

The King's March through Somerset, 1644.

BY EMANUEL GREEN.

IN August, 1642, William Seymour, Marquis of Hertford, was sent into Somerset to raise and command all forces gathered there for the King. He found himself, however, forestalled by the opposition party, working for the Parliament, and after some encounters about Wells, was driven away to Sherborne. On behalf of the Parliament, the High Sheriff, Sandford, with his son and other gentlemen, then made a general search and disarmed many of the Royalist houses, sending to Taunton the arms and armour thus secured. Early in September, Captain Pym, son to "that worthy patriot John Pym, Esq.," having intelligence that Sir Edward Rodney, Sir Edward Berkley, and one "Master" Dugdale, chaplain to the Marquis of Hertford, were at Sir Ralph Hopton's house at Witham, and were seducing the tenants and fortifying the place, proceeded there and assaulted it. They within, however, proved to be determined in their defence, and shot for shot was returned. Presently, Arnold Hayward, or Howard, the lieutenant of the company, espied at a distance three horsemen mounted. On riding up to them he found them to be the two knights and the chaplain, and bid them yield; but they, seeing that he was alone, "answered disdainfully." After some further parley, one of them, unobserved, drew a pistol and aimed it at the lieutenant, but the "fire took not." Howard, in return, gave them "a token" from his carbine, but had the "lucke to miss;" then "they at him, and he at both of them," the chaplain standing by neuter. So was carried on this close, but curious encounter, until eventually, for no reason given, the knights, although acknowledged to be gentlemen of courage, asked for quarter and surrendered themselves prisoners.

In the meantime the soldiers had made a breach into the

house through a small postern door, which caused the inmates to surrender on quarter, but with the loss of all arms and ammunition. The lieutenant, not a little proud of his share in this business, took his prisoners to the Parliament, where, having "welcome love and encouragement" to follow his future fortune in its defence, he delivered his captives and returned to his duty.¹ That there should be no doubt or mistake as to the part he had played, an account of the affair, duly signed and authenticated by the three prisoners, was printed in pamphlet form. But notwithstanding this good beginning and "loving encouragement," Howard afterwards deserted to the King, and being taken prisoner at Barnstaple, in July, 1644, was tried and executed.²

After this, Witham House was again garrisoned, and on the 10th February, 1643, the Parliament issued an Order that it should be disarmed, and that all persons found therein, "standing on their guard," should be sent prisoners to London.

Up to July, 1643, all went fairly well with the Parliament, but from that time and through 1644 the Royalists held possession of Somerset. The Earl of Essex being then sent from London with a force to relieve the West, was joyfully received in the county; the King's party avoiding contact. Those who joined the Earl, were "welcomed" by him, and Lord Roberts made them an excellent speech, which was received with loud shouts of assent.

But the hopes raised by the coming of Lord Essex were checked by the determination of the King to follow personally westward. To meet him with as many men as possible, Sir Ralph, now Lord Hopton, recruited energetically, especially about his own district, between Evercreech and Witham. His house at the latter place he strengthened, and placed about it some five hundred horse. Altogether two thousand were thus gathered, being told they were to resist an expected landing of some French. On finding that this was not true, most of them deserted, and, following their own inclinations, joined the other side.³

(1). Certain and true newes from Somersetshire.

(2). Oldmixon.

(3). God's Ark, &c.

Marching slowly, that the necessary preparations might be made, the King, accompanied by Prince Charles, left Badminton on Monday, the 15th July, passed through Marshfield, and so over Lansdown to Bath, where he was received by Lord Hopton, and Sir Thomas Bridges, the governor of the city. He had with him, including Hopton's contingent, about nine thousand men, horse and foot, intending to march for Devon, there to get Lord Essex between himself and Prince Maurice, and so crush him before any aid could come, or before any force could advance near enough to hinder his plan.

Sir William Waller at this time was about Warwick. It was known that if he advanced too suddenly to support or succour Essex he was likely to come weak, and if he stayed to join with others he must come too late.⁴

After resting two nights at Bath, his Majesty went on Wednesday, the 17th July, to Sir John Horner's house at Mells, "a faire large house built of stone, in the forme of an H, with two courts,"⁵ his troop being quartered at Kilmersdon. Sir John Horner's estate was under sequestration, and curiously enough, it happened that he was appointed Parliamentary High Sheriff of the County on the 15th July, being the day on which the King arrived in Bath, and only two days before he took possession of the house at Mells. On the march to Mells the soldiers searched every place for horses, taking sometimes twenty or thirty, but they were "hard put to it" for bridles and saddles. The foot were apparently in a bad state, and so poorly shod, that they even took the shoes from the feet of those who were their friends. To help them, if possible, the King sent a letter, on the 18th, to the Mayor of Wells, demanding a supply of boots and shoes, and asking also for a loan of £500, which he promised to repay "when God enabled him to do so." The citizens being greatly reduced were unable to raise more than one hundred pounds, and this, with two hundred pairs of shoes, they sent as a "free gift."

About the time of the King's arrival in Bath, Sir Francis

(4). Rupert Correspondence.

(5). Symond's Diary.

Doddington had been sent, to take a house of Mr. Arundel's, called Wodehouse, near Frome, and about two miles from Witham, in which the Pophams and Colonel Strode had placed a garrison of sixty-six men, under the command of one Wansey, who had been formerly a watchmaker in Warminster. In this house were many gentlemen who had sought therein safety and protection. Sir Francis found his task more difficult than he had anticipated, and consequently the King sent to him from Bath an additional party of horse and foot, with two pieces of ordnance. The garrison then seeing that longer resistance must be useless, yielded, upon quarter, on the 16th July. After the surrender, this agreement was most shamefully broken. The victors "abused both men, women, and children, most inhumanely;" and Sir Francis, treating his captives as rebels, hanged fourteen, all of good estate, clothiers of the neighbourhood, some of them said to be worth at least ten thousand pounds. Eighty others he sent off prisoners to Bristol, and then joined the King at Mells.⁶ This affair told much against his majesty, as he was so near, and somewhat personally concerned in it. In the Parliament it caused a great sensation, and immediate action was taken to proclaim martial law against all in arms on the Royalist side.

On the 18th, Prince Charles dined with Lord Hopton, at Witham. On Friday, the 19th, all left Mells, the general rendezvous being at Nunney. Then, marching to Bruton, his Majesty quartered at the Abbey, "a faire and noble habitation" of his loyal servant, Sir Charles Berkley. Here he stayed two nights, his troop quartering at Lamyat, in a "pretty stone house, neare the church," the seat of a Royalist Captain, named Davies.

Up to this time no support had appeared, nor had any curiosity been shown to see so rare a visitor. At Bruton, for the first time, the country people came to look at him, but some art had to be used to get them to do even this. They were called in with spades and shovels, as if for some work suited to those tools, and when assembled, an attempt was made to compel them

(6). A Diary, &c., No. 10. Walker, Sir Edward. Perfect Diurnal, No. 52.

to change these for weapons of war. This manœuvre proved a failure, as some three hundred so treated, at once left, and went to Taunton.⁷

On Saturday, the 20th, the rendezvous was on the hill, "Queen Camel being on the left hand," and the King went on to Ilchester, where he lay at the house of Mr. Dawes, his troop quartering at Chilton, about two miles off. Here he stayed three days, waiting for recruits, and hoping to increase his force from an assembly of the county, summoned by his sheriff, Sir Thomas Bridges, to meet on King's Moor, on Tuesday, the 23rd. Accordingly, on that day, a "mighty confluence of people came flocking from all parts of Somerset, and there saluted the King with shouts and acclamations, and followed him from place to place."⁸ Anticipating from this demonstration that their wishes would be fully realized, and that a great increase of strength would result, Sir John Stowell, Sir Edward Rodney, Sir Edward Berkley, and Colonel Biss, were appointed colonels, to organise and command the new regiments. The men from the eastern division of the county were to be placed under Sir Edward Rodney, and those from the western division under Sir John Stowell. But, notwithstanding their efforts, no recruits were forthcoming, and it was soon clear that all the apparent admiration was curiosity, and not affection, no King having been seen in those parts for many years. His Majesty then caused a speech, as if from himself, to be read, first in his own presence, and then in other parts of the ground. In this he said how often he had desired to come into the West, but the "malicious authors" of the war had made it impossible. He was now come to relieve them from the violence of a rebellious army, which would bring destruction on Religion, Property, and Liberty. These, on the contrary, he would defend, and all he asked was, that they would heartily join with him, bear arms in the cause, and so be the means of restoring peace—a blessed peace, which he had so often sought for. He promised that his soldiers should not be more burdensome

(7). Parliament Scout, No. 57.

(8). Walker, Sir Edward.

than was necessary ; but the best way to avoid disorders from them was to "take order that they be not provoked by want of provisions." He concluded by pointing to his son, "your fellow-soldier in this expedition," to whom he delegated the carrying out of his promises, if he himself "lived not to do so."

This speech made no impression, and when the newly appointed colonels came to the question, and asked the people whether they would join and serve the King, but "few stood to it." When all who could be gathered were drawn into a body, there were not more than a thousand. With these were included some who had enlisted before the meeting, under Sir Edward Berkley and Colonel Biss, and also about two hundred others, who had come with Sir Edward Rodney. The rest, having seen their sight, went home again.

On Wednesday, the 24th, having the night before received an addition of eight hundred men from Bristol, the army marched to Chard, "a pretty fair Town," and here the King stayed at the house of Mr. Bancroft, a merchant of London, his troop going to Sir Robert Brett's, "a fair old stone house," at White Stanton. The next day he left Chard, for Honiton, and so passed out of the county.

Meanwhile the efforts of the Parliament were continued to strengthen their force in the West, and some skirmishes now occurred in Somerset. Witham House was again besieged. Early in September Colonel Ludlow, hearing of its being garrisoned, marched there, and took from the park a hundred head of cattle. Soon the garrison offered to treat, and then surrendered, on conditions that all should return to their homes, that the arms should be delivered up, and that no garrison should be kept there in future.

The King's army intervening, but little or no news came from the Earl of Essex, in Devon, as his messengers were usually taken prisoners on their way. Consequently, General Middleton, commanding in Somerset, drew together his forces. Horsemen

were accumulated to cut off supplies in the Royalist rear, and all horses ordered to be brought into Ilchester. Saddles and bridles were received from London; a regiment arrived through Weymouth, other men from Lyme, and Colonel Massey came from Gloucester. The Earl of Manchester and Sir William Waller also marched westward, and joined General Middleton on the 10th September, between Taunton and Bridgwater.

The King, having determined to return to Oxford for the winter, left Exeter, and arrived at Chard on Monday, September 23rd, with ten thousand horse and foot, and seventeen pieces of artillery. He stayed, as before, at Mr. Bancroft's house, his troop being quartered, first at Knoll, then at South Petherton; the army generally being distributed to Crewkerne, Yeovil, and the country round. His Majesty was delayed at Chard a whole week, on account of the failure of his Somerset Commissioners to provide him with promised contributions of money and clothing. He left on the 30th, and, keeping the high road, dined at Lord Paulet's, at Hinton St. George, being joined there by Prince Rupert and Lord Digby, from Bridgwater. Then, leaving Crewkerne two miles to the left, he quartered for the night at Mr. Gibbs', the Manor House, South Perrot, and so passed on to Sherborne.

During the delay at Chard, the Parliamentary forces had continued to concentrate. Sir Thomas Wroth had set out from London with a complete regiment, and from the same centre, men, money, and provisions, were sent off daily. Colonel Cromwell had reached Salisbury, and Lord Essex wrote that he would soon join Sir William Waller, who was now at Shaftesbury. As the King advanced, Sir William retired, and the Royalists continued their march to Newbury, where they were brought to an encounter, with such a disastrous result, that the King, leaving his men to shift for themselves, fled to Bath in the night, a distance of fifty miles; and thence, under the protection of Prince Rupert's horse, got safely to Oxford.