Dunbar, the key of the borders, surrendered; Balliol was taken prisoner and sent to the Tower ; while the English prince concluded what he deemed the conquest of Scot­land, by removing from Scone to Westminster the sacred stone upon which the long line of its kings had been crowned and anointed. But at this sad moment Scotland, which in vain looked for a deliverer amongst its feudal nobles, found one in a man of far inferior rank.

William Wallace was the son of Sir Malcolm Wal­lace, who held the estate of Ellerslie, near Paisley. Hav­ing been outlawed by the English for an alleged mur­der, committed on one by whom he had been grievously injured, he fled into the fastnesses of his country, and assembling round him a small band of followers, who were weary of their servitude, commenced that kind of pre­datory warfare, which led from one success to another, till he saw himself at the head of a formidable force. With this he boldly descended into the low country, and after having defeated the English in the sanguinary battle of Stirling, was soon after chosen Governor of Scot­land. This title he only accepted as acting in the name of John Balliol, whom he had always acknowledged as his here­ditary king. Into the exploits and career of this great man it is impossible, within our limits, to enter ; but mak­ing every allowance for the passionate admiration of his countrymen, and regarding him as reflected in the cold glass of history, rather than invested with the brilliant hues of romance, there will still be found all that constitutes a heroic character, if the accomplishment of the greatest re­sults with the most confined means, an entire devotion to his country, a contempt of power for its own sake, unex- tinguishable hatred of oppression, and a personal courage which nothing could shake for a moment, were ever en­titled to such an epithet.

It was however impossible for Wallace, with all his great qualities, to reconcile the Scottish nobles to his en­vied elevation, or to compose the feuds and jealousies which divided and weakened their efforts. Edward, who had been absent in Flanders when his officers were defeated at Stir­ling, hurried back to England, and once more invading Scotland at the head of an immense army, encountered and defeated Wallace in the battle of Falkirk. The result of this victory was the temporary subjugation of a country, whose allegiance expired the moment its invaders retired. Wallace voluntarily resigned the office of Governor, Robert Bruce and John Cornyn were chosen Guardians, and for five years the war was continued with various success ; but Edward, who in this interval had thrice invaded the king­dom, by these unceasing efforts and superior numerical strength, at last subdued the spirit, and appeared to have completed the conquest of this devoted people. The Guar­dians submitted and were pardoned; sentence of outlawry was pronounced against Simon Fraser and the few followers of Wallace who still held out; and at last this great chief him­self was betrayed into the hands of the conqueror, and exe­cuted at London. It was at this crisis, which seemed to seal for ever the fate and liberty of the Scottish people, that a deliverer arose in the person of Robert Bruce.

Section V.

**a.d. 1306** to **1436.**

Nothing could be more extraordinary, or apparently more unpropitious to the cause of freedom, than the cir­cumstances which led to this great result. Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, and grandson of the competitor for the crown, had acted a dubious and interested part during the years that Wallace, and the few patriotic barons who adhered to him, made their stand for the independence of their coun­try. He inherited, with vast landed estates, the right to

the crown possessed by his grandfather; but, had he urged his claim, it might have been at the risk of the forfeiture of these possessions, which made him one of the most power­ful barons in Scotland ; and, although, in his early career, we can detect occasional outbreaks of the patriotic feeling, he preserved his allegiance to Edward the First, and appears to have been treated with confidence by that monarch.

The injuries inflicted on the country seem at last to have aroused both Bruce and Cornyn, and they formed a secret agreement to rise against the English. But Comyn’s heart failed him. He betrayed the purpose to Edward, and meet­ing Bruce, who had been made aware of his treachery, in the church of the Grey friars at Dumfries, that proud baron reviled him as an informer, and stabbed him to the heart on the steps of the high altar. He was instantly proclaim­ed a traitor by Edward, excommunicated as a sacreligious murderer by the Pope, a price set upon his head ; and from the first and most influential noble in the kingdom, he felt that he must either assert his right to the crown, and trust to his sword for its defence, or he content to sink into the condition of an outlaw and a fugitive. His decision was instantly taken. He rode with his little band to Scone, and was there solemnly crowned ; but being aware of the ad­vance of an English army, he hastily concentrated his forces, and after ravaging Galloway, marched against Perth, then in possession of Edward.

But the early portion of Bruce’s career was disastrous; and those military talents, which afterwards conducted him through *a* course of unexampled victory, were nursed amid incessant defeat and hardship. He was put to flight at Methven, his small army dispersed, and he himself driven an almost solitary wanderer through Lennox and Kintyre, to seek an asylum in Rachrin, a little island on the northern coast of Ireland. Here he remained during the winter, unaware of the execution of his faithful followers, who had fallen into the hands of Edward ; of the imprisonment of his queen and daughter, and the extraordinary severity with which the English monarch seemed determined to rivet the fetters upon his native country.

In the spring he passed over from Rachrin to Arran, ac­companied by his brother Edward Bruce, Sir James Dou­glas, and about three hundred men. His own castle of Turnberry, on the coast of Carrick, was then occupied by Lord Percy, an officer of Edward. Bruce attacked it, put the English garrison to the sword, and, after a variety of minor enterprises, in which, although often repulsed, he and his followers gained experience and confidence, he ventured, although at the head of only six hundred spearmen, to meet the earl of Pembroke, with three thou­sand cavalry, at Loudon Hill, (May 1307). The result of this conflict, owing to the admirable dispositions of Bruce, was the entire defeat of the English ; and from this point, the crisis of his fortune, to the hour when the liberty of his country was for ever secured on the field of Bannockburn, the career of this extraordinary man presented an almost continued series of success.

It was perhaps fortunate for Scotland that he was opposed, not by Edward the First, who had died when on his march to Scotland, (1307), but by his son, Edward the Second, a prince of far inferior talent ; yet the military resources of England were so formidable, and the barons who wielded them such experienced leaders, that Bruce, who had to strug­gle against domestic enemies, as well as foreign invasion, may well be praised for the admirable judgment with which he wielded the strength of his little kingdom. It was his policy to avoid a general battle, and to starve and distress the for­midable armies which England repeatedly sent against him, by wasting the country, retiring slowly before his enemies into the woods and fastnesses, and when they were compelled by famine or the season to retreat, by hanging on their rear, and cutting them off in detail. Convinced that, from the