

LXXXVI.

SIR WILLIAM LE SCROPE — EARL OF
WILTSHIRE.

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SIR WILLIAM LE SCROPE was the eldest son of Richard the first lord Scrope of Bolton, by Blanch de la Pole, the sister of Michael earl of Suffolk. The public records furnish no materials for his history previously to the reign of Richard II; and we are left to gather the few particulars, which are presumed to be known of his early life, from depositions in the celebrated suit of his distinguished father with sir Robert Grosvenor;¹ without possessing the means of verifying, from other sources of evidence, the facts related, or of ascertaining how far the relators may not have blended, in their reminiscences, this individual with his kinsman sir William le Scrope of Masham, to which branch of the noble house Dugdale has, by mistake, affiliated him.² Godard, however, one of the witnesses, stated³ that he had seen sir William, “the plaintiff’s son,” armed in Prussia (probably in one of the several crusades of the Teutonic Order against the Lithuanian pagans), and again, beyond Venice, on his coming to join the army under the duke of Duras. To the former incident we are unable to assign a date; but our knight may have served in the north of Italy in 1373 or 1378, in both which years Charles of Sicily duke of Duras (who afterwards, in 1381, ascended the throne of Naples by the title of king Charles III.) commanded the Hungarian forces against Venice.⁴

¹ Scrope and Grosvenor roll, pp. 118. 122. 136. 166. 172.

² Baronage, vol. i. p. 661.

³ Scrope roll, p. 172.

⁴ Charles III. was grandson of John of Sicily duke of Duras, 8th son of Charles II. king of Naples. Duke John had two sons, Charles and Louis. The elder succeeded as duke of Duras in 1335, and was beheaded in 1348, leaving his daughter, Jeanne, who, as duchess

of Duras, gave the title of duke to her husband Louis of Navarre upon her marriage in 1366. After his death in 1372, it devolved to Charles the son of Louis of Sicily-Duras, the second son of John above-mentioned. The duke of Duras came, at the head of the army of Louis king of Hungary, to the succour of the Paduans in 1373; and defeated, on the 9th of May in that year, the Venetian general Thad-

The military experience acquired by Scrope on the several occasions referred to in the above-mentioned depositions, and the influence of his father and maternal uncle, sir Michael de la Pole, in the government of Richard II, conduced doubtless to his appointment on the 30th May 1383, to the high office of Seneschal of Aquitaine.¹ The troops, which were to attend him on this service, were mustered in July following.² In 1385-6 he was appointed governor of the town and castle of Cherbourg;³ and continued, during the five following years, to fill that confidential station, together with his post in Gascony; although we find him at intervals in England within that period.⁴ In 1389 the custody of Queenborough castle was granted to him.⁵ He was, in the following year, adjudged to offer a jewel of 500*l.* value at the shrine of St. Cuthbert, in atonement for some injury which he had inflicted on the bishop of Durham or his servants.⁶ Whilst in Aquitaine, he received directions to conclude a treaty with Spain in 1390,⁷ and remained in that province until 1392, when he was commissioned, with others, to accept the homage of the count of Armignac.⁸

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About 1393 Scrope seems to have exchanged his active duties in the foreign service of the state for the less honourable occupations and intrigues of a court. In that year he was nominated vice-chamberlain;⁹ and, in 1395, lord chamberlain of the household.¹⁰ In 1394 he had been admitted into the Order of the Garter, upon the death of sir Bryan Stapleton;¹¹ filling the third stall on the Prince's side. On 7th October 1395 he was sent as one of the ambassadors to France to negotiate the king's marriage with the princess Isabel;¹² and, on the 9th of May following was empowered to

deus Giustiniani, in a pitched battle on the banks of the Piave. We are not aware that a duke of Duras had, previously to 1373, the command of an army in the neighbourhood of Venice.

¹ Rot. Vasc. 6 Ric. 2, m. 4.

² Ibid. 7 Ric. 2, m. 12, July 18.

³ Rot. Franc. 9 Ric. 2, m. 26.

⁴ Ibid. 10 Ric. 2, m. 18; 11 Ric. 2, m. 18; 12 Ric. 2, m. 6, & 14 Ric. 2, m. 14. 3.

⁵ Pat. 12 Ric. 2, p. 2, m. 15.

⁶ See p. 309.

⁷ Rymer, vol. iii. (new ed.) p^t 4, p. 61.

⁸ Rot. Vasc. 15 Ric. 2, m. 2.

⁹ Pat. 17 Ric. 2, m. 32; Pat. Holinsh. 480, 18 Ric. 2, m. 4.

¹⁰ Pat. 19 Ric. 2, m. 9.

¹¹ Windsor tables. He had robes in 1399. See p. 254.

¹² Rot. Franc. 19 Ric. 2, m. 19.

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sign the treaty.¹ High in the king's favour, he was appointed at this period to various offices of trust and emolument.

The prominent part which he took whilst chamberlain as one of the appellants against the duke of Gloucester and the adherents of that prince in 1397, drew from Walsyngham the bitter censure that "a man more wicked or cruel could not easily be found amongst the whole human race."² His subserviency to Richard in the guilty transactions of that memorable year was rewarded by his elevation to the earldom of Wiltshire on the 29th of September,³ and with ample portions of the spoil from the confiscated property of the victims.⁴ The unfortunate earl of Warwick was committed to his custody in the Isle of Man, the sovereignty of which Scrope had, some years antecedently, purchased from the earl of Salisbury. In February 1397-8 he was appointed one of several ambassadors to negotiate with France a treaty of peace;⁵ and, on the 17th September following, constituted treasurer of England.⁶

In February 1398-9 the castle of Guînes was committed to his custody.⁷

Although retained by indenture to attend the king to Ireland on his ill-fated expedition in 1399,⁸ Scrope did not accompany him; but remained, as lord treasurer, to assist in the council of the duke of York, to whom the guardianship of the realm was entrusted during the king's absence; and, on the 11th of July, was appointed, with sir John Bussy, sir Henry Grene, and sir William Bagot, to protect the young queen Isabel, then resident at Wallingford castle.⁹

The fall of the earl of Wilts from his powerful eminence was as sudden and rapid as that of his unhappy master. From Bolingbroke, whose star was now in the ascendant, he could entertain little hope of forgiveness, since it was notorious that he had mainly advised¹⁰ the unprincipled repeal of the patent

¹ Rot. Franc. 19 Ric. 2, m. 11. 10.

² Wals. ed. 1574. p. 387.

³ Chart. 21 Ric. 2, N^o 19. The habendum of the grant was to him and his heirs male for ever.

⁴ Pat. 21 Ric. 2, m. 12, &c. Orig. cod. a^o. rot. 15.

⁵ Rot. Franc. 21 Ric. 2, m. 5.

⁶ Orig. 22 Ric. 2, rot.

⁷ Rot. Franc. 22 Ric. 2, m. 6.

⁸ Dugd. vol. i. p. 662.

⁹ Pat. 23 Ric. 2, m. 7.

¹⁰ Rot. Parl. vol. iii. p. 372.

which had reserved the possessions of the duchy of Lancaster to their owner during his exile. Soon after the landing of Henry at Ravenspur, the council of regency erected the royal standard at St. Alban's, and prepared to resist the invader. Their efforts, however, failing to collect a sufficient and willing force for that purpose, and the unpopularity of the king's party hourly increasing, Scrope, with Bussy, Grene, and Bagot, also members of the council, abandoned the regent and the chancellor (Stafford, bishop of Chichester,) and fled precipitately to Bristol. Henry, having secured the metropolis, marched with a large army towards Wales in order to obtain possession of the person of the Sovereign; and, on his way, laid siege to Bristol castle. It surrendered on the 29th of July; and, on the following morning,¹ the earl of Wilts, Bussy, and Grene were beheaded; Bagot having escaped by sea to Ireland.²

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The earl's attainder was declared in parliament shortly after the accession of Henry IV; and, when the act was introduced for that object, his aged father raised his feeble voice, drowned in tears, to acknowledge submissively the justice of the sentence which had cut off his first-born, and to implore and obtain the king's mercy for the preservation of his inheritance to himself and his surviving children.³

Our knight married Isabel, daughter and co-heir of sir Maurice Russell; but died without issue. By the petition of his widow to the king in parliament in 1401, it appears that an annuity of two hundred marks had been granted for her support, but not punctually paid. Her prayer to have dower of her husband's lands was not granted, but a pension of 100*l.* assigned to her.⁴

ARMS.

Azure, a bend Or, differenced by a label, of three points, Gules.

CREST.

A plume of feathers, Azure, issuant from a coronet Or.⁵

¹ "Chronicle of London," pp. 84, 85.

² Wals. p. 397.

³ Rot. Parl. vol. iii. p. 453^b.

⁴ Ibid. p. 483^b. It appears by Exit. Pell. Mich. 1 Hen. IV, that a payment on account of this an-

nunity was made to her.—"Isabelle que fuit ux. Willi le Scrop mil. nup. Com. Wiltes def. consang. dñi nri Reg^{is}." on 27 Jan. 1399-1400.

⁵ Harleian Charters, A. 22. 56.