

CHAPTER I

THOUGHTS ON BANNOCKBURN

THE 600th anniversary of Bannockburn is an event that ought to make people think. Scotsmen are jubilant, and rightly so; Englishmen would do well to be thoughtful, and as, although medieval conditions do not exist to-day, human nature is much the same at all periods, certain reflections do not come amiss. One result of the study of old quarrels is the acknowledgement that war has had a greater influence than the school of J. R. Green, the scorner of the drum-and-trumpet theory of history, would allow. It has influenced constitutional progress. Of course Green himself knew this. All his admirers know the passage which couples Château Gaillard with Runnymede; the fall of the great Norman Castle and the subsequent loss of Normandy to the French made Magna Carta possible. Just in the same way the wars of Wallace and Bruce brought to a head the ceaseless contest between the English Crown and the Baronage, and made Magna Carta effectual. From the purely military point of view England was passing through a crisis under the three Edwards. The development of long-bow archery, which proved the value of the peasant in war, can be traced from Wales and the Welsh wars,

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through the Wallace and Bruce period, down to the day of Crécy. War in itself is revolting ; yet it is impossible not to admire the combination of coolness and skill which makes for victory. More than that ; war brings out a nation's resources and moulds national character. Thus a few minutes of reflection on an old battle will at least suggest the old and ever-needed lesson of readiness, of modesty, of profiting by mistakes, and of unanimity and a complete absence of class hatreds, if a nation is to be successful.

Bannockburn cannot be studied by itself. It is one event in a series. The most important it may be, yet one to be studied in the light of what came both before and after. It shows the evolution of the peasant to be as good a fighting man as the lord, but only on the condition that he is well led. The foot spearman triumphed over the mounted knight in all his pride ; the man who kept his place in the ranks triumphed over the man who rode jealous of his neighbour ; the nation whose King was supported both by nobles and by peasants triumphed over the nation whose nobles scorned alike their King, the peasant archers of their own army, and the peasant spearmen opposed to them. Bruce won independence for Scotland ; he also taught the English to abate their pride and to combine, noble with archer, in future wars, or rather to re-learn a previous lesson of combination, which the English barons in their pride and factious opposition to their King had put aside.

The history of Bannockburn, when taken with the history of the wars before and after, helps us to understand

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the Anglo-Saxon character. The man of restless energy, who loves adventure for itself, who fights because fighting gives him something to do and enables him to show his masterfulness, who thinks that none but he has the right to fight, who if he is not fighting is engaged in a constitutional struggle against his King—which indeed is partly a class trouble and partly personal to himself, for the barons by no means always pulled together—who, at intervals when nothing else is stirring, crusades in Palestine or Africa or Prussia, who in fact must always be up and doing, is the Norman baron. The Anglo-Saxon is the stay-at-home. His ancestors indeed had come as pirates and conquerors, but the next generations settled down on the land; the pirates turned farmers, forgot how to fight, cowered before the Danes, rallied when well led and inspired by Alfred and Edward the Elder and their successors, collapsed once more when even the House of Alfred produced an Ethelred, were unable to rally to any purpose under Edmund Ironsides, and so let their country fall at one blow before William. They let the burden of fighting be borne by the House of Godwin and a few energetic thegns and a professional bodyguard of house-carles. When once Hastings was fought and won and the few fighting men were dead, partly because Wessex and Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria, could not combine for lack of leadership and a common bond of union, mostly because the churls and boors were rooted to the soil as peaceful farmers, they received new masters and sank to be villeins or semi-serfs. Spasmodically they showed some spirit. Rufus called some of them out. Henry I carried over some of them to

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Normandy, and with their help beat Robert. The men of the North rose at the call of the Church, and beat back the Scots at the battle of the Standard. Henry II saw their value, and by his Assize of Arms reorganised the old Anglo-Saxon fyrd or militia. But a militia has inherent defects, for it cannot be trained systematically, and if it is called out for any length of time farming suffers, so that, although spasmodically a militia force may be raised to a certain degree of excellence, the system as a system is a bad one.

Now the Norman barons were restive under the Williams and Henries because, having come to England as adventurers and having received lands in a conquered country, they resented the strong control of the Crown, the royal insistence upon strict payment of feudal dues, and the power of the Royal Court over their Manor Courts. Each wanted to be a little King over his own estates. Therefore their ideal was individualism. But the strong rule of Henry II created an official class which enabled the Crown to prevail against them. Of course with the reign of King John the problem was changed. Normandy was lost, and every baron had to decide whether he should be henceforward an Englishman or a Norman. All those who preferred the Island Kingdom to the Duchy were now, however pure might be their Norman blood, English barons, and they tended more and more to unite as a class against the Crown until they extorted from John their class liberties. Their strongest stand they made on the question of feudal service. William the Conqueror had granted lands to their ancestors on condition that they should fight for him without pay ; but he was then both King of England and Duke

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of Normandy, whereas John was only King—the Duchy of Aquitaine does not count, for Henry II was the first to hold it, whereas feudal service had been instituted by William I. Therefore the cry of “No feudal service across the sea” directly preceded the demand for the Great Charter. Of course their object in extorting the Great Charter was to win their own liberties, not the freedom of all classes of unborn Englishmen for generations to come; not the control of all taxation by the Commons, which did not yet exist, but their special right not to have to pay aids and scutages without their own consent. An “aid” was a money grant upon a special occasion; “scutage” was money paid in lieu of feudal service; and both were in proportion to the number of knights that each baron, or indeed even quite humble men who held land directly from the Crown, owed for war. Therefore the military consequence of the Great Charter was that the King could not declare war or enforce feudal service or collect a scutage without consent. If he fought on his own initiative he must do it at his own cost. Both for men and for money for a serious undertaking he was dependent upon his barons. “Men” here means mounted men exclusively; the feudal system provided the King with heavy cavalry only.

To understand the Norman spirit we have to look at one special district—the Marches of Wales. For a period of about two centuries the Norman lords were able to show their love of adventure in this particular district where there was no restraint upon them. The Crown, partly it would seem to give to the barons just that something to do for which their souls yearned and therefore to divert

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their attention from England, and partly to reduce the breezy and freedom-loving Welsh by a cheap method, allowed certain lords to wage war and to conquer on their own behalf as much of Wales as they could. As a matter of fact the Earls of Chester conquered but very little of North Wales; and the Mortimers conquered some, but not very much, of mid-Wales; but in the century between William I and Henry II most of South Wales was won. There the March estates were created; there were erected the castles, first the moated earthen mounds, which were crowned with wooden stockades and towers, and later the stone keeps, which are the outward and visible signs of the earlier and the later Norman periods. The Welsh offered a keen resistance, particularly in the Valley of the Usk, the land of Gwent. But, when at last overcome, they fought under their Norman lords against other Welsh. They followed Strongbow and his brother raiders to Ireland, and in battle the native Irish and the Irish Danes went down before the combination of mailed Norman horse and South Wales archers. For this is the main fact; the land where the true long-bow was first effectively used was South Wales. It was a bow of wild elm, ugly, unpolished, rough, but stiff and strong; so says the native historian of Wales, Gerald de Barry, and the conclusion to which he comes is that in the field mounted men and archers should always be combined. The whole of Strongbow's army of invasion was something short of 400 horse and 2000 archers. It was a Norman-Welsh, far indeed from being an English, invasion of Ireland.

We do not possess about any army of Richard I

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such definite information as the actual pay-rolls give us for Edward I. We simply know that the Anglo-Norman contingent at Acre and Arsuf was but a fraction of the crusading host. We can guess that it was mostly Norman ; how many or how few were the Saxons in the retinues of Richard himself and his barons we cannot determine, but that they were quite few is practically certain. That all Crusaders knew the value of good archers, whether mounted or on foot, to combat the Turkish horse archers is clear. The tactics in the East consisted of putting a screen of foot, mostly bow-armed, to shield the horses of the mailed men against the arrows of the Turks, and of then giving the word for the horsemen to charge through the screen at the right moment. This was done by Philip of France at Acre before Richard's arrival, as well as by Richard himself at Arsuf. But the typical bow-men of a crusading army were crossbow-men, Genoese and Pisans, and it was the cross-bow that had the best repute. Richard himself was alive to the value of the long-bow and tried to obtain South Welsh archers, but they were doubtless few in numbers and not anxious to enlist for distant service in Palestine or France. For this fact is prominent, and it is entirely germane to our purpose, that in Western Europe infantry were of no account in spite of the experience of the Crusades. For instance, at the battle of Bouvines in 1214 a mass of foot was pushed forward in front of the mailed cavalry, but was entirely useless in the battle and may be said to have been merely exposed to be slaughtered. In England the cross-bow was valued and considered to be the best missile weapon down to the reign of Edward I, but the

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crossbow-men were quite few in numbers, and those few were chiefly professional mercenaries. Some indeed were Londoners, but most were Netherlanders or Gascons and, as mercenaries, they came under the ban of the Great Charter.

As a critical period, both from the constitutional and from the military point of view, let us take the days of Simon de Montfort. Constitutionally the barons of his period appeared to be contending for their class privileges against the Crown so as to make the Great Charter effectual. But it is well known that by no means all the barons were Montfortians. The personal element came in, as it always must come in. Take Gilbert of Clare, Earl of Gloucester, who fought side by side with Simon at Lewes and against Simon at Evesham. Why was this? Chiefly it was because Llewelyn of Wales was Simon's ally, for, as the result of the whole baronial struggle of the reigns of John and Henry III, the Welsh had been gaining ground as against the Lords Marchers. As Lord of Glamorgan, Gloucester was one of the chief Marchers. He was keen enough to stand up as Earl against King in England, but he was not going to allow Llewelyn to grow to such strength as to weaken him as Lord Marcher; Llewelyn being Simon's ally, Glamorgan was in danger. Also, from the military point of view, the actions at Lewes and Evesham are of interest because the barons and the mounted men alone were deemed to be of any value. As we saw just now, the lesson of the Crusades had been thrown away and the barons wished to keep to themselves the fighting, even as they put themselves and their own liberties forward against the King. That is to say, they themselves wished alone to be in

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evidence, whether they were fighting or whether they were agitating against the Crown.

Any keen lover of history is quick to resent a charge of pedantry, and such a charge may often be made in connection with the exact use of words. But every man must use words according to the meanings that they bear to him and the ideas that they suggest to him. Green and Freeman were right from their own standpoint when they called the Angles and Saxons, even as they called themselves, English. They implied that our nation is still English in the same sense, having absorbed into itself Danes and Normans. To others, however, it appears that the English nation in history and to-day has both Saxon characteristics and Danish and Norman characteristics, and that the Saxons did not absorb but were leavened by the Normans. Consequently we should call the old race Saxon or Anglo-Saxon, the mixed race English. We have a very definite date at which we can first use the word "English" in such a sense, viz. 1204, the date of John's loss of Normandy. Then the Montfortian period, being as it were the outcome of the struggle for the Charter, was a time when the barons were vitally conscious of their position as Englishmen. They protested against the King's foreign ministers and favourites as if their own ancestors had never been foreigners, and Simon de Montfort himself lost his authority amongst them because, though he posed as the anti-foreigner, he was himself not purely English by blood.

We can continue this thought now into the reign of Edward I. The wars against the Welsh and the Scots, long before the Hundred Years War began in France,

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cannot but have given a stronger idea of English nationality. A baron cannot fight in Wales or in Scotland without feeling himself to be an Englishman, however pure his Norman blood may still be. But we have to make a strong distinction between the Welsh and the Scottish campaigns. In Wales all the barons of Edward I served as a feudal duty, but their hearts were not in a war in Scotland. The reason is that as Lords Marchers they were determined to support their King in crushing Llewelyn and the still independent section of the Welsh. Almost every magnate was likewise a Lord Marcher. Not only was Gloucester Lord of Glamorgan; Humphrey Bohun, hereditary Constable and Earl of Hereford, was Lord of Brecknock; Roger Bigod, hereditary Marshal and Earl of Norfolk, was Lord of Chepstow; the King's own brother, Edmund of Lancaster, was Lord of Monmouth; the Earl of Lincoln in the course of the last war against Llewelyn received the marcher lordship of Denbigh; Roger Mortimer had great estates in Shropshire and Herefordshire, and likewise in mid-Wales. And so all the lords, whether great or small, whether Montfortians or Royalists in the last reign, followed Edward I against Llewelyn as a matter of course. In 1277 they served for five months; in 1282-3 for 15 months; and then again on the rising of Rhys in 1287, and of Madoc in 1294-5. Each seemed to consider it to be a point of honour to serve unpaid, for thus the Crown was under an obligation to him, and he was defending his own march lands as well as fighting for the King of England. It is important to insist upon this point because, if these men served the Crown as a feudal duty, they were likewise intensely keen to maintain