12. Shades of Bruce: Independence and Union in First-World War Scottish Literature

David Goldie

Less than two weeks into the First World War, the weekly newspaper with the widest circulation and readership in Scotland, the *People's Journal*, published a stirring, if paradoxical, hand-drawn illustration plainly designed to stir up the martial spirit of patriotic Scots. Incorporating at its bottom corner a pamphlet in which Lord Kitchener called on "The Men of Scotland" to join his drive for 100,000 New Army recruits, the illustration featured Robert the Bruce, hero of Bannockburn, with behind him a crowd of eager young men mobbing the figure of Britannia who stands aloft with union flag in one hand and raised sword in the other. Above Bruce's head and just below Britannia's sword are the dates 1314-1914 and, just in case this implicit connection between Bannockburn and the present war is not emphatic enough, the caption at the bottom of the illustration reads "Shades of Bruce – the Same Spirit still Lives!"[1]

The placing of Bruce in the foreground, the bold appeal to "the Men of Scotland," and the reminders of the sexcentenary of the Battle of Bannockburn, suggest a confident and aggressive sense of Scottish pride. But this superficial gesture of national assertiveness is qualified by the piece's visual rhetoric. The Bruce may be the dominant physical presence occupying the foreground, but he is, in theatrical terms, upstaged by Britannia. By having to turn his body and his gaze towards the background his physical presence loses much of its assertiveness and becomes instead a means by which the eye is drawn further into the picture. His positioning, reinforced by the diagonal hatching on his lion-rampant shield and on the crowds being drawn to

[1] *People's Journal*, 15 August 1914, 4.

Britannia, creates a dominant line along which the eye is drawn to Britannia and her union flag.

Such visual complexity sums up nicely the ambivalence of the Scottish position in 1914: the very gestures of national independence and martial self-assertiveness seemingly becoming markers of a contented subordination to the cause of English-led union. Bruce, the hero of a generation-long struggle of the Scottish nation to shut the door on English interference now acts as Britannia's gatekeeper and bodyguard, and Bannockburn is transformed into a triumph of respectful co-dependence over resentful independence.

This demonstration of the British imperial union's ability to accommodate dissonance, and to harness potentially dissident discourses to its own ends is surprising perhaps, but is not uncommon at the beginning of the First World War. The Boers, the Irish, and the militant suffragists – all much more problematic than the Scots – had each, by the end of 1914 turned their erstwhile antipathies towards the British state into varying degrees of complicity with, and even enthusiasm for, its war effort: the Boer-War generals, Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, proving staunch wartime defenders of the Empire's interests in South-West Africa, with Smuts rising to a leading position in the War Cabinet; the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, suspending the struggle for Irish self-government and successfully soliciting the enlistment of over a hundred thousand militant republicans from the Irish Volunteers in the British army; Emmeline and Christabel Pankurst turning almost overnight from bashers of the UK's patriarchal establishment into vociferous white-feather agitators remaking, along the way, their militant *Suffragette* newspaper into the vehemently pro-war *Britannia*.

These were all, to varying extents, pragmatic responses to the centripetal effect of war: in effect, calculated recognitions that it was better to pull together in empire than risk the consequences of aiding its dissolution. The Scots response, willingly harnessing the historical engines of Scottish independence to the British war machine, might similarly be put down to a canny balancing of self-interest and mutual obligation. But while Irish republicans and suffragettes, and to a lesser extent the Boers, had come relatively late to the aid of the British party, largely impelled by the fact of war, for many influential Scots it had long been a matter of policy to bruit forth a Scottish patriotism, implicitly critical of overbearing England, while at the same time subscribing wholeheartedly as Britons to English-led attempts to dominate world trade and international politics. From this perspective, the commemoration of Bannockburn and the invocation of its spirit of martial independence are not divisive gestures, but are instead assertions of a fundamental belief in the power of the Union to work to a single end while respecting the historical and cultural differences of its constituent parts.

The nation's proud martial tradition was particularly fresh in Scottish minds in August 1914. The previous twelve months had seen two commemorative events marking key historic battles between England and Scotland: the quartercentenary of the Battle of Flodden Field in 1913, and then six weeks before the outbreak of the war, the sexcentenary of Bannockburn.[2] Both celebrations had attracted considerable public attention and opportunities for the great Scottish statesmen of the day, such as the Earl of Rosebery, to reassert Scotland's pride in its military history and to restate the importance of that history in the subsequent shaping of the United Kingdom.

---

[2] See Katie Stevenson, and Gordon Pentland, "The Battle of Flodden and Its Commemoration, 1513-2013," in *England and Scotland at War, c. 1296-c. 1513*, eds. Andy King and David Simpkin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 355-80.

Flodden had, of course, been a military disaster for Scotland but Rosebery saw in it a triumph of the Scottish spirit in adversity, praying that the nation remain worthy of the "high example" of James IV and his soldiers "and that she may yet bear in her proud bosom sons and heroes worthy of that glorious and tragic tradition."[3] Bannockburn, a more obvious cause for celebration, was for Rosebery a less unalloyed source of "both pride and joy." In an address to the children of Scotland on the occasion of the sexcentenary, he cautioned them that "we do not remember who were the defeated side at Bannockburn. Those who were then our fiercest enemies, trying to swallow up Scotland, are now our closest friends and brothers." In a metaphor particularly suited to his audience, he described the centuries-old battles of which Bannockburn was typical as "now only a memory, just as your scrimmages in the playground will seem to you when you are as old as I am. And now people cannot make up their minds whether Scotland has swallowed up England or England Scotland, or what is more likely, that both remain unswallowed." Seen through the comforting telescope of time, then, Bannockburn becomes a kind of adolescent escapade of the now successful and mature union, an event which speaks of a characterful passion and pride in the Scots that has mellowed with age into adult reasonableness and reconciliation. In this way, Scots can take a legitimate pride in the character their forefathers displayed in their wars against the English while conveniently glossing over the antipathies that formed it. This allows Rosebery to end on a note that resonates strongly with the illustration that would appear in the *People's Journal* only a matter of weeks later, both for its evocation of the spirit of Bruce and the sense in which loyalty to the king can become a transferable virtue,

---

[3] "Lord Rosebery on Flodden: Lessons of a Memorable Battle Memorial," *The Scotsman*, 14 June 1913, 11.

moving easily from the royalty of medieval Scotland to that of the modern United Kingdom. Though, given what we know about what was to follow, his optimistic patriotism also rings with an ominous irony:

> Are we worthy of those men, of Bruce and his fellows? Do you children feel that you, too, might grow up to be heroes like them; to be ready if necessary to die for your country, your freedom, and your King …?[4]

The foundation of Rosebery's confidence in the soundness of Scottish patriotism and its easy fit with Union can be traced back deep into the nineteenth century: to the nostalgic nationalism of Sir Walter Scott, and even more influentially, to what Graeme Morton has defined as Unionist Nationalism, the means by which mid-century Scotland was able, through the mechanism of a powerful civil society, to exercise a strong degree of self-government while maintaining staunch support for the British imperial union.[5] As Morton has shown, and James Coleman after him, one of the key elements of Unionist Nationalism was the development of an assertive though ultimately non-confrontational notion of "nationality," as opposed to a harder "nationalism," constructed through a recovered Scottish history and celebratory memorial culture, exemplified in the building of the National Wallace Memorial at Abbey Craig above Stirling in 1869.[6] Although the political phenomenon identified by Morton waned after the 1860s with increased centralisation and the consequent decline in the powers of local government, its cultural legacy continued and even strengthened towards the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the

---

[4] "The Bannockburn Celebration: Lord Rosebery's Message to the Children of Scotland," *The Scotsman*, 20 June 1914, 9.
[5] Graeme Morton, *Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830-1860* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999).
[6] James Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality, and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

twentieth. In general terms, this can be seen in the creation of a number of active antiquarian, historical, and literary movements, among them the Scottish Text Society (1882), the Scottish Historical Society (1886), the Scottish National Song Society (1906), and from 1909 a Conference of Scottish Societies.[7] By 1909 Charles Sanford Terry was estimating that there were twenty-seven Scottish History Societies active in Scotland, and in 1915 John Douglas was listing some six-hundred active Scottish societies across the world.[8]

The wars of independence featured strongly in this revivalist enthusiasm. The monument-making of the mid-century continued with the unveiling of a significant statue to Wallace in Aberdeen in 1888, the erection in 1900 of a memorial cross to Wallace at the supposed place of his betrayal at Robroyston, and the completion of the Wallace Memorial at his traditional birthplace in Elderslie in 1912. Following on from the foundational Scottish histories that appeared in this period, which included Peter Hume Brown's three-volume *History of Scotland* (1899-1909), Andrew Lang's four-volume *A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation* (1900-1907), and Sir Henry Craik's two-volume *A Century of Scottish History* (1901), were a number of histories that dealt particularly with Bannockburn. These included John E. Shearer's *Fact and Fiction in the Story of Bannockburn* (1910) and his slighter *The Site of the Battle of Bannockburn* (1914) as well as the more substantial and controversial W. M. Mackenzie's, *The Battle of Bannockburn: A study in mediaeval warfare* (1913) and John E. Morris's, *Bannockburn* (1914).

---

[7] See David Goldie, "The British Invention of Scottish Culture: World War One and Before," *Review of Scottish Culture* 18 (2006): 128-48.
[8] Charles Sanford Terry, *A Catalogue of the Publications of Scottish Historical and Kindred Clubs and Societies* (Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1909); John Douglas, *Douglas's Yearbook of Scottish Associations* (London: John Douglas, 1915).

As Robert Crawford has illustrated, there was a long history on both sides of the Scottish-English border of literary commemoration of the heroes of Bannockburn and the wars of independence, from the contemporaneous Robert Baston to the verses of John Stuart Blackie and Theodore Napier in the 1890s.[9] This had been augmented in the latter part of the nineteenth century by a kind of banal unionist-nationalism, visible on the margins of patriotic literature, in works such as John Davidson's verse drama *Bruce* (1886) which features William Wallace as a proto-unionist, predicting to the English judges at his trial in Westminster Hall that "our lands are destined to be one," and telling them triumphantly that it is "the ultimate effect I battled for, / That you, free English, and that we, free Scots, / May one day be free Britons."[10] A similar burden was taken up by Robert Louis Stevenson, when he suggested that "the true work of Bruce and Wallace was the union of the nations; not that they should stand apart a while longer, skirmishing upon their borders; but that, when the time came, they might unite with self respect."[11]

This kind of banal unionist-nationalism was also seen in the ways in which references to Bannockburn and the wars of independence worked their way through popular culture. The battle had been recreated for Scots in two panoramas, the first seen in Glasgow and Edinburgh in the 1820s (which saw no incongruity in displaying the scenes of Scotland's triumph alongside panels featuring the Battle of Trafalgar and the aftermath of Waterloo) and the second in the 1880s.[12] The flamboyant

---

[9] Robert Crawford, *Bannockburns: Scottish Independence and Literary Imagination, 1314-2014* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). See also Lesley Duncan and Elspeth King, eds., *The Wallace Muse: Poems and Artworks Inspired by the Life and Legend of William Wallace* (Edinburgh: Luath, 2005).
[10] John Davidson, *Bruce: A Drama in Five Acts* [1886] (London: Bodley Head, 1893), 79-80.
[11] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* [1879] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1916), 157-8.
[12] See the *Caledonian Mercury*, 5 April 1827; *Herald*, 31 August 1827, 3; "The Panorama of Battle of Bannockburn," *Herald*, 27 Feb 1888, 5; and Emil Clauss, *Guide to the great Scottish national*

Yorkshire-born A. E. Pickard, owner of Glasgow's Panopticon music hall and Clydebank's Gaiety theatre took to styling himself "A. E. Pickard Unlimited of London, Paris, Moscow and Bannockburn."[13] And music halls generally resounded to Scottish patriotic songs, such as "The Highlandman's Toast" (1900) by Harry Linn which spoke directly of the legacy of Wallace and Bruce – though such songs, as Paul Maloney has noted, sat happily alongside imperial British ballads and even such odd hybrids as the Scots dialect song "Aye Ready to Fecht for Auld England" (1894).[14] The deeds of Wallace and Bruce were the subject of much popular poetry in newspapers and books; the battle being immortalised (if that's the right word) by the singular genius of William Topaz McGonagall in his *Poetic Gems* (1890):

> Sir Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn
> Beat the English in every wheel and turn,
> And made them fly in great dismay
> From off the field without delay.[15]

And in prose, too, Bannockburn and the heroes of independence were brought into Scottish homes by way of the romantic and serial fiction published in weekly newspapers, such as the serial story "Scots Wha Hae: A Romance of Bruce and Bannockburn" which began on 11 April 1914 in the *People's Journal.* Cinema too, played its part, with a film made by French Pathé about Bruce in 1911, *Robert Bruce,*

---

panorama—"Battle of Bannockburn." By Philipp Fleischer, of Munich (Glasgow: Scottish Panorama Company [1888]).

[13] Quoted in Bruce Peter, *Scotland's Splendid Theatres: Architecture and Social History from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999), 151.

[14] Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the Music Hall, 1850-1914* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 163-5.

[15] William McGonagall, *Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 88.

episode des Guerres de L'independence Ecossaise 1314. This was a reminder that the story had international salience – a fact brought home to Andrew Carnegie in 1907, when, in a meeting with the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Kaiser informed him that Robert the Bruce "was my hero in my youth. I was brought up on him."[16]

What this all meant to many Scots was well summed by an editorial in *The Scotsman* at the time of the sexcentenary events:

> it was Bruce's victory that decided the terms on which union was to take place—terms amicably arranged between two independent nations, and not imposed by the strong on the weak, by the conqueror on the conquered. … on the fortunes of that fateful day perhaps depended the question whether there was to be an independent Scotland, or a Scotland reduced, like Wales and Ireland, to the position of an appanage of England. … Out of it came, among other things, Scottish character, Scottish literature, and Scottish institutions, in the distinctive form in which they have impressed themselves on the history of civilisation and the annals of the Empire. With the legacy of Bannockburn we have every reason to be proudly satisfied.[17]

But such pride was not universal. There were some outside Scotland critical of this tendency to crow about Bannockburn, not least the uncompromising English critic of Scottish presumption, T. W. H. Crosland, who had written witheringly of the Scotsman on the make, that "his learning consists wholly of 'facts and figures,' all grouped methodically round that heaven-sent date, A.D. 1314."[18] Some inside

---

[16] Andrew Carnegie, *Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 367.
[17] *The Scotsman*, 24 June 1914, 8.
[18] T. W. H. Crosland, *The Unspeakable Scot* (London: Grant Richards, 1902), 24.

Scotland, too, were a little more lukewarm about Bannockburn than first glances might suggest.

The annual commemorations at Bannockburn could be well-attended: in 1912, a reported 15,000 and in 1914, at the sexcentenary, an estimated 50,000.[19] But this had not always been the case in recent years. The Scottish Patriotic Association reportedly "did not publicly celebrate Bannockburn Day" in 1908, and the 1909 celebration was said to be neither well-organised nor well-attended.[20] The 1910 celebration was similarly noted as "a very quiet affair."[21] The 1913 event was also unremarkable, leading to considerable fears as late as May 1914 that the sexcentenary celebrations would be "meagre and ineffective."[22]

There was considerable doubt about the facts of the battle itself: no-one was sure of its actual location, and it had only become firmly established through Mackenzie's *Bannockburn* book in 1913 that the battle had in fact taken place over two days rather than on one. The battlefield itself seemed neglected: its only markers were a flagpole, erected by the Dumbarton Lodge of Oddfellows in 1870 at the borestone where, according to legend, Bruce had raised his standard, and a small tin shed to shelter the occasional curious visitor from the rain. There appeared to be little political and public will to preserve the ground or monumentalise it further. The organisers of the sexcentenary events initiated a public subscription to buy the land of the battlefield to turn into a national park and build a monument, but they were able to raise only £30 towards such a project from a total sum raised for the celebrations of

---

[19] See *The Scotsman*, 29 June 1914, 11; and David MacRitchie, "The Sex-Centenary of Bannockburn," in *Douglas's Yearbook of Scottish Associations 1914-15*, ed. John Douglas (London: John Douglas, [1915]), 51-62 at 62.
[20] "Why We Celebrate Bannockburn Day," *The Thistle* 1.12 (July 1909): 183.
[21] "Bannockburn Day," *The Thistle* 2.24 (July 1910): 111.
[22] George Eyre-Todd, "Bannockburn Sex-centenary Commemoration," *The Scotsman*, 8 May 1914, 8. Eyre-Todd was the president of the Glasgow St Andrew Society.

£204 7s 8d, and although the corporations of Stirling, Edinburgh, and Glasgow contributed to the fund, it was not without demur: the Glasgow corporation at first refused to give any money, with one of its Labour members expressing the view that the corporation "should be horrified at commemorating bloodshed."[23] The Scottish patriotic societies had, in addition, lobbied since the previous year for a Bannockburn Day Scottish public holiday to mark the sexcentenary, but this, again, proved fruitless. Though patriotic societies had been active in monument-raising, municipal Scotland had largely proved reluctant to memorialize the heroes of the wars of independence. There were no memorials to Bruce and Wallace in Edinburgh in spite of money having been bequeathed to the corporation for just this purpose by Captain Hugh Reid as long ago as 1832, and no memorial to them in central Glasgow.

Such municipal unease was, perhaps, related to a number of wider concerns about Bannockburn's legacy, particularly that the battle and what it represented had not been the unalloyed national success that patriots tended to assume. It had been the view of several nineteenth-century English historians, and also a number of Scots, that that the outcome of Bannockburn had been much less the creation of a free, united country than the defining moment in which the nation gave itself up to an alien Anglo-French aristocracy intent on carving up Scottish lands for its own benefit and subjugating those who had fought for it and lived on it. After reading Scott's historical primer *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828), Thomas Carlyle had written furiously that the Scottish nobility (implicitly including and encouraged by Bruce) were "a selfish, ferocious, famishing, unprincipled set of hyaenas," who "have maintained a quite despicable behaviour from the times of Wallace downwards."[24] This chimed

---

[23] *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 20 February 1914. Quoted in Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 186.
[24] James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life, 1795 – 1835*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1882), 88.

with the argument of Henry H. Lancaster that, "the triumph of Bannockburn bore no better fruit than the uncontrolled license of a rude aristocracy" and "the profound misery of the people." As Lancaster put it, "Scotland bought her independence at the cost of inconceivable material wretchedness, the loss of constitutional liberty, the utter disorganisation of society, and the arrest for nearly four hundred years of any real progress in civilisation."[25]

These arguments persisted into the twentieth century and were picked up by socialists who admired the doggedly heroic example of Wallace and Bruce, particularly as filtered through Robert Burns, but who saw Bannockburn as the beginning of a long and wretched history of Scottish ruling-class expropriation and exploitation. Such was the view of Thomas Johnston, the influential Independent-Labour editor of the radical *Forward* newspaper (and future secretary of state for Scotland):

> The Bruce, a Norman, convinced our forefathers that his fight against the English was for Scottish freedom; and, lo, when the invading hosts were driven back, the Bruce handed our common fields to his fellow Normans. For the Stuarts, also Normans, we shed our blood, only to find the chains of tyranny and misery manacle us the more.[26]

Such criticism was an uneasy reminder of the differences that had often been noted between the heroes of the wars of independence: between Wallace, construed rather idealistically as a forthright, low-born and freedom-loving man of the people, and an

---

[25] Henry H. Lancaster, *Essays and Reviews* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1876), 9, 15.
[26] Thomas Johnston, *Our Scots Noble Families* (Glasgow: Forward, 1909), viii.

aristocratic, prevaricating Bruce, who owned lands in both England and Scotland and who had fought on both sides in the wars of independence (against Wallace at Stirling Bridge and Falkirk) before finally recalculating his chances and coming over to the Scottish cause. It was the freedom-loving Wallace rather than the pragmatic Bruce who had been eulogized by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* (1805) and *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland* (1803), who was the childhood hero of eminent émigré Scots such as John Muir and Andrew Carnegie, who had been the hero for freedom fighters and dissidents such as Mazzini and Garibaldi. It would even be claimed that Wallace inspired a revolt of black nationalists in the highlands of Nyasaland in 1915.[27]

Children's fiction, too, favored this view of Wallace over Bruce, certainly as seen in G. A. Henty's *In Freedom's Cause* (1885), a spirited boy's adventure story set during the wars of independence, which for a book of this kind takes a surprisingly ambivalent view of the Scottish king. Henty's Wallace is a Robin Hood figure, borrowing a number of traits from Howard Pyle's recently-published and highly successful reworking of the myth in *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* – an outlaw who defends a native population against not only a foreign invader, but a complaisant Anglo-Norman Scottish aristocracy.[28] But he is ultimately let down by the nobles, Bruce among them, who refuse to support a leader who is not of their own caste. Following the defeat at Falkirk Henty's Wallace is forced to make his supporters realize that, "the Scottish nobles were far more influenced by feelings of personal jealousy and pique than by patriotism, and that so long as Wallace remained

---

[27] Marinell Ash, "William Wallace and Robert the Bruce: the Life and Death of a National Myth," in *The Myths We Live By*, eds. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 83-94 at 83.

[28] Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (New York: Scribners, 1883). Joanna Baillie, who wrote a "Metrical Legend of William Wallace" in 1814, had noted this connection in 1821, observing that "the romantic adventures of a Robin Hood are by tradition fondly joined to the mighty acts of Scotland's triumphant deliverer." Joanna Baillie, *Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters* (London: Longman, Hurst, Reese, Orme, & Brown, 1821), viii.

the guardian of Scotland they would to a man side with the English."[29] Henty's Bruce eventually redeems himself and becomes a great leader, but only after he has been talked around by the book's youthful hero, Archie Forbes, who has earlier confided in Wallace that "had it not been for our marching and fighting Bruce would never have wavered in his allegiance to Edward. It was only because he begins to think that our cause may be a winning one that he decides to join it."[30]

It is perhaps ironic, then, that at the outbreak of war in 1914, many of the complexities of the Scottish response to Bannockburn were forgotten, and Bruce was employed as a model of patriotic solidity and resolution that faint-hearted pragmatists and waverers were encouraged to emulate. Many of the tensions over Bannockburn, were ignored and the Battle was, as we have seen, used as means of recruiting patriotic Scots to the allied war effort. The Doric poet (and emigrant) Charles Murray was one among several using the battle to encourage his compatriots to enlist – expressing sentiments in his poem "Wha Bares a Blade for Scotland" very like those used by Rosebery in his address to the children of Scotland:

Ye've read aboot Bruce an' Wallace, an' the
fechts that they focht langsyne,
An' mony a tale an' ballad hauds your forbears'
deeds in min' ;
O, they were the lads for Scotland, they stood
for her staunch an' true,
But what o' the bairns that's comin', will they

[29] G. A. Henty, *In Freedom's Cause: A Story of Wallace and Bruce* (London: Blackie & Son, 1885), 149.
[30] Henty, *In Freedom's Cause*, 117.

say the same o' you?[31]

There were direct or oblique references to the wars of independence in some of the popular works of fiction in the war, too. For example, in the most widely read Scottish book of the war, Ian Hay's *The First Hundred Thousand* (1915), Hay fictionalizes the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders as the Bruce and Wallace Highlanders. In R. W. Campbell's *Private Spud Tamson* (1915), a German attack meets what the narrative describes as its "Bannockburn," as the German soldiers fall into pits modeled on those used against the English in 1314.[32] Wallace was invoked by politicians, including the Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who told an audience in Dundee that "freedom is the refrain which is constantly repeated in the rugged music of Scottish history."[33] The Bannockburn sexcentenary committee even sought to commiserate with King Albert of Belgium on losing his country to the Germans by suggesting that Bannockburn might "prove an inspiration to his people for centuries to come."[34]

And Bannockburn was used too by newspapers to color editorial opinions and stiffen the national resolve, as in an editorial in *The Scotsman* in October 1915, in the wake of the Battle of Loos – which had proved particularly disastrous for the Scottish regiments, and which led to the replacement of Sir John French as Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary force by the Scotsman Douglas Haig. *The Scotsman* took solace from what it described as the "lessons of history," to suggest that "if the horizon be darkening in some quarters, in others it is lightening. But were

---

[31] Charles Murray, "Wha Bares a Blade for Scotland?" (1915), in *A Sough o' War* (London: Constable, 1917), 16.
[32] R. W. Campbell, *Private Spud Tamson* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1915), 279.
[33] "Freedom Ceremony: Premier's Enthusiastic Reception," *The Scotsman*, 2 July 1917, 3.
[34] "Bannockburn Sex-centenary Committee and King Albert," *The Scotsman*, 23 October 1914, 8.

the prospects as dark all round as they seemed to Bruce on the eve of Bannockburn, the incentive for 'men of our race' would only be to increase our efforts and stiffen our resolve."[35]

Probably the most consistently visible reminder of the Wars of Independence in the literature of the First World War, though, came through Robert Burns' "Scots Wha Hae." The song, originally titled "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn," had long been sung by Scottish patriots at political and commemorative events, but it had also proved throughout the nineteenth century a source of inspiration to Chartists, Scottish radicals, black activists, and more recently Scottish Suffragettes.[36] It was quickly taken up as a support to the war effort, too, and found itself being included in the proliferation of anthologies of martial verse that appeared at the beginning of the war, among them Oxford University Press's *Poems of War and Battle* (1914). When virtually the whole of Glasgow's Tramways department enlisted together to form the 15th Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry in 1914 they were sent off to war with Burns' evocation of Bannockburn ringing in their ears. In a speech reported in the Glasgow *Herald*, Bailie Kirkland, convener of the Glasgow Tramways Department, counselled the newly-enlisted soldiers to take their inspiration from the song of Wallace and Bruce and quoted its familiar lines.[37] The Edinburgh volunteers raised by Sir George McCrae to form the 16th Royal Scots, were similarly inspired at their inaugural gathering in the Usher Hall in November 1914 by a pipe band playing the tune, and by a version of the song ("Who would bear a sword unsheathed / While the

---

[35] *The Scotsman*, 23 Oct 1915, 8.
[36] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 693; T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830*-1950 (London: Fontana, 1987), 237; Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen, eds., *Black Writers in Britain 1760-1890* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 129; Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1995), 117, 204-6.
[37] "Tramwaymen's Noble Response," *Herald*, 8 September 1914, 7.

guilty Kaiser breathed? / Rise wi' vengeance steeled and teethed, / Strike wi' George McCrae") rewritten in their honor by the Edinburgh *Evening Dispatch*.[38]

The power and relevance of "Scots Wha Hae" was widely noted, with the *People's Journal* hailing it as "the battle-cry of the nation."[39] The *Daily Record* described it as "at once the most warlike and the most patriotic national anthem ever composed." It continued,

> The patriotism which he instilled is having its glorious fruition. "Liberty's in every blow," and, fighting for our national existence, we cannot but recall that fervent utterance of love of country and love of kind which makes Burns at once the greatest of all democrats and the greatest of all patriots who have sung. Our soldiers are falling, and their "latest draught o' breathing" is of the very spirit which animates Burns's great hymns of war.[40]

And the left, too, embraced the song, with Thomas Johnston in 1916 describing it as the "national anthem" of the Scottish socialist movement.[41] But, as the quotation from the *Daily Record* suggests – it is as much Burns, the poet of liberty, who is being honored here as Wallace or Bruce. And this is also suggested by the many homages to and parodies of "Scots Wha Hae" that appeared throughout the war. These were seen everywhere, from daily and weekly newspapers, through factory magazines, to the music halls.[42] But while these parodies often hymned Scottish valor and freedom they

---

[38] See Jack Alexander, *McCrae's Battalion: The Story of the 16th Royal Scots* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2003), 80.
[39] "Robert Burns as Recruiter: The Inspiration of His Songs," *People's Journal*, 1915.
[40] "Burns and the Sodger Laddie," *Daily Record and Mail*, 25 January 1915, 4.
[41] Graham Walker, *Thomas Johnston* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 37.
[42] See David Goldie, "Robert Burns and the First World War," *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 1 (2010): 1-26.

were also used, apparently indiscriminately, to celebrate empire, Britain, even Ireland, and adapted to more prosaic uses such as shaming the timorous and careless to action, as seen in "Scots Wha Hae, The Shirker's Version."[43]

While it is relatively easy to find examples of Bannockburn being used for the purposes of exhortation in the optimistic atmosphere of the early-war period, it is somewhat harder to find them being used later – as though Bannockburn and Scots martial glory were amongst those large abstract nouns of which people became increasingly suspicious. While Burns retained his popularity throughout the war, it was less the case with Wallace and Bruce. One example of this came with the refusal by Glasgow Corporation to allow the building of a memorial to Wallace in 1915. In that year John Lindsay, a foreman pattern maker of the Lochrin ironworks in Coatbridge, bequeathed £1400 for the erection of a statue in Glasgow's Cathedral Square, to be handed over on completion to the care of the corporation. The Council's General Finance Committee, however, recommended unanimously not to grant a site for the proposed memorial and not to accept the care of such a statue were it to be erected elsewhere.[44] As a counterpoint to this, the same year the city organized a flag day, on 26 December 1915, which raised £20,000 to erect a statue to the commander of the British forces in the Second Boer War, the Anglo-Irish Earl Roberts of Kandahar, in Kelvingrove Park.[45]

Following the war, there were some attempts to keep Bruce and Wallace in view. A ship, HMS Wallace was commissioned by the Royal Navy in 1919, shortly

---

[43] Reprinted in Derek Young, *Forgotten Scottish Voices from the First World War* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), 16. See also, for example, "Sons of Britain: A Georgetown War Song, Tune 'Scots What Hae,'" *Georgetown Gazette*, October 1917, 30; and G. A. Bell, "Here and There," *Evening Times*, 8 September 1914, 2.
[44] *The Scotsman*, 16 June 1915, 8.
[45] Ray McKenzie, *Public Sculpture of Glasgow* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 232.

after an HMS Bruce went into service in 1918.[46] The Reid Bequest finally bore fruit – after Pittendrigh Macgillivray had exposed Edinburgh Corporation's reticence in the matter in 1921 – with the creation of the Wallace and Bruce statues at Edinburgh Castle in 1929, almost a hundred years after the date of the gift. A memorial plate to Wallace's execution was unveiled in Westminster Hall in 1924. A Burns-Wallace memorial was created in Lenglen Glen in Ayrshire in 1929, and the Bruce stone at Glentrool was unveiled in the same year. And finally, in 1931, 58 acres of the battlefield around the borestone were acquired, and were handed over in the following year to the care of the National Trust for Scotland.

But Bannockburn as an idea had less hold. The battle rarely figured in public discourse in the 1920s, and one sign of this is that when discussions for the creation of a Scottish national war memorial began in the early 1920s it was Edinburgh Castle that was chosen and not Bannockburn. The correspondence in *The Scotsman* on the subject of where to situate the war memorial shows the extent to which, for some Scots at least, Bannockburn had been reduced to secondary importance by the recent war. One letter put it bluntly in stating that, "even Bannockburn and the wars of independence pale into insignificance compared with the issues which have been decided in these fateful years."[47] Another, that "we have done our part as Scotsmen in a great world war preventing invasion and subjugation by the German, compared with which Bannockburn was a flea-bite."[48]

The wars of independence remained important, though, to nationalists, who would be responsible for securing the site of the battlefield at the beginning of the 1930s. The annual celebrations at Bannockburn, at the Wallace Cross in Robroyston

---

[46] See [T. D. Wanliss] "Scottish Names for British Battleships," *The Thistle* 10.123 (Oct 1918): 155-6.
[47] "Idiotes" [James Paterson], *The Scotsman*, 8 August 1920, 8.
[48] W. P. Anderson, *The Scotsman*, 26 August 1922, 11.

and the Wallace Monument in Elderslie continued after the wartime break. The first substantial celebration at Elderslie in 1920 offered an occasion for R. B. Cunninghame Graham to restate Wallace's centrality to Scottish identity and to argue that Wallace "prepared the way, and is preparing the way with your assistance for a National Legislature in Scotland."[49] But this emphasis on Wallace rather than Bruce was one among several signs that the national memory was being subtly recalibrated after the war – especially among socialists and nationalists – and that while Wallace's reputation had survived the First World War the pre-war feeling of ambiguity about Bruce had revived and deepened.

This is seen quite markedly in a work of 1919, *The Story of William Wallace*, by Lewis Spence, who, like Cunninghame Graham, would become one of the founders of the National Party of Scotland, the precursor of the Scottish National Party. Spence's book, written for children and published by Oxford University Press, reprises some of the common tropes of the Wallace myth: the emphasis on personal liberty; the implicit comparisons with Robin Hood (the young Wallace is shown as a lad "richly dressed in a jerkin and hose of Lincoln green"); and the rather superior comparison of Scotland to Ireland ("Through his life and work Scotland was enabled to keep her self-respect and to make a union with England on equal terms, instead of becoming a second Ireland").[50] But it also reopens the perceived differences between Wallace and Bruce.[51] This begins in the book's introduction, where Spence reminds his young readers of the relevance of Wallace's example to a "spirit of patriotism"

---

[49] R. B. Cunninghame Graham, *Self–Government for Scotland* (Glasgow: Scottish Home Rule Association, 1920).
[50] Lewis Spence, *The Story of William Wallace* (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), 14, 92.
[51] According to an advertisement in the book's inside cover, Spence was also scheduled to write a second book, *The Story of Robert the Bruce* in the same series. It would seem that this book was never completed.

never "so deeply aroused as during the years of the Great War," but then goes on to qualify this by noting that,

> Many times in the history of the world unscrupulous kings and leaders have tried to use this love of country for their own purposes and have deceived the people. But sooner or later the people have found them out. No leader can keep the confidence of a nation for long unless his cause is just.[52]

This mistrust of "kings and leaders" is familiar from the earlier stories of a liberty-loving and popular Wallace, an approach that Graeme Morton has characterized as the "Proletarian Wallace."[53] But in the context of the latest war, it might also be seen as a pointed reminder that the recent victory is a victory of the people rather than the "unscrupulous kings and leaders" who "have tried to use this love of country for their own purposes." This sense of mistrust of the nobility and leaders is a constant theme of the book, as it had been in Henty's *In Freedom's Cause*. Spence contrasts "the lesser barons and gentry" with the prevaricating "greater nobles" who were "secretly in favour of English rule," and ascribes Wallace's defeat at Falkirk to "the mean and unpatriotic conduct of the Scottish nobility, Scottish only in name and alien to the rest of the population in speech and manners."[54]

Thomas Johnston, likewise, drew attention immediately after the First World War to the way that, in the wars of independence the Scottish "serf," fighting alongside the free townsman, had developed on the battlefield a form of class consciousness: "a consciousness that they were the equals, in the last resort, of the

---

[52] Spence, *The Story of William Wallace*, 3.
[53] Graeme Morton, *William Wallace: Man and Myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 94-112.
[54] Spence, *The Story of William Wallace*, 71-3.

knights and men at arms they speared at." For Johnston, the lessons of Bannockburn become a primer not so much on Scottish nationalism as Scottish socialism: in Johnston's view, as far as the common soldiery was concerned, "it was unthinkable that when Bannockburn was fought and won they would go back to the old settled slavery."[55]

Similar arguments were made by Scotland's Historiographer Royal, Robert Rait, when he addressed the annual Wallace commemoration at Elderslie in 1921 and described Wallace as "the real gigantic figure in our history." Rait emphasized the "difference in blood and sympathy" between the Anglo-Norman "leaders of the people and the people themselves," and noted that "when the day of testing came" it was left to Wallace to rouse "the people to do for themselves what their leaders had failed to do for them." Like Spence, Rait made an explicit comparison between the valor of the soldiery at Bannockburn and the sacrifices of the citizen soldiers in the recent war: winning the audience's applause for suggesting that the "greatest celebration of Wallace that had ever occurred" was "the dedication to those ideals by the Scotsmen who went out to the war, especially at the beginning, and fought in the twentieth century for precisely the same ideals as Wallace fought for in the thirteenth century."[56]

This sense, that the recent victory in the Great War was a people's victory rather than a victory of leaders, gave Bannockburn a new and distinctive relevance, especially to nationalists keen to distance themselves from the perceived wartime failures of the British high command. But the extent to which the recent war was seen as a people's tragedy – a conflict that had wasted a generation at the hands of an

---

[55] Thomas Johnston, *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland* (Glasgow: Unity Publishing, 1920), 16.
[56] Quoted in the *Herald*, 12 September 1921, 11.

imprudent leadership; a debacle in which suffering and loss had outweighed glory; a shambles for which songs of lament were more appropriate than songs of defiance – meant that memories of another engagement between England and Scotland, that of Flodden Field in 1513, were revived. The most appropriate sentiment for those who had suffered the war was perhaps not so much the grim pride in the "gory bed" welcomed by "Scots Wha Hae," but rather quiet sorrow for those "a' wede away" like the flowers of the forest who fought and died under James IV. By 1929 Robert Rait, now Principal of Glasgow University, was titling a public lecture, "Was Bannockburn a misfortune for Scotland?" and acknowledging, in the context of the recent war, that "Victory had always been a disillusion as well as a snare."[57]

Field Marshall Haig had gone to Cupar in 1919 to receive the freedom of the burgh, at which event the town's Provost had proclaimed that Haig:

> had proved himself supreme in the most critical period in the history of the world, and had shown by his endurance and fine leadership that he possessed in no small degree the patriotic spirit and the military genius of a Bruce or a Wallace. He had turned what might have been a Flodden into a Bannockburn. (Cheers).[58]

But this was not really consistent with the view of Scottish literary culture, subsequently. If the Scots went into the First World War with the example of Bannockburn at the forefront of their minds, they left it with a memory of Flodden – symbolised particularly in the song, "The Flowers of the Forest," the lament for the

---

[57] "Was Bannockburn a Failure?", *The Scotsman*, 21 October 1929, 5.
[58] Quoted in *The Scotsman*, 12 May 1919, 6.

battle that had been popularized in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3). The English war veteran H. V. Morton talked in his *In Search of Scotland* (1933) of Flodden as "still a pain in the heart" of Scotland and described the lament of "The Flowers of the Forest" as "a living sorrow; it is as if all the tears of all the women of Scotland who mourned at that time had been preserved for ever in some indestructible urn."[59] A reminder of Flodden was apparent in the title of John van Druten's anti-war play *The Flowers of the Forest* (1934). Its memory was present too in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1963), in which Miss Brodie, an unmarried woman of the 1930s, claims to be scarred by the First World War and the memory of her dead fiancé, Hugh Carruthers, who she refers to as her "flower of the forest." Flodden's echoes are heard in the chapter "The Flowers of the Forest" in James Barke's epic novel of early twentieth-century Scottish life, *The Land of the Leal* (1939). In music, too, the song would become linked to the memory of the First World War: most notably through its adaptation in the lament of the third movement of the Quartet for Strings No.7, "Threnody" (1916) by John Blackwood McEwen.[60] And the song would continue to resonate: Trevor Royle's 2007 book of the Scottish experience of the First World War is titled *Flowers of the Forest: Scotland and the First World War*.

Flodden also provides the background theme for probably the greatest Scottish novel to come out of the experience of the Great War, Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932). The song alluded to in the book's title is the lament for Flodden, "The Flowers of the Forest" which features throughout the text as a song with particular

---

[59] H. V. Morton, *In Search of Scotland* (London: Methuen, 1933), 70.
[60] *McEwen String Quartets volume 1*, Chilingirian Quartet (Chandos, CHAN 9926). I am grateful to the anonymous publisher's reader for drawing this to my attention.

resonance for the heroine Chris Guthrie.[61] The novel climaxes with the dedication of the war memorial above Kinraddie on which her dead husband, Ewan Tavendale, is remembered, with a piper playing the "Flowers of the Forest" and the young socialist minister, Robert Colquohoun, lamenting the passing of an old way of Scottish life in the carnage of the war:

> A new generation comes up that will know them not, except as a memory in a song, they passed with the things that seemed good to them with loves and desires that grow dim and alien in the days to be. It was the old Scotland that perished then, and we may believe that never again will the old speech and the old songs, the old curses and the old benedictions, rise but with alien effort to our lips.[62]

The song that ends the book, then, is a tune not of glory, like those of Bannockburn and "Scots Wha Hae" marching confidently towards a glorious future, but of the loss of a generation of men, and the sense of a countryside, a community, and a nation despoiled by an unimaginable, unfathomable war. It was not the spirit of Bruce that lived on here, but that of the tragic James IV and the withered flowers of a generation of Scots.

---

[61] Gibbon went so far as to insist that the sheet music of 'The Flowers of the Forest' was included in the novel, so the song is physically present as well as being evoked.

[62] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Sunset Song* [1932] (London: Pan, 1982), 252.