

The Battle of Langport.

JULY 10TH, 1645.

BY HUGH NORRIS.

THE spring and summer of 1645 were fruitful in military incident throughout the south and west of Somerset.

Taunton had been held on behalf of the Parliament by Pye and Blake since July, 1644, and had stood two stiff sieges when it was temporarily relieved on the 11th of May, 1645, as has been recounted by Mr. Emanuel Green in the *Proceedings* of this Society.¹

Mr. Clements R. Markham in his *Life of the Great Lord Fairfax* (1870), and Mr. Samuel R. Gardiner in his *History of the Great Civil War, 1642—1649* (1893), have each devoted a chapter to a relation of the Somersetshire campaign in the summer of 1645, but strange to say, the "Battle of Langport" has never yet found a place in the archives of the Somerset Archæological Society.

It is true that two years ago at Crewkerne, the late Rev. R. Holme gave a short sketch of Fairfax's hurried visit to that place in July, 1645,²—a sketch which is worthy of perusal by anyone who desires to be briefly put in possession of contemporary local events; but unfortunately the author allowed his paper to appear under the misleading title of "The Battle of

(1) Vol. XXV, ii, 33.

(2) *Proceedings*, Vol. XXXVII, ii, 70.

Crewkerne," an occurrence which really has no place in history, and this error goes far to impair the usefulness of his article as a link in the chain of events now under consideration. It is consequently hoped that a slight retrospective glance at some proceedings during the spring of 1645 may be pardoned, even if it should involve a small amount of recapitulation.

The story of the sufferings endured by the beleaguered inhabitants and garrison of Taunton, together with the cry of those that throughout the surrounding district were victims of the atrocities of Goring and his "Crew" (who knew too well how to pile on the horrors of war without practising any of its amenities,) had moved the Committee of Both Kingdoms to send general Fairfax into the west, in order that the New Model Army might measure swords with the king's forces, in what was then deemed the stronghold of Royalist local influence.

Accordingly the first week in May found the Parliamentary General at Blandford, on his way to Taunton, when he was suddenly ordered to proceed at once to Oxford, where some movement on the part of the king rendered his presence needful. This change of front was thought imperative because the Parliament had but *one* army wherewith to counteract the tactics of its opponent's *two*, viz., those commanded respectively by the King in the midlands, and by Goring in the west.

Before quitting Blandford, Fairfax despatched a brigade under Colonel Welden to Taunton, with a view to succour Blake, and thereby enable him to retain possession of a town, the occupation of which was of such extreme importance to either party. With the successful carrying out of this mission Mr. Green's historic notice closes, and it is now proposed to take up the thread of narrative which was then dropped.

It should, however, be mentioned that at this juncture Goring was at Wells on his return from Oxford, whither he had been summoned to a conference by the King. His force meanwhile had been left under the temporary command of Lord Hopton, who, believing himself attacked by the main

army under Fairfax, beat a retreat (without fighting) to the Blagdon hills, well knowing that his enemy could not both relieve the town and engage him on the heights on which he had pitched his camp.

Welden's orders had been to introduce supplies in the shape of provisions, ammunition, and men, into the besieged and famishing garrison, but not to encumber it with needless mouths. Having accomplished the task thus set him, he was desirous of retiring either to join the main army at Oxford, or to fall in with Massey's brigade, which was stationed in West Dorset for the purpose of keeping the country open, and watching, as far as it could, events in the neighbourhood of Taunton.³ Before, however, Welden could quit the latter place, he was set upon by Goring, who, taking heart at finding only a brigade where he had expected a whole army, very shortly drew up once more before Taunton, and threw himself strongly on the relieving forces, the event of which cannot be better told than in Clarendon's own words :

“General Goring, upon his return from the King, found Taunton relieved by a strong party of 2000 horse and 3000 foot,⁴ which unhappily arrived in the very article of reducing the town, and after their line was enter'd, and a third part of the town was burn'd. But this supply raised the siege, the besiegers drawing off without any loss ; and the party that reliev'd them, having done their work, and left some of their foot in the town, made what haste they could to make their retreat eastward, when Goring fell so opportunely upon their quarters that he did them great mischief, and believ'd that, in that disorder, he had so shut them up between narrow passes, that they could neither retire to Taunton nor march eastward ; and doubtless he had them at a great advantage, by the opinion of all men that knew the country. But by the ex-

(3) “Calendar of State Papers,” Charles I, Domestic. June 15th, 1645.—*Rolls Series.*

(4) These numbers must be taken with some reservation.

treme ill disposing his parties, and for want of particular orders (of which many men spoke with great license), his two parties sent out several ways to fall upon the enemy at Petherton bridge, the one commanded by Colonel Thornhill, the other by Sir William Courtney (both diligent and sober officers), they fell foul on each other, to the loss of many of their men ; both the chief officers being dangerously hurt, and one of them taken, before they knew their error ; through which the enemy with no more loss got into and about Taunton ; notwithstanding which untoward accident, General Goring was, or seem'd, very confident that he should speedily so distress them that the place would be the sooner reduced by the relief that had been put into it, and that in a few days they would be at his mercy.”⁵

Goring himself gave an account of this blundering exploit in a long letter to Lord Culpepper, dated May 20th, 1645, in which he begs that the Prince of Wales may be informed that he “ was kept from destroying the greatest part of the rebels’ army by the most fantastical accident that has happened since the war began.” He goes on to say that whilst Thornhill and Courtney were fighting each other, he himself was engaging Welden at Petherton Bridge ; that he had performed prodigies of valour then and there, but that what the exact issue would be he “ could not judge *with so little sleep* as he had had.” His letter concludes thus, “ I hope this changing of quarters in the rebels will be but the desire of dying men to change their beds, and by that time your lordship has considered on this, I hope we shall all be refreshed.”⁶

Mr. Gardiner does not print this letter ; he contents himself with the remark that as the general’s statements were flatly contradicted by a narrative which reached Culpepper from another source, “ it is safe to conclude that truth did not lie on the side of Goring.”⁷

(5) “ Hist. Rebel.,” Book IX, pp. 453-4, Ed. 1732.

(6) “ Calendar of State Papers,” Charles I, Domestic. 1644-5, p. 506.

(7) “ Hist. Civ. War,” II, 229.

The fact is, that after that eventful night a number of the Parliamentary troops got into Lyme Regis, whilst the rest with Welden himself escaped to Taunton, where for a time they were closely hemmed in by the Royalists.⁸

On the 26th of May we find the Committee of Both Kingdoms writing to Colonel Blake, desiring "that all the soldiers in Taunton, except the townsmen and so many as may secure the castle, may forthwith be put in the field, to join with our party under Colonel Welden, as we have written to all the rest of the garrisons there⁹ to do the like, so that Welden may be put into a posture to keep the field and oppose the enemy. You need not fear a siege while that party is master, or can by the uniting of these forces be made masters of the field."¹⁰

It would, however, appear that the numbers available were not strong enough for the purpose, and that Welden had to remain where he was, until the final raising of the siege, which, by the end of the month, was renewed as closely as ever.

But the brave garrison, though reduced to the utmost straits, was neither forsaken nor forgotten. In the early days of June we find Parliament ordering that a collection should be made of all well-affected persons for the relief of the "poor distressed inhabitants of Taunton," and adjacent places. The proclamation that was accordingly issued was couched in very pathetic terms, and concluded thus:—"In such a singular and extraordinary case as this, stir yourselves up to do some extraordinary thing; do not draw out your purses only to your poor distressed brethren, but your very souls too, as the Prophet speaks. This is your duty, and this will be your policy, if you desire to save your persons, houses, and estates from that heavy misery which hath exposed them to your mercy."¹¹

(8) *Markham*, "Life of Fairfax," 231.

(9) Lyme and Weymouth, and *perhaps* Plymouth.

(10) "Calendar of State Papers," Charles I, Domestic. 1644-5, p. 525.

(11) *Husband's* "Ordinances in Parliament, 1642 to 1646," p. 651.

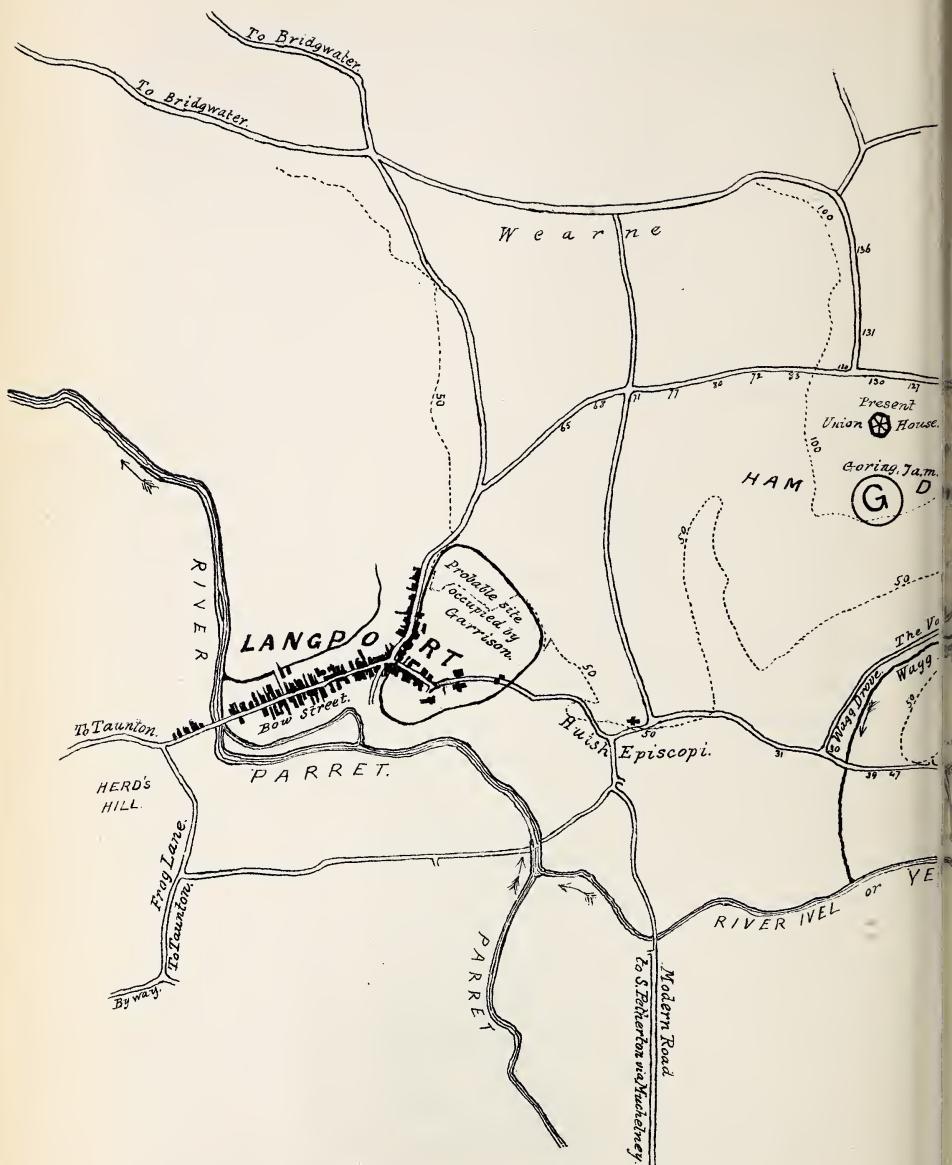
Such being the feeling of the House, we cannot wonder that after Charles's reverse at Naseby, the Committee of Both Kingdoms instructed Fairfax to make a second descent into Somerset with the two-fold object of raising effectually the siege of Taunton, and crushing "the army of the west."¹²

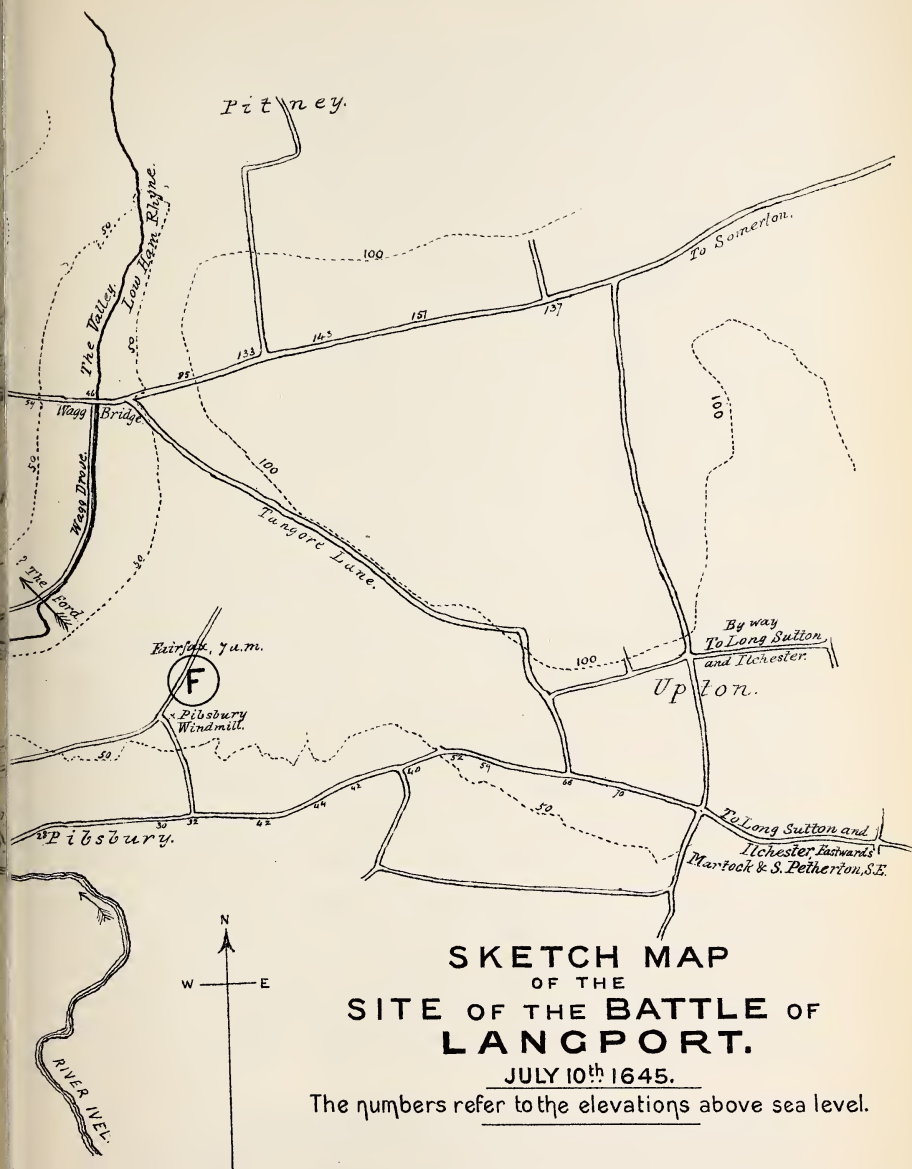
Fairfax had fought the battle of Naseby on the 14th of June, and was present at the taking of Leicester three days later. On the 22nd we find him, with Cromwell as second in command, in full march towards the west, and so speedy were his movements that by the 4th of July his head-quarters were at Beaminster, in Dorsetshire; his whole force, with its *impedimenta*, thus having covered a distance of nearly 150 miles in thirteen days. His route so far to the south of the most direct road is presumed to have been determined partly by the fact that in that direction lay the seaports of Weymouth and Lyme, both then occupied by Parliamentary troops, with which he could keep up correspondence in case of need,¹³ and partly because the strong Royalist castle of Sherborne guarded the path one would obviously have taken under ordinary circumstances.

On July the 5th the general had a conference with the clubmen of Dorset, led by Mr. Hollis, whom he convinced partly by persuasion, and partly by threatened severity, that they consulted their own best interests by remaining peaceable. He then rode to Crewkerne, where he was informed that his return had alarmed Goring quite as much as his menaced visit in May had frightened Hopton, and that his enemy had again removed the army investing Taunton and set up his head-quarters somewhere in the neighbourhood of Somerton, where he was engaged in strengthening himself on the north bank of the river Yeo or Ivel. His rear guard appears to have been then occupying South Petherton. Massey was meanwhile stationed with his dragoons in the district between Chard and Axminster.

(12) *Gardiner*, "Hist. Civ. War" II, 262.

(13) *Op. cit.*, 267.





SKETCH MAP OF THE SITE OF THE BATTLE OF LANGPORT.

JULY 10th 1645.

The numbers refer to the elevations above sea level.

At four a.m. the same day, Colonel Fleetwood had been dispatched with two thousand horse and dragoons to reconnoitre and, if opportunity offered, to harass the enemy's rear.

Falling in with them at Petherton Bridge, he found that they had broken it down and thrown up a breastwork on the Ilchester side, in order the better to delay the passage of any of Fairfax's soldiers. Fleetwood, on his arrival, at once "made up" the bridge, and drove the Royalists to Ilchester and Long Load, where the passages over the river were so strongly guarded that the Parliamentary troops dared not attempt to force them. On this being reported at head-quarters in Crewkerne, a second brigade, under the command of Colonel Montague,¹⁴ was sent to occupy South Petherton and Martock, so as at all events to secure the passage of the river Parret, which crosses the road mid-way between those places.

This Goring had apparently forgotten to do ; at any rate his neglect threw open to Fairfax's army the whole country between the Parret and the Ivel from Ilchester to Langport, where the rivers unite. The above precaution having been taken, the disengaged troops returned to spend their Sunday in rest at Crewkerne ; that is, as much rest as the exigencies of war permitted, for we find that scouts were continually coming in until two o'clock the next morning, bringing intelligence from divers quarters. These assured the general that, as a certainty, Goring's head-quarters were at Long Sutton, and moreover that the Ivel was strongly defended at Ilchester, at Load bridge, and at Langport ; a small bridge below Yeovil (? either at Mudford or Yeovilton) having been destroyed. The Yeovil bridge itself had been also broken up by the Sherborne garrison.¹⁵

(14) This was Edward Montague, then a very young man, belonging to a good Northamptonshire family. Having greatly distinguished himself in the New Model Army, he was subsequently made an admiral, and served in a joint commission with Blake when war broke out with Spain in 1653 (*Clarendon*). He was created Earl of Sandwich by Charles II, in 1662.

(15) "An exact and perfect relation, etc." B.M.

At four a.m. on Monday, the 7th of July, the *réveillé* was sounded at Crewkerne, and two hours later the whole army was drawn up on the high ground towards Merriott, from whence Fairfax and Cromwell, attended by a strong escort, started for Load bridge in order to see things for themselves, and to examine the country between the Parret and the Ivel all along the line. In doing this, they had a few small skirmishes with the Royalist troops "in the meadows," apparently somewhere to the east or north-east of Martock. The result of this reconnaissance was that the two generals determined to make a rush on Yeovil, to cross the river there, and passing down its right bank to take Goring's army in flank; seeing that he was so strongly posted, with the Ivel flowing through a marshy country in his front, and with its bridges so powerfully defended, that storming them, even if successful, must be attended with a greater sacrifice of life than circumstances would justify.

The main army at this moment was stationed at South Petherton, awaiting the arrival of Welden from Taunton and Massey from Chard.¹⁶ Leaving Montague at Martock, two strong detachments were disposed so as to watch the enemy's movements at Ilchester and Load Bridges, whilst a third accompanied Fairfax to the broken bridge at Yeovil, the town itself being undefended. On reaching the river he found that the enemy had decamped, and it being late in the day, the generals took up their quarters at Yeovil for the night.

Having thus successfully turned Goring's flank, Fairfax could not have been surprised when he was told on the following morning (the 8th) that the Royalists had evacuated Ilchester; whereupon the Parliamentary army was marched there, and occupied the town during the ensuing night.¹⁷

Here, too, they found that Goring had not only withdrawn his defences from the three bridges before-mentioned, but that

(16) "A more full relation, etc." B.M.

(17) "A more exact relation, etc." B.M.

he was hurrying his whole army across the Parret at Langport, in the direction of Taunton. This movement was probably made with an intention of surprising that town, and occupying it with a view to entrenching himself there, so as to be near the coast about Minehead and Watchet, where it had been arranged that an expected contingent from Wales and Ireland should land and join the Royalist army. If the latter could be materially strengthened by this junction of forces, it is probable that Fairfax would be quite overmatched.

But the Parliamentary generals were as wide awake as their opponent, and they straightway despatched from Ilchester the ever-ready Massey, with a force of 4500 horse and foot, in the direction of Ilminster, under orders "to streighten the enemies' quarters and to hinder them from any plundering exercise."¹⁸ The Major-General, who never let the grass grow under his horses' feet, next day surprised a large number of the Royal forces, commanded by Goring in person. He found their horses grazing in some meadows at a place called Ilemoor, a little to the north of Ile Brewers. "Some of the soldiers were asleep, some bathing in the river, and the rest carelessly walking in the fields. But the gap by which Massey led his troops was so narrow as only to admit of two horses entering abreast, and most of the king's forces had time to get away."¹⁹ About 500 were captured, and among them was Goring's Lieutenant-General Porter,²⁰ who had commanded an infantry division at Marston Moor."²¹ Goring himself only got into Langport by hard riding, having nearly lost one of his ears in the *mêlée*.²¹ The King's troops that escaped in the confusion followed their leader, who sheltered himself in the garrison at Langport. This disgraceful affair

(18) "The Parliament's Post," No. 2, from Tuesday, 8th July, to Tuesday, 15th July, 1645. B.M.

(19) *Wogan*, quoted by Markham, p. 235.

(20) Second son of Endymion Porter.

(21) *Markham, Op. cit.*, 235. "A more full relation, etc." B.M.

seems to have taken place in the afternoon of the 9th of July.

Massey, who had carried the pursuit to within two miles of Langport, was unable to join Fairfax that night, but during some part of this engagement he was so near the main army that its officers "heard the musquets goe off very thicke" in his direction, although they were unaware of his doings, inasmuch as three rivers, (to wit, the Ile, the Parret, and the Ivel) intervened, and prevented for the moment any direct intercourse between the two parties.²²

Montague, who had been left at Martock to support Massey's rear in case of need, was fortunately within call, and some of his soldiers marched to the general's head-quarters, which by this time were fixed at Long Sutton. Massey's absence was, of course, calculated to cripple the resources of the Parliamentary commanders, who needed all the cavalry they could get together. In these circumstances, the numbers in the field were pretty nearly equal, viz., about seven or eight thousand, on each side. Fairfax, however, was far from any of his supports, and very bare of supplies, having little more than sufficient commissariat stores to last beyond a single day. Goring, on the other hand, was close to the garrison of Langport, and but eleven miles from the stronghold at Bridgwater.

Here it may be remarked *en passant* that Langport had not nearly so strong a garrison as it might have had, and as its important position demanded. Those miserable jealousies and personal squabbles that ever characterised the Royalist commanders had interfered even in this matter. Colonel Wyndham, the governor of Bridgwater, could not brook a separate command so near himself, consequently he did everything in his power to belittle Sir Francis Mackworth, the commandant at Langport,—to keep him short of both men and supplies, and to thwart all his plans for strengthening his position. In this iniquitous proceeding Goring supported Wyndham, and

now his sin was to find him out ! Had Sir Francis Mackworth been allowed to have his way, things might have turned out very differently for Goring,—and for the King.

Whilst Massey was distinguishing himself at Ille Moor, Fairfax was advancing his force by the north bank of the Ivel (having several skirmishes by the way,) towards Langport, and on the evening of the 9th of July, the Parliamentary army was quartered at Long Sutton.

By early dawn on the 10th, the whole force (consisting of seven regiments of horse and a considerable body of infantry) was astir, and seven o'clock in the morning found it drawn up in marching order, on a "Campania," "by the windmills between Langport and Summerton,"²³ where a council of war was held in order to decide whether Fairfax should advance at once on Langport or retire and await events; this over, and the former course being resolved on, the general was putting his foot in the stirrup when he was again interrupted by two commissioners from the truculent Dorset clubmen, who with angry words took the opportunity of presenting a petition desiring justice against Colonel Ceeley, the governor of Lyme, whom they charged with harsh and tyrannical treatment of the country folk around him.²⁴

At this instant an alarm was raised that the enemy also had drawn out, and set themselves in battle array on the opposite

(23) "The Parliament's Post," July 8th to 15th. B.M. "Report of the Scout who brought the news to London," B.M. This account happily describes the exact position of the Parliamentary generals just as the fight commenced. The old Pibsbury windmill, though in a dilapidated condition, still stands as a witness to the correctness of the "Scout." This may possibly not be the original windmill, but those who know the persistency of cottage sites, etc., in the Western counties, will readily acknowledge the probability of its being a direct successor.

(24) "A more full relation, &c." B.M. Mr. George Roberts (quoting Clarendon) tells us that on the 8th of July the Lyme garrison encountered a party of clubmen, and slew fifty of them.—"Hist., etc., of Lyme Regis," 1834, p. 101. It is a coincidence worthy of note, that Col. Ceeley's cousin, Edward, was direct lineal ancestor of the annual President of the Som. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc., before whom this paper was read.

hill near Langport, where they had placed two pieces of ordnance in a commanding position. This movement may possibly have been the cause of Fairfax dismissing in a hurry the clubmen, by giving them better terms than would otherwise have been conceded, seeing that thenceforward we find them very helpful to the Parliamentary forces,²⁵ notwithstanding that Cromwell gives them so bad a name.²⁶

Goring's troops were very strongly posted on some rising ground called "Ham Down," standing pretty much on a level with Fairfax's centre, each being from eighty to one hundred feet above the sea level; and the combatant forces but a short mile distant from each other. Between the two, at the foot of their respective hills, and at about an equal distance from each, lay a small valley, along the marshy bottom of which is now situated the roadway called "Wagg Drove" (then a muddy trackway, fit only for summer use), at a level varying from sixty to seventy feet below the higher ground which has just been described. Down the same valley, by the side of the drove, flowed then, and flows still, a small stream from some high ground to the north, on its way to join the river Ivel on the south; this is called the "Wagg Rhyne." A narrow lane crossing both stream and drove, more or less at right angles, was the only direct means of approach from one strategic point to the other. At the lowest level of this lane the Wagg Rhyne formed a wide, deep and muddy ford, "reaching to the horses' bellies"; and this ford must needs be waded by those who travelled that way. It seems that all contempo-

(25) *Op. cit.* B.M.

(26) "Lieut.-General Cromwell's Letter to a Worthy Member of the House of Commons," July, 1645. B.M.

In "The Exchange Intelligencer," of July 18th, 1645, B.M., we read that "as our Army hath beene somewhat troubled and molested by the importunate desires, out of Season, of Dorsetshire and Wiltshire clubmen, it hath received much comfort, reliefe and aide from the honest Somersetshire clubmen, 300 of whom are joyned with Sir Thomas Fairfax against the *Gorians*, and doe bring daily many of the enemies, prisoners."

rary military writers describing the battle, call this spot "the pass."²⁷

Goring's end of the lane debouched on Ham Down, and there it was defended at the outset by the two pieces of ordnance which he had retained. The artillery was also supported by upwards of a thousand horse, which were afterwards drawn up in readiness to contest the position.

The hedges of the enclosed grounds about the valley and the "pass" were thickly lined by a couple of thousand musketeers so placed as to be able to pour a front and flanking fire on an advancing foe. The conditions of the attack then were as follows: before it was able to measure swords, or cross pikes with the enemy, Fairfax's force had to advance first downhill for at least a quarter of a mile, then to make its way through the obstructing ford, and finally to charge up a steep hill for another long quarter of a mile, by an ambushed lane that was, according to Cromwell's account, so narrow as scarcely to afford room for two horses to travel abreast.

Cromwell was of opinion that Goring did not intend to fight, but that having early the same morning sent all his guns, except the two before mentioned, together with most of his train

(27) Mr. Gardiner, who personally visited the district in the summer of 1887, is inclined to believe that the ford was situated at the spot where Wagg Bridge now stands ("Hist. Civil War," 270, *n.*); but the six-inch Ordnance map presents some faint indications that a more direct pass might have once existed about half-a-mile further to the south. The writer of this article, noticing such indications, took occasion in the autumn of the present year to subject to careful examination the roads and dykes and passes about Wagg Drove from end to end, with the result that he is of opinion that the ford was situated at a point (noted by a conspicuous arrow in the accompanying map) where a line drawn from Pibsbury wind-mill and meeting the valley at a right angle would cross it. There is apparent evidence of an old right of way extending to the wind-mill from the drove, and there is a present private track-way from the same spot, ascending the opposite height of Ham Down. The improvements in drainage and road-making throughout the district, which this century has witnessed, render exact identification a matter of difficulty. It is submitted, however, that a careful collation of the different contemporary accounts of the battle-field, would tend to confirm the accuracy of the writer's opinion.

and baggage to Bridgwater, he relied on the strength of his position to cover his retreat to that garrison.²⁸ By the light of after experience it seems highly probable that Cromwell was right. However the Parliamentary generals were determined to try the issue, more especially as they were so short of every kind of supply.

From their respective positions the opposing commanders could observe every movement of both armies that was not obscured by smoke. Goring, however, had the advantage of the wind.²⁹

Fairfax opened the ball by "drawing up his cannon, which did very good service, and made the side of the other hill so hot that the enemy could not come down to relieve their men (at the ford)."³⁰

At the same time he advanced his musketeers with orders to drive their opponents from their ambush, and to force the pass. This was more easily said than done, and eleven o'clock saw the Royalists still in full possession of their ground. On finding this, the general commanded Cromwell to try the effect of a cavalry charge, which was carried out in a most gallant manner by Major Bethell, "with two troops of about one hundred and twenty horse,"³¹ "through the water which was depe and dirty, and very narrow," but "the enemy having a very large body at the top of the lane, many times over his number," he was thrice repulsed, his right hand, moreover, being shattered by a pistol bullet. On this, Major Desborough (Cromwell's brother-in-law), was sent to his support, when together they made such a desperate onset that Goring's troopers fled in dismay.³² Fairfax's foot advancing at the

(28) "Copy of Lieut. General Cromwell's letter, etc." B.M.

(29) "An exact and perfect relation, etc." B.M.

(30) *Op. cit.* B.M.

(31) "Copy of Lieut.-Genl. Cromwell's Letter, etc." B.M.

(32) "A more full relation, etc." B.M. "Cromwell, and all the chiefe officers that saw (this charge), say that it was one of the bravest that ever their eies beheld."

same moment drove the musketeers from their cover, and by one o'clock in the afternoon the battle had become a rout.³³

Most of the Royalist soldiers fled to Aller; a little stand was made in Aller Drove; a few sought shelter in the church ruins on Borough 'Hump,' and were taken three days later; but, with these exceptions, Fairfax's horse being close on their heels, the fugitives never drew rein until they found themselves safe within the walls of Bridgwater. Another body of Goring's troops, chiefly infantry, with the two guns, fled through the town fortifications of Langport, down Bow street, to which they set fire, and over the bridge, hoping to reach Bridgwater by the left bank of the Parret. These were hotly pursued by Cromwell and by Massey (who had now joined him), down the burning street, under an archway of flame, and never halted until they had been utterly cut up or taken prisoners, together with their guns and colours, as spoils of war.³⁴

The reason given for this remarkable escapade is contained in a letter written by an officer who took part in the chase; it is dated "July 11th, at Sir Tho. Fairfax's quarters at Middlesey, four miles from Bridgwater," and says "the enemy had quitted (Langport), because as they say the governour refused to hold it (the garrison) without 800 men, *which they could not spare*."³⁵ And so Langport was again slighted! this time, however, with dire results to Sir Francis Mackworth's false friends.

Another officer (Capt. Backwell) tells us that in their mad panic, Goring's soldiers killed some of their own comrades who would not march with them; others threw their arms into the river and the cornfields; many took arms with the victors,

(33) Bethell was ordered by the House of Commons to have a present of £200 for special service in this fight. He was "a Yorkshire gentleman, a kinsman of Fairfax's, and a man full of gallantrie." "The Scottish Dove," July 11th to 18th, 1645. B.M.

(34) "The Kingdome's Weekly Intelligencer," July 8th to 15th, 1645. B.M.

(35) "An exact and perfect relation, etc." B.M.

whilst, according to his belief, most of the prisoners were sent to London.³⁶

Never, apparently, was rout more utterly complete ! We are obliged, however, to trust to the evidence of one side only, seeing that the partizans of the king could not summon sufficient moral courage to give their experiences of the fight.

Clarendon seems to have felt the defeat very deeply, and by implication throws all the blame on Goring. He says that the popular voice regarded "the beating up his head quarter (at Ilemoor) the day before the Rout at Lamport,—and that total Rout at Lamport, as two of the most supine and unsoldierly Defeats, that were ever known."³⁷

The "Butcher's Bill" (to use a nineteenth century euphemism) was not a heavy one for so decisive a victory. A contemporary newspaper³⁸ calculates the number killed on both sides "whereof most of the enemy" (Royalists) at three hundred.

Goring's men were aware that he had sent all his supplies and *impedimenta*, together with all his guns except the two that he lost, to Bridgwater, with the intention of carrying out an immediate retreat to that garrison ; they consequently demurred at being called on to shed their blood for no visible object.³⁹

Fairfax, in his report, says that "2,000 were taken prisoners, few slain, good store of arms, two pieces of ordnance, with many colours, both of horse and foot, taken."⁴⁰

Massey was sent on the same night to block up the east side of Bridgwater, and by Cromwell's advice an additional force of 1,500 horse and dragoons was despatched to render similar service on the western side.⁴¹

(36) "A more exact relation, etc." B.M.

(37) "Hist. Rebel.," book IX, p. 466 ; ed. 1732.

(38) "The Kingdome's Weekly Intelligencer," July 8th to 15th, 1645. B.M.

(39) *Gardiner*, II, 271.

(40) "Letter of Sir Thomas Fairfax, etc." B.M.

(41) "The Parliament's Post," July 8th to 15th. "Report of the Scout," etc. B.M.

Thus ended the battle of Langport! Thus commenced the final act of the great drama that was about to close!

Fairfax is said to have reckoned this western campaign as amongst the greatest of his successes. Cromwell himself paralleled "Long Sutton mercy" with "Naseby mercy" in his account of the victory.

Bridgwater surrendered, as Mr. Green has told us, on Tuesday, the 22nd of July; the very day set apart for public thanksgiving for the victory obtained at Langport, on which occasion Mr. Marshall and Mr. Ward were desired to preach before both Houses of Parliament in the Abbey at Westminster.⁴²

Sunday, July 27th, was appointed as a similar day of thanksgiving for the fall of Bridgwater,⁴³ and we are told that the Parliamentary army celebrated this service at Martock, which place they had reached on their return march the previous day.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding Sprigg's remark that this was "a very great action," we may take it for granted that the engagement was rather a pluckily fought battle than a great one; but its moral consequences were prodigious. This opinion is emphasised by the fact that both Fairfax and Cromwell wrote a detailed account of the action to Parliament, and that two special messengers who took part in the same (one of whom was "sturdy" John Lilburne) were sent to London, in order to give personal narratives of what they had seen during the fight.

The King's army of the West had been not merely beaten; its very elements had been so completely disorganised that they thenceforth lost all power of cohesion. Goring's failings all came out on the occasion. His obstinate self-sufficiency, duplicity, and untrustworthiness displayed themselves without

(42) "*Mercurius Civicus*," July 10th to 17th, 1645. B.M.

(43) "*Calendar of State Papers*," Domestic, 1645-7. *Rolls Series*.

(44) *Sprigg*. "*Anglia Rediviva*."

disguise. His soldiers saw this and liked him even less than of yore ; whilst popular feeling was shown by the fact that the clubmen in a body deserted him then and there. He never again ventured to face his rival. He did not even wait for the taking of Bridgwater, but on the very day after his discomfiture at Langport, he started for Barnstaple, where for three months he and about a thousand of his troopers gave themselves up to every kind of licence and debauchery. Having thus alienated all that part of the country from the king, in the following November he crossed over to France, his native land being well rid of him.

The event for the Parliamentary forces was just the reverse. The attack was a bold one, and audacity led to success. Officers felt they could trust their men ; men confided in their officers. All were actuated by that spirit of self-negation which was the leading principle of the New Model Army.

The fall of Bridgwater, and even of Bristol, under such circumstances became mere matter of detail. The whole west country, previously the stronghold of loyalty to the King, was wrested from his partisans. Fairfax the victorious had now but one main army (and that a discouraged one) to encounter in place of the two that had existed at the commencement of the campaign ; and although a good deal had still to be done ere peace could be established, the end had ceased to be a matter of chance or even of speculation.

These are some of the circumstances,—some of the considerations, that conspire to give “The Battle of Langport” so conspicuous a page in the history of our great civil war.

NOTE.—All the preceding foot notes to which the letters B.M. are appended are mutilated titles of Civil War Tracts in the British Museum Library. They are to be found in “The King’s Collection of Pamphlets,” Nos. E 292 and E 293 ; and the indications given suffice for identification.—H.N.