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An original and genuine NARRATIVE, now first published, of the remarkable BLOCKADE and ATTACK of BLAIR-CASTLE, the HOUSE of JAMES, DUKE of ATHOL, by the FORCES of the REBELS in the Spring of 1746, written by a SUBALTERN OFFICER of his MAJESTY'S GARRISON, who served in the DEFENCE, and has long since been a GENERAL in the First rank.

IN February 1746, his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland arrived at Perth, with the King's army under his command, on his march towards the East coast and Northern part of Scotland, against the Rebels, who had retired to the country about Inverness. He there found it necessary to make two detachments from the several regiments of infantry under him, to secure and keep in awe the country of Athol, where almost all the inhabitants were notoriously disaffected to government. One of these detachments, consisting of 200 men, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Webster, was sent to occupy Castle Menzies, the seat of Sir Robert Menzies of Weem, in order to secure the passage of the Tay at Tay-bridge, and for other objects.

The second detachment of 300 men, commanded by Sir Andrew Agnew, Bart. Lieut.-Col. of the Royal North British Fusileers, was sent by the route of Dunkeld, and through the Pass of Killicranky, to take post at Blair-Castle,

the seat of James Duke of Athol, a very faithful subject of his Majesty, but then absent from the country; whilst almost all the others, capable of bearing arms, had followed the standard of the pretended Prince of Wales; and were suspected to maintain a traitorous correspondence with the ladies, and aged gentlemen, or person's of any note who had remained in the country.

The chief object of the service committed to the commandant of the King's garrison in Blair-Castle, was therefore supposed to be, not only to prevent such correspondence, but to prevent all ill consequences arising by interception of such correspondence, and effectually to cut off, by proper parties, at fit outposts, the communications by the great roads between the Southern and Northern parts of the country.

Accordingly there were several outposts taken possession of, and kept by parties from the garrison of Blair; but none of these parties exceeded the command of a non-commissioned officer. As to what means were used by the commandant to obtain useful information, and convey it to the Duke of Cumberland, the writer of these notes knew of no step taken in that way; nor of any prisoner of note brought in, under suspicion of treason, excepting once the Hon. Mrs Robertson

of Lude, a sister of Lord Nairne; but who contrived so well to justify herself with the commandant, as to be apologized to, entertained at dinner, and sent back to her house. As to voluntarily and faithfully sending intelligence to the commandant, none were supposed to shew that loyalty, excepting some of the presbyterian clergy, and Thomas Bissett, Esq. of Kincaigie, residing near Dunkeld, where he was the Judge of the Commissariat Court, and certainly a most zealous and active friend to government. One lady too, (called lady Faskally,) sister of John Mackenzie of Delvin, Esq. was esteemed to be sincerely loyal; and sometimes visited Blair-Castle, where she was particularly well received.

As, at the time of the detachments being sent from Perth, no siege or blockade of Blair-Castle had been foreseen, it was expected that an open communication with it, and the means of its garrison being supplied with provisions, would be securely maintained; the quantity of garrison provisions sent to it, (which is not exactly recollected,) was but small; and no artillery or military stores were thither sent, or, it is believed, afterwards demanded by the commandant: in so much that, on the castle's being first surrounded by the rebels, and the number of serviceable cartridges of powder and ball, in possession of the soldiers, strictly examined, it was found that they did not exceed 19 per man. With respect to water, there was a draw-well in the house; but before the troops were shut up, most of the water used by them, for different purposes, was brought from a brook, which

formed a pond at a small distance from the front of the castle.

Blair-Castle was then irregular and very high, with walls of great thickness; having what was called *Cuming's Tower* projecting from the west end of the front of the house which faces to the North. The entrance into the ground story of that tower was by a door in the centre of its E. side, without the house: but it might be defended by musket fire from some of the windows. The great entrance into the house itself, was by a large door on the E. side of a stair-case, projecting from the front to the North: and adjoining to the E. gavel of the old house or castle, a square new building had been begun, but only carried up to a few feet above some beams or joists fixed for the first floor. There was, at 4 or 5 yards distance eastward from that new building, a strong wall running N. and S. for 40 or 50 yards, and of about 15 or 16 feet in height: as forming the west end of a sunk bowling-green, and serving as a strong retaining wall to the ground above, which lay between it and the E. end of the new building: and about the centre of this wall, fronting, and on a level with the bowling-green, was a Pretty large recess, or room for holding the bowls, and into which persons might occasionally retire. Along the N. side of this bowling-green ran a range of office-houses, chiefly seeming to be new built. But, between this period and autumn 1777, when the writer of this had the honour to visit the Duke and Duchess of Athol¹, there had

¹ G. M. was accompanied by his relation, John Whyte of Bennoch, Esq.

been great alterations made, particularly on the castle itself, which had been considerably lowered, modernized, and improved, with a front of modern appearance: and the very high projection, called Cuming's tower, had been taken away: it is said also, that other improvements in the gardens and other environs have been since made by the present Duke.

But to return to matters relative to the king's garrison, and the blockade of the castle, it is to be observed, that very early in the morning of the 17th March, all the detached parties, without the castle, had been completely surprized, and made prisoners, by the rebels, at their several posts; after which, by break of day, Blair-Castle itself was so closely invested on all sides, by the advanced post of the rebel forces, that they fired from behind the nearest walls of enclosures, at the picket guard of the garrison, which was commanded by a subaltern, and posted at a short distance from the castle. It was with some danger of being intercepted that that guard, as well as some horses belonging to the officers, with a small quantity of provender, could be brought into the house: and one of the horses, which had been just brought by Captain Peregrine Wentworth², of his Majesty's 4th regt. of foot, having been brought too late to get into the castle itself, was put into the lower part of Cuming's tower, with the door shut upon it, and without either forage or water.

² Peregrine Wentworth of Toulston Lodge, Esq. near Tadcaster in Yorkshire: a very respectable gentleman, still living.

The great door in the stair-case being then barricado'd, and a small guard placed at it, some disposition of the garrison (amounting now to about 270 men, rank and file) was made thro'-out the different apartments of the castle, under their proper officers; and with positive orders to the men to abstain from any firing by the windows, excepting in case of being actually attacked.

For the defence of the new unfinished building before-mentioned, which joined the E. end of the castle, and to which the only communication was down by a ladder of 10 or 12 steps, from a door in the E. end of the castle, a hasty flooring or platform of loose boards was laid on the joists, and an Ensign³, with a guard of 25 men, Was posted on it; who was not relieved during the whole of the blockade.

There was also a small guard, with a non-commissioned officer, appointed to remain at the draw-well within the house, with orders to prevent any water from being taken up, excepting during an hour in the morning; a precaution which was judged to be necessary, in order to obtain a sufficient quantity that should not be too muddy.

The provisions in the castle, excepting what were accidentally in it, for the use of the commandant and officers, consisted chiefly, if not wholly, of biscuit and cheese, of which too the quantity was so small, that the whole allowance fixed, *per diem*, for each

³ Ensign (now General) Robt. Melville of his Majesty's 25th regt. of foot in which he had served the two preceding campaigns.

man, was only one pound of biscuit, a quarter of a pound of cheese, with a bottle of water.

There were, of persons to be subsisted in the castle, (besides the garrison, and a few servants of officers,) domestics of the Duke of Athol to the number of 7, viz. a land-steward and female house-keeper, with 3 maid-servants, a gardener, and game-keeper.

Pretty early in the forenoon of the 17th March, Lord George Murray, as Lieutenant-General for the Prince Regent, with Major-Generals Lord Nairne and Mr Macpherson of Clunie, and, the principal part of the rebel forces, having established their headquarters in and about the village of Blair, nearly a quarter of a mile to the north of the castle, sent down a summons, written on a very shabby piece of paper, requiring Sir Andrew Agnew, Baronet, commanding the troops of the Elector of Hanover, to Surrender forthwith the castle, garrison, military stores, provisions, &c. into the hands of Lieut.-Gen. Lord George Murray, commanding the forces there of his Royal Highness the Prince-Regent, as the said Sir Andrew Agnew should answer to the contrary at his peril.

It appeared afterwards, that no Highlanders, from the impressions they had received of the outrageous temper of Sir Andrew Agnew, could be prevailed on to carry that summons; but a maid-servant from the inn at Blair, (then kept by one M'Glashan,) being rather handsome, and very obliging, conceived herself to be on so good a footing with some of the young officers, that she need not be afraid of

being shot, and undertook the mission: taking care, however, when she came near the castle, to wave the paper containing the summons over her head, as a token of her embassy: and when she arrived at one of the low windows in the passage, whither the furnisher of these notes, with three or four more of the officers, had come, the window was opened, and her speech heard; which strongly advised a surrender, promising very good treatment by Lord George Murray, and the other highland gentlemen: but denounced, if resistance were made, that as the highlanders were a thousand strong, and had cannon, they would batter down, or burn the castle, and destroy the whole garrison.

That speech was received from Molly with juvenile mirth by the officers, who told her, that those gentlemen should be soon driven away, and the garrison again become visitors at M'Glashan's, as before. She then pressed them much, that the summons should be received from her, and carried to Sir Andrew: but that was positively refused by all, excepting a Lieutenant, who being of a timid temper, with a constitution impaired by drinking, did receive the summons, and after its being read, carried it up, to deliver it to Sir Andrew; with some hopes, doubtless, of its having success: but no sooner did the peerless knight hear something of it read, than he furiously drove the Lieutenant out of his presence, to return the paper: vociferating after him, so loud, on the stairs, strong epithets against Lord George Murray, with threatenings to shoot through the head any other messenger whom he should send: that the girl herself perfectly overheard

him, and was glad to take back the summons, and to return with her life to Lord George, who, with Lord Nairne, Clunie, and some other principal officers, were seen standing together, in the church-yard of Blair, to receive her, and could be observed, by their motions and gestures, to be much diverted by her report.

(To be concluded in our next.)

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Original and genuine Narrative, now first published, of the remarkable Blockade and Attack of BLAIR CASTLE, the House of JAMES, Duke of ATHOL, by the Forces of the Rebels in the Spring of 1746,

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FROM that time Lord George made no attempt to have any intercourse with the garrison; but, from all the measures he took, seemed to place all his hopes in reducing it to surrender by famine, having probably heard of the store of provisions being scanty; for the better execution of which design, he easily found means, by his great superiority in number, to block up the Castle so very closely, by men, up to the walls, wherever they could not be annoyed from it by musketry, particularly round that part where the scaffold guard was posted, heaving up stones from time to time among them, with coarse jokes, especially against Sir Andrew, of whose *peculiarities* they seemed to have been very well informed, that it was indeed impossible to receive any sort of supplies into it. It is also probable that he had some expectation of hastening a surrender, by setting fire to the Castle, or putting the garrison in great dread of it, by

firing at it red-hot bullets, from 2 field-pieces which he had brought with him, and placed a little to the eastward of Blair-village, behind a wall, in which he made two embrasures.

All his efforts, however, for that purpose, at different times, proved ineffectual, as all the red-hot bullets, which lodged in the rafters of the roof, or other solid timber in the Castle, did not set them on fire, but only charred, or burned black what was around them; and either falling out of themselves, or being otherwise got hold of, were caught up in an iron ladle from the Duke of Athol's kitchen, and tossed into tubs of urine, for better water could not be bestowed in quenching them. To Lord George's disappointment in his attempts against the north front of the house was attributed the removal of his field-pieces in a night, before his breaking up the blockade, to a nearer position on the south side of the back of the Castle; from whence however their shot produced no greater effect than the former.

However determined the commandant was, (and whatever military talents he might want, those of zeal and natural courage were surely none of them) as well as his garrison, to make the most intrepid effort, rather than submit to any capitulation; yet if the rebels could have kept up the close blockade for a short time longer, the garrison, after being reduced to eat horse flesh, must have tried the last resource, by an attempt in the night time to break thro' the blockade and try to join the King's troops at Castle Menzies. The garrison could then have issued from the Castle, only by a door,

under the annoyance of an enemy so near; and must have afterwards been exposed to their attacks on all sides, with very superior numbers, during a march of about 10 miles, mostly across it a country, very mountainous and without roads. This was indeed a very desperate project; but it would have been attempted, and, whatever had been the issue, it would have merited the highest honours of fame.

The event, however, turned out to be decisive in behalf of the garrison, without its being reduced to the last extremities, and even without any loss, excepting that of the outposts as before mentioned. But it suffered one alarm of danger, which, had it not proved to be false, must have been of the most decisive effect. It was, that in a week after the commencement of the blockade there was distinctly heard such a noise of knocking, seemingly underneath the ground floor of the Castle, as if miners were hard at work in forming a mine to blow it up; a measure to reduce or destroy the garrison, which indeed seemed to be very practicable, had it been thought to be so by Lord George Murray. For his men were in the complete and undisturbed possession, not only of the bowling-green and the range of office-houses forming its north side, but also of the high wall making *that* to the west, in the center of which was the bowl-house before mentioned; from the back of which a subterraneous passage or gallery might have been easily dug out to the center of the ground under the castle, and a chamber or mine there formed large-enough to hold a sufficient number of barrels of gun-powder for blowing up the Castle: previous to which a summons, with a

threatening instantly to spring such a mine, if the commandant did not capitulate, ought certainly to have appeared to Lord George the most probable measure for obtaining success. —22nd the opportunity for executing such a measure seemed indeed so inviting, that its not being attempted by Lord George (who was born in Blair Castle, and perfectly well acquainted with its topography, as well as a man of known sagacity) can hardly be supposed to have proceeded from its not having occurred to himself, or to any one of his most intelligent officers; but rather to the want of workmen capable of executing such a work, however clumsily. Certain however it was, that had it been attempted, and even discovered by the garrison, before being completed, and the mine charged, it was impossible to have interrupted it otherwise than by opening and running down a counter mine from the ground-floor of the Castle. But the whole of that mighty alarm was found to be caused by nothing more than a soldier's cutting a block of wood which lay on a floor in one of the uppermost rooms, with repeated strokes of an axe; which occasioned a pretty general merriment in the garrison.

However, the smallness of the present quantity, with the certainty of an approaching want of provisions for men, and of horse provender, were circumstances constantly in view; and as no probability of the rebels being forced to give up the blockade soon could be foreseen, nor any mode devised of sending intelligence by the commandant to the Earl of Crawford, then supposed to be at Dunkeld, or Perth, as the general officer, commanding some British cavalry, &c. with a

body of Hessian troops lately brought from Flanders; until Mr Wilson, the Duke of Athol's gardener, a loyal, stout, and sensible man, offered to perform that service, which being accepted, and a letter prepared by the commandant, stating matters to Lord Crawford, with references to Wilson, who was to destroy the letter if in danger of being taken, he was allowed to take his choice of one of the officers' horses in the Castle; and about one o'clock in the morning of the 29th March, (as far as can be recollected) a soldier being placed at each of the front windows; and the officer with the platform-guard, prepared to make a discharge against any sentries of the rebels who should attempt to stop or take Mr Wilson; the great door was then unbarricadoed and opened without noise; on which he slipt out, unperceived by the rebels, and having got on horseback, passed along westward to the small bridge over the brook, at the upper end of the pond, and from it had proceeded slowly to the bottom of the avenue which led up to the high road, when being discovered and fired at from each side, a discharge was instantly made from the platform guard and from most of the windows of the Castle, at the places where the rebels ??? been observed to fire; ??? which the affair ended; every one ??? that Mr Wilson had made ???, until next morning, when the identical horse he rode was seen near Blair-village, mounted by a Highlander; which caused much concern in the garrison, as it was concluded that poor Wilson had been made a prisoner, and no intelligence gone to Lord Crawford.

Before this time, the question whether the young Highland horse of

Capt. Wentworth, which had been hardily bred on the Highland hills, but hastily put into the bottom of Cumming's tower, and shut up from all communication with the Castle as has been said, could be still alive, or not; as having been left without either forage or water. It was therefore thought that he could not have outlived or 9 or 10 days at most; which in the sequel will be only found to prove that the English and the Lowland Scotchmen were no judges of the constitution of a Highland horse bred on bleak and barren hills.

After the apparently most unlucky fate of Wilson, no hope of relief remained but from the chapter of accidents, especially with the soldiers, who used frequently to say among themselves, that Sir Andrew's good luck would certainly help them out in some way or other. For they had heard many strange stories about him, as of his never having been sick or wounded, nor in any battle that the English did not win; and they were therefore the less surprised, when, at break of day, on the 1st of April, not a single Highlander could be seen; and soon after Macglashan's maid Molly, who had brought down the summons, came to congratulate her old friends, that Lord George, and all his men, as she called them, had gone off, in the night, for Dalnacardoch and Badenoch: adding, that she believed the Highlanders had been afraid of being surrounded by Lord Crawford with the King's black horse from Dunkeld: but it was afterwards said, with more probability, to have been in consequence of an order suddenly received by Lord George Murray to join the forces of the pretended Prince of Wales near Inverness; and in

expectation of being soon after attacked by the Duke of Cumberland, then marching from Aberdeen.

Notwithstanding the certainty of the rebels having broken up their blockade in the night time, and marched off in such haste; all particulars of which were speedily reported to the commandant; yet as he was purblind, and could not have the evidence of his own eyes, nor would trust to the eyes of others, he positively ordered that the garrison should be kept shut up till further orders; and those orders were not given for its releasement until next morning, the 2nd of April, when an officer having arrived on horseback from the Earl of Crawford, he informed the commandant, that his Lordship, with some cavalry, might be expected in an hour, as accordingly happened; and the garrison being drawn out, his Lordship was received by the commandant, at the head of it, with this compliment, "My Lord, I am very glad to see you, but, *by all that's good*, you have been very dilatory, and we can give you nothing to eat." To which his Lordship answered laughingly, with his usual good humour, "I assure you. Sir Andrew, I made all the haste I possibly could; and I hope that you and the officers will do me the honour to partake with me of such fare as I can give you." His Lordship did accordingly entertain, afterwards, in the summer-house of the garden, Sir Andrew and his officers, with a plentiful dinner, and very good wines; and returned in the evening to Dunkeld.— Whence it is supposed that Lord Crawford had made a handsome report to the Duke of Cumberland, in favour of the garrison, as public thanks were soon after given to it by his Royal

Highness for its steady and gallant defence of Blair-Castle, and the matchless commandant promoted to be Colonel of a regiment of marines⁴.

It was then learned that, although Mr Wilson had got a fall from his horse, which was frightened by the fire at him, yet he had on foot made his escape from the rebels, arrived early next day at Dunkeld, and waited on Lord Crawford with his dispatch: and it was further understood that his Lordship had spared no pains to prevail on the commandant of the Hessians to advance with them against the rebels in Athol, but without effect; so great was their terror of being attacked, in the pass of Killicranky, with swords, by the wild mountaineers, as they considered them, who had twice beaten the King's troops with, fire-arms, as they had heard.

One remarkable incident at the end of the blockade still remains to be told: which is, that after Sir Andrew's general jail-delivery of the garrison, in the morning of the 2nd April, some officers hastening to see the poor *dead* horse of Capt. Wentworth, it being the 17th day of his confinement, they had no sooner opened the door and entered, than they were precipitately driven out, laughing, to avoid the animal, who was wildly about. That fine stout animal having received the most proper care and best treatment by order of his

⁴ He died an old Lieutenant General, in 1771, aged 84, having served as a cornet in the 2nd regiment of Dragoons, or Scotch Greys, when commanded by Lord John Hay at the battle of Ramilies, 11th May O. S. 1706.

master, soon became in excellent condition, and, as it is believed, was then sent to England by Capt. Wentworth, as a present to one of his sisters.⁵

⁵ The 25th regt. having re-embarked a Burnt Island in autumn 1746 for Williamstadt on the Meuse.