

The Battle of Killiecrankie

Killiecrankie (near Blair Atholl, Perthshire) is the scene of the Battle in 1689 between the troops of William and Mary under General Mackay, and the Highland Clans, under Viscount Dundee. The strength of the former was computed at to be 5000 men, while that of the latter was not nearly so much.

Early on the morning of Saturday, the 27th July, Dundee arrived at Blair Castle, where he learned that Mackay's troops were already in the ravine of Killiecrankie. A Council of War was held; and it was determined to fight and conquer, or to perish in the attempt to restore to their native King the throne and kingdom which they considered so justly his own. The Clans were in high spirits, and set out to encounter the enemy, although they knew he was far superior to them in numbers; but not in courage, nor in determination.

The enemy had meanwhile made his way up the Pass. The ascent had been long and toilsome; for even the foot had to climb up by twos and threes. The passage was at last effected, and the troops found themselves on the small valley below the House of Urrard, immediately beyond the Pass, and where they lay down to rest themselves after their tiresome march from Dunkeld.

Early in the afternoon they were roused by a report that the Clans were approaching. In a little, the ascent was covered with bonnets and plaids, while Dundee was seen to ride forward to survey the enemy. He then drew up his men with as much tact as their peculiar character allowed. Each Clan, large or small, formed a column. One of these battalions might contain seven hundred men, while another might not exceed one hundred and thirty.

On the right of the Jacobite Army, close to the River Garry, were the Macleans. Next to them were the Irish troops under Cannon. Then came the Macdonalds of Clanranald. On the left were the other bands of the Macdonalds. At the head of one large battalion towered the stately form of Glengarry, who bore in his hand the Royal Standard of King James the Seventh. Still further to the left was the Cavalry under Sir William Wallace. Beyond them was the renowned Lochiel with his Camerons; while on the extreme left were the men of Skye.

Meanwhile a fire of musketry was kept up on both sides. The space between the armies was hid with a cloud of smoke. Not a few Highlanders dropped. They looked down with Scorn upon the Sassenachs. They remembered that they themselves were the descendants of the heroes of Tibbermuir, Aldearn, and Kilsyth, and were impatient to measure their broadswords with the bayonets of their Lowland foes.

Mackay's troops looked in terror upon the martial appearances of the Clans, and recalled to mind the tales they had heard of their warlike prowess in days of old. They recoiled at the idea of encountering in mortal and deadly strife such determined antagonists. Mackay himself, though an old and experienced officer, and a brave man, had his own misgivings.

The sun, however, was low in the western heavens before Dundee gave the word to prepare for action.

It was past seven o'clock when Dundee gave the order. The Highlanders dropped their plaids, their haversacks, and all that could hinder their onset, and marched resolutely down the hill, receiving Mackay's third fire before they pierced his line. Many at this juncture fell, and among these were Dundee, in the moment of victory. No sooner did the Clans come to close quarters than they threw down their firelocks and rushed the enemy with a fearful yell. The Lowlanders prepared to receive the charge, and were still fumbling with the muzzles of their guns and the handles of their bayonets when the bands of the Clans came down upon them like a flood. In two minutes the battle was lost and won. Mackay's troops were completely discomfited. All was over; and the mingled torrents of red coats and tartans were pouring down the gorge of the valley of Killiecrankie. Mackay's loss was dreadful—upwards of 2000 men were actually hewn down by the victorious Clans. The wreck of the vanquished army fled over the mountains, and at last found themselves in the valley of the Tay. The loss of the Clans did not exceed altogether 900 men.

The Clans did not follow up their advantage. They retired from the field proud with victory, and laden with the spoils of the enemy, but soon the loss of Dundee began to be felt. They remained inactive till the 21st of August when they made an attack on Dunkeld, where they were repulsed. After this, discord and disunion did its work, and on the 24th of August, or four weeks after their great victory, the Clans were disbanded, and the Highland Army ceased to have an existence.

Although "Killiecrankie" was a brilliant affair, it was a dear won victory to King James. Her had lost then only man that was able to command the Highland Army. His death at the time was therefore fatal to the cause of the Stuarts.

The following old song written to commemorate the victory of Killiecrankie is inserted as a Jacobite curiosity. -

*“Where hae ye been sae braw, lad-
Whar hae ye been sae brankie, O-
Whar hae ye been sae braw, lad-
Cam ye by Killiecrankie, O?
An' ye had been whar I hae been,
Ye wadna been sae cantie, O;
An' ye had seen what I hae seen
On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O.*

*I've faught on land, I've faught on sea,
At hame I faught my auntie, O;
But I met the devil and Dundee,
On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O!
An' ye had been, &c.*

*The bauld Pitcur in a fur,
And Clavers got a clankie, O;
Or I had fed an Athole gled,
On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O.
An' ye had been, &c.*

*Oh, fie! Mackay, what gart ye lie,
I' the bush ayont the brankie, O;
Ye'd better kiss'd King Willie's loof,
Then come to Killiecrankie, O.
Its nae shame, its nae shame,
Its nae shame to shank ye, O;
There's sour slaes on Athole Braes,
And deils at Killiecrankie, O."*

Acknowledgement: The foregoing material was sourced from the publication

DUNKELD:

Its Straths and Glens

Published by A. M'Lean and Son, Dunkeld

1865.