espoused Margaret, the youthful daughter of Henry, at York, and exhibited a spirit and intelligence superior to his years, in refusing to pay homage for his king­dom of Scotland. “ I came,” said he to the artful mo­narch who made the proposal ; “ I came into England on a joyful and pacific errand, not to answer to an arduous question, which belongs to the states of my kingdom.” He at the same time made no objection to take the oath of fealty for the lands which he held in England.

Defeated in this attempt to overreach a minor sove­reign, Henry commenced a series of intrigues with the Scottish nobles, with the object of obtaining an entire control over the affairs of the sister kingdom ; and the country was divided and distracted by two factions, the one acting under English influence, and the other more honestly contending for the freedom of their prince and the inde­pendent administration of the government. These scenes of civil faction and foreign interference continued till the monarch, having arrived at manhood, and developing a character of much energy and judgment, took the reins into his own hand, and compelled his nobility to respect the laws and support his measures.

Scarcely had this happy change occurred, when the kingdom, which had already suffered from the vicinity of the fleets of Norway, was threatened with invasion by Haco, one of its most warlike princes. The dispute which led to this menace originated in a circumstance al­ready noticed ; the precarious homage paid by the petty piratical chiefs of the Western Isles, who, as circumstances pressed on the one side or the other, acknowledged a feu­dal dependence on Scotland or on Norway. To support them in their independence on Alexander, Haco made a descent on the western coast of Scotland with a mighty fleet, but sustained a signal defeat at Largs, and on his return with the shattered remains of his ships, sickened and died at Orkney. The results of this victory were highly favourable to Scotland. It fixed the chiefs of the Western Isles in their allegiance, secured to Alexander the homage of the king of Man, and convinced Norway that Scotland was not to be so easily subdued or overawed as its piratical princes had anticipated.

The remainder of this reign was prosperous, as far as the circumstances of the kingdom are considered, but unfortu­nate for the monarch, who found himself suddenly deprived by death of all his children. His eldest son, Alexander, died soon after his marriage, and his only daughter Mar­garet, the wife of Eric, king of Norway, was cut off in childbed, leaving an infant daughter, Margaret, commonly called the Maiden of Norway, the heiress of the Scottish throne. These calamities induced the king, who was a widower, to make a second marriage. Having selected Ioleta de Coney, daughter of the Count de Dreux, the nuptials were celebrated at Jedburgh ; and the nation, under a wise monarch still in the prime of life, flourishing at home and at peace abroad, looked forward to a long season of prosperity, when all its hopes were overcast in a moment. Alexander, when riding in a dark night, on the brink of a dangerous rocky ledge near Kinghom, was precipitated from the top to the bottom, and killed on the spot.

The death of the king was deeply lamented, and not without cause, for he left the kingdom in most difficult cir­cumstances, exposed to the ambition and attack of Edward the First, one of the ablest princes who had ever reigned in England, and its happiness at home dependant upon the precarious life of an infant. To fill the cup of Scotland’s calamity, this child, Margaret, the Maiden of Nonvay, when on her passage from that country to take possession of her throne, sickened and died in Orkney ; and on her death arose that celebrated competition for the Scottish crown, which threatened to plunge the kingdom into all the miser­ies of civil war.

The moment was favourable to the designs of Edward the First, who determined to make himself master of Scot­land. While in that country the various competitors col­lected their forces and prepared to support their claims, the English monarch having given orders for assembling the strength of his kingdom by a certain day, invited the nobility and clergy of Scotland to meet him at Norham, for the purpose of deliberating upon the succession to the crown. It has been made a subject of dispute, whether Edward was invited by the Scottish people to be umpire in the contest for the crown, or whether he proposed him­self as judge, and the subject is involved in some obscurity. It is by no means improbable, that English intrigue and a regard to their own interest, had induced some of the competitors, if not to invite, at least most readily to accept the mediation of the English monarch ; but it is equally true, and the point is of far greater importance, that there is no evidence to prove that there was any invitation of this kind, either by the people of Scotland, or even by à majority of its nobles and clergy. Be this as it may, the competitors for the crown, with a large proportion of the nobility and clergy of Scotland, accepted the medi­ation of Edward, and met this monarch at Norham, (May 1291).

Of these claimants for the crown the two principal were John Balliol and Robert Bruce. It was quite apparent that the question lay between them, the rights of the other com­petitors being evidently inferior to theirs. The title of these two chiefs arose out of the circumstance, that on the death of all descendants of Alexander the Third, the crown reverted to the descendants of David, earl of Huntingdon, brother of king William the Lion. This David left three daugh­ters, Margaret, the eldest, who married Alan, lord of Gal­loway ; Isabella, the second, who married Robert Bruce, fa­ther to the competitor Robert Bruce, lord of Annandale ; and Ada, the third daughter, who married John de Hast­ings. It was evident, therefore, that the question lay be­tween Balliol and Bruce. Balliol pleaded that he was en­titled to the crown as the descendant of the eldest daughter, being great-grandson to David, earl of Huntingdon. Bruce admitted that he sprung from the second daughter, but contended that, being grandson of the earl of Huntingdon, and therefore a degree nearer, his claim was superior.

Edward’s scheme against the independence of Scotland was now ripe for execution ; and announcing his determina­tion to give a just decision, he, to the dismay of many pre­sent, required the Scottish barons to swear fealty to him as their Lord Paramount. It was in this character alone, he said, that he was entitled to give, and as such alone that he would pronounce, a judgment. The scene which now ensued was a humiliating one. The right of Edward was admitted; and Bruce, Balliol, the remaining competitors, the barons and the clergy, set their hands to an instrument, in which they acknowledged that the English king was feudal superior of Scotland. There can be little doubt that they knew this claim of Edward to be untenable upon any ground of truth or justice, but they saw it ready to be enforced by a determined prince at the head of the whole strength of his dominions, and they did not dare to resist it. Edward, accordingly, having received their oaths of homage, pro­ceeded to investigate the contending claims, and awarded the crown to John Balliol.

It was probably part of the plan of the English monarch to quarrel with his vassal king. It is at least certain, that he availed himself of the earliest appearance of spirit and re­sistance in this unfortunate prince to summon him, in terms of reproach and indignity, to his court in England, and at last goaded him and his people into what he termed rebellion. In the war which ensued, Edward found it an easy matter to overrun a kingdom unprepared to resist so formidable an enemy. The town of Berwick was carried by storm ;