem as if that same Almighty power who so destined him, who turned even his one evil deed to good, had manifested His judgment and His power to him, as to His servants of olden time. Fearfully was that involuntary crime chastised, ere power and glory, even freedom was vouchsafed. His own suf-

ferings, exile, persecution, defeat, the constant danger of his life, would have been in themselves sufficient evidence of an all-seeing Judge; but in the death, the cruel death of too many of his noble friends, men whose fidelity and worth had twined them round his very heart-strings, whose loss was fraught with infinitely deeper anguish than his own individual woes, we may trace still clearer the hand of vengeance, tempered still with long-suffering, yet unending mercy.

From the time of his landing in Scotland, called there as his contemporaries declare by a supernatural signal from Turnberry Head, the success of the Bruce certainly may be said to commence; though it was not till the death of their powerful enemy, Edward of England, in July, 1307, that the Scottish people permitted themselves to hope and feel their chains were falling, and they might yet be free.

Accustomed to elude the enemy by dispersing his men into small parties, the Bruce had repeatedly conquered much greater numbers than his own, and spread universal alarm amidst the English, by the suddenness and extraordinary skill of his military movements; that these dispersions repeatedly perilled his own life King Robert never heeded. His own courage and foresight and the unwavering fidelity of his followers so frequently interposed between himself and treachery, that at length danger itself became little more than excitement and adventure. The victory of Loudun Hill amply revenged on Pembroke the defeat at Methven, compelling both him and the Earl of Gloucester to retreat to Ayrshire; and from the splendor which accrued from it on the arms of the Bruce, obtained him the yet more desirable advantage of strong reinforcements of men, arms, and treasure, and enabled him to pursue his success, by driving the English back almost to the borders of their own land. Skirmish after skirmish, battle after battle followed, carried on with such surpassing skill and courage by the Bruce, that his call to battle was at length hailed by his men as a summons to victory. Finished in all the exercises of chivalry in the court of Edward, in the wisdom, prudence, and tactics of a general, Robert Bruce had *bought* his experience, and was in consequence yet more fitted for the important post he filled, at the same time that his dazzling, chivalric qualities gained him at once the admiration and confidence of his people.

Although perchance it was not till the momentous words

"Edward is dead" rang through Scotland with clarion tongue, and thrilled to the hearts of her sons, that even the most lukewarm started from their sluggish sleep, girded their swords to their sides, and hastened to join their rightful king, and yet more hope and courage and enthusiasm fired the breasts of her already devoted patriots, yet enough had been already accomplished by the Bruce to fill the last moments of the dying king with the bitterest emotions of disappointed ambition, hatred, and revenge.

From Burgh-upon-Sands, where his strength had so drooped he could not proceed further, despite his fixed resolve to hurl fire and sword on the only land which had dared his power—where the sovereign of England lay awaiting his last hour—the hills of Scotland were visible, and he felt that land was free! that the toil, the waste, the dreams of twenty years were vain; the vision of haughty ambition, of grasping power, had fled forever. Death was on his heart, and Scotland was unconquered, and would be glorious yet. He felt, he knew this; for in this hour of waning power, of fading life, fell the chains of Scotland. His instructions to his son, partaking as they do infinitely less of a civilized and enlightened monarch (for such was Edward, ere ambition crept into his soul) than of the barbarous customs of a savage chief, have betrayed to posterity that such were his feelings. The imbecile, uncertain character of the prince was too well known for his father to place any reliance upon him, even if his last commands were obeyed, and one little month after his death sufficed to prove both to English and Scotch that the prognostics of each were verified.

Sir John de Bretagne, Earl of Richmond, and the Earl of Pembroke were alternately named guardians of Scotland by the fickle Edward, who, satisfying his conscience with that measure, hastened back to London, there to enjoy in luxurious peace the society of Gaveston and other favorites, bearing with him the dead body of his father, whose last commands he thought fit, perhaps with some degree of wisdom, to disobey.

King Robert, however, perceiving that the Scottish guardians were collecting a much larger army than would permit him to stand the brunt of battle, thought it wiser to lure them to the northern districts of Scotland, where their forces could not be so easily increased, and where their total ignorance of the ground would ably assist his measures against them. James

of Douglas he left in Ettrick, to continue the struggle there, and nobly did that gallant soldier execute his trust. It was during this war in the north that the illness of the king, the insult of his foes, and the harrying of Buchan took place, as described by old Murdoch in the previous chapter. The citadels of Aberdeen, Forfar, and others of equal strength and importance, surrendered and were dismantled; and perceiving the most brilliant success had crowned his efforts in the north, he divided his forces, dispatching them under able leaders in various directions, thus to separate the English invaders, and prevent their compelling him to give them battle in a body, as at Falkirk, and deciding the fate of Scotland at a blow.

Douglas, Tweedale, and Ettrick were conquered by Lord James; and Galloway, despite the furious defence of its native chiefs and English allies, aided by the savage nature of its country, was finally brought into subjection by Edward Bruce, to whose wild and reckless spirit this daring warfare had been peculiarly congenial. On every side success had crowned the Bruce, and then it was he projected and carried into effect his long-desired vengeance on the Lords of Lorn, whose persecuting enmity demanded such return. Their defeat was total, despite their advantageous situation in the formidable pass of Cruachan Ben, where that great mountain sinks down to the banks of Loch Awe, a road full of precipices on one side, and a deep lake on the other. The Bruce, following his usual admirable plan of tactics, sent Douglas with some light troops to surround the mountain and turn the pass, himself covering the movement by a threatened assault in front, and thus attacked in rear, flank, and van at once, all advantage of ground was lost, and the Lords of Lorn, both father and son, compelled to escape by sea, leaving the greater part of their clan dead upon the field.

The vacillating measures of the second Edward in vain endeavored to remedy these evils; the barons of England, already disgusted at his unjust preference of upstart minions, either obeyed the royal commands for fresh musters of forces or neglected them, according to individual pleasure. Their own interests kept them in England; for, mistrusting their king and hating his favorites, they imagined their absence would but increase the power of the latter, and effectually remove the former from their control. Scotland was now a secondary object

with almost all the English nobles; their own prerogatives, their own private interests were at stake.

Meanwhile, the measures of that now liberated land proceeded with a steadiness, a wisdom, presenting a forcible contrast to those of her former captors. For the first time for many troubled years the estates of the kingdom assembled, and by a large and powerful body of representatives declared, in all proper and solemn form, that Edward's previous award of the crown to John Baliol was illegal, unjust, and void; that the late deceased Lord of Annandale was the only heir to the crown, and, in consequence, his grandson, Robert the Bruce, alone could be recognized as king; and all who dared dispute or deny this right were denounced, and would henceforward be prosecuted as traitors and abettors of treason; and not alone by the laity were these important matters acknowledged and proclaimed, the clergy of the kingdom, braving the bull of excommunication once promulgated against him, issued a solemn charge to their spiritual flocks, desiring them to recognize the Bruce as their sovereign.

Roused at length into action, Edward assembled a formidable army at Berwick, and entered Scotland, but too late in the season to effect any movement of consequence. Bruce, as usual, avoiding any decisive action, harassed their march, cut off their provisions, desolated the country, so that it could present nothing but waste and barren deserts to its invaders, and finally caused Edward to retreat to England out of all patience, and eager to solace himself with his queen and his favorites at Carlisle. A second, third, and fourth expedition were planned and dispatched against Scotland, but all equally in vain; the last headed by Gaveston, who, despite his foppery and presumption, had all the qualities of a brave knight and skilful general, advanced as far as the Frith of Forth, finding, however, neither man, woman, nor child, cattle nor provender—all as usual was desolate. The villagers, emulating the courage and forbearance of their sovereign, retreated without a murmur to the Highlands, carrying with them all of their property that permitted removal, although the extreme severity of the season, and the various inconveniences resulting from a residence of some length amid morasses and precipices, rendered this test of their patriotism more than ordinarily severe.

In was in retaliation for these invasions King Robert planned