

Literature, &c.

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ACCOUNT OF THE BORDERS.

Shortly after the fall of the family of Soulis, Hermitage Castle passed into the possession of the Douglases, and became the principal stronghold of the "Black Knight of Liddesdale," a natural son of the good Lord James Douglas, the companion of Bruce. In 1342 it was the scene of the following terrible story—Sir Alexander Ramsay of Dalhousie, was one of the bravest of the Scottish barons, and had distinguished himself by his gallant and patriotic exploits in the wars with England. Having taken by storm the castle of Roxburgh, a fortress of great strength and importance, King David bestowed on him the government of the place, together with the sheriffdom of Teviotdale. Douglas, who had previously held the office of sheriff, was enraged at this act, and vowed vengeance against Ramsay, his old companion in arms. He came suddenly upon him with a strong party of his vassals while he was holding his court in the open church at Hawick. Ramsay having no suspicion of injury from his old comrade, invited him to take his place beside him; but the ferocious warrior, drawing his sword, rushed upon his victim, wounded him in a vain attempt at resistance, threw him bleeding across a horse, and carried him off to the remote and inaccessible castle of Hermitage. Here he was thrown into a dungeon, and left to perish of hunger. He is said to have prolonged his existence for seventeen days by some particles of corn which fell from a granary above his prison.

About the close of the last century, a mason, digging for stones about the old castle of Hermitage, laid open a stone vault, in which, amid a great quantity of chaff, lay several human bones, along with an ancient sword and a bridle bit of uncommon size. These were conjectured, with great probability, to have belonged to the gallant but unfortunate Ramsay. 'It is a melancholy reflection,' says Mr Tytler, 'that a fate so horrid befell one of the bravest and most popular leaders of the Scottish nation, and that the deed did not only pass unrevenged, but that its perpetrator received a speedy pardon, and was rewarded by the office which had led to the murder.'

We are not to imagine that this was a solitary case. Deeds of equal atrocity were of frequent occurrence on the Border. The Douglases, in particular, seem to have had no law but their own will, and inflicted vengeance for their real or imaginary wrongs entirely by their own authority, and according to their own arbitrary pleasure. In the year 1451, Herries of Terrigles, a gentleman of ancient family, and considerable influence in Dumfriesshire, having attempted to defend himself against the attacks of some of the followers of the Earl of Douglas who were ravaging his lands, and to recover from them their plunder, was defeated, and dragged before the earl, who caused him to be hanged, although the king sent him a positive order by a herald, enjoining him to forbear any injury to the person of his prisoner.

But a still more flagrant breach of law and insult to the royal authority occurred in the following year. Maclellan, the guardian of the young lord of Bomby, ancestor of the Earls of Kirkcubright, having refused to join Douglas in a treasonable league, was seized by him and imprisoned in his strong fortress of Thrieve in Galloway. As Maclellan was much esteemed by the king, and the nephew of Sir Patrick Gray, captain of the royal guard, the king sent 'a sweet letter of supplication,' praying the earl to deliver his prisoner into the hands of his kinsman. When Sir Patrick arrived at the castle of Thrieve, Douglas, who had just risen from dinner, received him with great apparent courtesy, but declined entering upon the business which had led to the visit until Gray also had dined. 'It was ill talking,' he said, 'between a fou (full) man and a fasting.' But suspecting the object of Sir Patrick's visit, and determined to defeat it, he gave private orders that Maclellan should be immediately led forth and beheaded in the court yard of the castle.

After dinner, Sir Patrick presented the king's letter to the earl, who received and read it with great affectation of reverence. 'Sorry am I,' said he, with a look of much concern, 'that it is not in my power to give obedience to the commands of my sovereign, much as I am beholden to him for so gracious a letter to me, whom he has been pleased of late to regard with somewhat altered favour; but such redress as I can afford thou shalt have speedily.' He then took his visitor by the hand, and led him to the castle green, where the bleeding trunk of Maclellan was still lying. 'Yonder, Sir Patrick,' said he, 'is your sister's son, but unfortunately he wants the head. Take his body however, and do with it what you will.' 'My lord,' said Gray, suppressing his grief and indignation, 'if you have taken his head, you may dispose of the body as you will.' But when he had mounted his horse, which he instantly called for, his resentment broke out in spite of the dangerous situation in which he was placed. 'My lord,' said he, 'if I live you shall be rewarded for this deed according to your merits.' This expression of natural indignation, however, had nearly cost him his life; for the earl was highly offended, and gave orders for an instant pursuit; and if Gray had not been well mounted, he would in all probability have shared the fate of his nephew. The chase was continued almost to Edinburgh, a distance of fifty or sixty miles. It is not un-

structive to mention, that when Douglas was shortly afterwards stabbed by the king in Stirling Castle, Sir Patrick Gray, who was present, at one blow felled him with his battle-axe.

The overthrow of this great family followed soon after; but the Earl of Angus, whose share in the ruin of his kinsman led to the saying that 'Red Douglas had put down the Black,' obtained a large portion of the forfeited domains of this mighty house, including the strong castles of Douglas, Hermitage, and Tantallon, and appears to have very soon enjoyed almost the same extensive supremacy on the Borders. The same system of rapine and bloodshed was consequently pursued. Archibald, sixth Earl of Angus, called *Bell-the-Cat*, who was at once warden of the east and middle marches, and Lord of Liddesdale and Jedwood forest, seems to have had as little respect for law or royal authority as his kinsmen and rivals, the Earls of Douglas. His share in the murder of the favourites of James III. at Lauder, and of the overthrow and death of the unfortunate monarch in the battle of Sauchieburn, is well known. A quarrel which he fastened on Spens of Kilsplindie, a favourite of James IV., cost him his lordship of Liddesdale and castle of Hermitage. Spens who was a renowned cavalier, had been present when Angus was high-praised for strength and valour. 'It may be,' answered Spens, 'if all be good that is up- come.' Shortly after, Angus, while hawking near Bothwell, with a single attendant, met Spens. 'What reason had ye,' said the earl, 'for making question of my manhood? Thou art a tall fellow, and so am I, and by St. Bride of Douglas, one of us shall pay for it!' 'Since it may be no better,' answered Kilsplindie, 'I will defend myself against the best Earl in Scotland.' With these words they encountered fiercely, till Angus, with one blow, severed the thigh of his antagonist, who died on the spot. The earl then addressed the attendant of Kilsplindie—'Go thy way: tell my gossip the king that there was nothing but fair play. I know my gossip will be offended; but I will get me into Liddesdale, and remain in my castle of Hermitage till his anger be abated.' James, however, took advantage of the opportunity to compel Angus, as the price of his pardon, to leave

'The dusky vale
Of Hermitage in Liddesdale,
Its dungeons and its towers,
Where Bothwell's turrets brave the air,
And Bothwell bank is blooming fair,
To fix his princely bowers;'

which was a considerable diminution to the family power and greatness. The sword with which Angus slew Spens, was presented by his descendant, the famous Earl of Morton, to Lord Lindsay of the Byres, when he defied Bothwell to single combat on Carberry Hill.

The grandson of old Bell-the-Cat married the widowed queen of James IV., and obtained the supreme authority in Scotland during the minority of James V. In the words of an old historian—'He ruled all which he liked, and no man durst say the contrary. There dared no man strive at law with a Douglas; for if he did he was sure to get the worst of his lawsuit. And he adds—Although Angus travelled thro' the country under the pretence of punishing thieves, robbers, and murderers, there was no malefactor so great as those who rode in his own company.'

The high spirit of the young king, who was now fourteen years old, was galled by the ignominious restraint in which he was held; and in a progress to the Border, for the purpose of repressing some excess of the Armstrongs, intimidation was secretly given to Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch that he should raise his clan, and rescue his clan, and rescue the king out of the hands of the Douglases.

Buccleuch immediately levied his retainers and friends, comprehending a large body of Elliots, Armstrongs, and other broken clans, over whom he exercised great authority. Angus had passed the night at Melrose; and the Kerrs and Homes, who had accompanied him in his expedition, had taken their leave of the king, when Buccleuch and his followers suddenly appeared on an eminence called Halidon Hill, and interposed between Angus and the bridge over the Tweed. 'Sir,' said the earl to the king, 'yonder is Buccleuch, and the thieves of Annandale with him, to interrupt your passage. I vow to God they shall either fight or flee; and ye shall tarry here on this know (knoll), and my brother George with you, with any other company you please, and I shall pass and put yon thieves off the ground, and rid the gate unto your grace, or else die for it.'

The earl with these words alighted, and hastened to the charge; and the Borderers, shouting their war cry, immediately joined battle, and fought stoutly. The encounter was fierce and obstinate; but the Homes and Kerrs returning at the noise of the conflict, set upon the wing and rear of Buccleuch's men, and decided the fate of the day. About eighty of the Scots were slain in this clan battle, which was fought on the 25th of July 1526. The death of the laird of Cessford, who was killed in the pursuit by a retainer of Buccleuch, occasioned the deadly feud between the Scotts and Kerrs of which we have already spoken.

BORDER CASTLES AND FORAYS.

The residences of the Border chieftains by no means corresponded to the extent of their power and the number of their retainers, and presented a striking contrast to the magnificent fortresses of the great English nobles. This, however, was not always the case. During the interval of more than a century, which elapsed between the reign of William the Lion and the death of Alexander III., there was

profound peace between England and Scotland; and the Borders appear to have been in a state of progressive improvement. At this period were erected several monastic edifices within the Scottish border, which formed the refuge of learning, and whose inmates must have contributed, in ordinary times, to allay the fierce passions of the neighbouring inhabitants. Among the structures of this kind may be named the abbies of Melrose, Dryburgh, Jedburgh, and Kelso, on the eastern marches, and Lincluden on the west. These with some other monasteries formed seats of refinement and peaceful contemplation, while all around was little better than a mental wilderness. Usually, these sanctuaries were respected by the hand of rapine; but in the case of national wars they suffered in common with other buildings, and were laid waste with fire and sword. In all cases, however, the piety of the age restored them, until they finally sunk under the violence of the Iconoclasts in the sixteenth century.

In some instances, adjoining these religious houses, towns arose, and numerous strong and extensive royal and baronial castles graced and defended the frontier. There is little reason to doubt, that if the peace between England and Scotland had not been broken by the unjustifiable pretensions of Edward I., the Borders would have gradually been improved in character with the rest of Scotland, and centuries of misery would have been avoided. The war of Scottish independence, which raged throughout nearly the whole of the fourteenth century, at once stopped all advancement, and threw the Borders back into a state of disorganization. Monasteries were destroyed, towns sacked, castles stormed, and thousands of the inhabitants killed. Perceiving that the only means of preserving the liberties of their country consisted in laying waste the district, the Scots burned and erased many dwellings, and pulled down all the strongholds of importance likely to fall into the hands of the enemy.

When the good Lord James Douglas three several times recovered possession of his ancestral castle, upon each occasion he laid waste and demolished it, and took refuge with his followers in the hills and forests. 'He loved better,' he said, 'to hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak.' The same devastating but uncompromising and effectual system of warfare was carried on during the whole of the struggle which the Scots maintained for their independence, and was delivered by Robert Bruce as a legacy to his successors, in what is affectionately called the 'Good King Robert's testament.' On his death-bed he enjoined his followers, in their wars, always to fight on foot; to trust for protection to their mountains, morasses, and woods, rather than to walls and garrisons; to employ for arms the bow, the spear, and the battle-axe; to drive their herds into the narrow glens, and to fortify them there whilst they laid waste the plain country by fire, and compelled the enemy to evacuate it. 'Let your scouts and watchers,' he concluded, 'be veciferating through the night, keeping the enemy in perpetual alarm; and, worn out with famine, fatigue, and apprehension, they will retreat as certainly as if routed in battle.' These judicious counsels were followed by the Scots in all their wars with the English down to the days of Cromwell. Hence the great baronial and royal castles which existed on the borders were, with very few exceptions, levelled with the ground during the wars of Bruce and Baliol. The castle of Jedburgh, one of the strongest of these fortresses, remained for a long time in the hands of the English, and was a source of great annoyance to the adjacent country. On its reduction by the Scots in 1408 it was immediately ordered to be destroyed; but so strongly was it constructed, and so unskilful were the Scots in the work of destruction, that it was proposed to impose a tax of two pennies on every hearth in Scotland, to defray the expense of razing and levelling the fortifications. But the regent ordered the sum required to be paid out of the royal revenues.

The lesser strengths, consisting of single towers, or peals, as they were called, each forming the lodgement of a petty chief, do not seem to have suffered the same devastation at the hands of their proprietors who probably reckoned on defending them from all casual assaults. These towers, whose remains are now the most remarkable features in the Border landscape, were for the most part built in some situation of great natural strength, on a precipice or on the banks of a torrent, or surrounded by woods and morasses, which rendered them almost inaccessible. The position of these Border houses, in short so plainly indicated the pursuits and apprehensions of their inhabitants, that James V., on approaching the castle of Lochwood, the ancient seat of the Johnstones, is said to have exclaimed, 'that he who built it must have been a knave in his heart.' The principal part of these fortresses consisted of a large square tower, called a *keep* having walls of immense thickness, which could easily be defended against any sudden or desultory assault. The residences of the inferior chiefs, called peels or baste houses, were usually built upon a still smaller scale, and consisted merely of a high square tower, surrounded by an outer wall, which served as a protection for the cattle at night. The apartments were placed one above another, and communicated only by a narrow stair, which could be easily blocked up or defended; so that the garrison could hold out a considerable time, even after the lower story was in the possession of the enemy. In such circumstances the assailants usually heaped together quantities of wetted straw in the lower apartments, and setting it on fire, drove the defenders from storey to storey by means of the smoke, and sometimes compelled them to surrender.

Around these fortresses were placed the habitations of the vassals and retainers of the chief who were ready upon the first summons either to take arms for the defence of the castle, or to follow their lord to the field; and as much ground in the vicinity was cleared and cultivated as was necessary for their support.

The Border towns, before and after the war of independence, were usually furnished with a number of towers, like the peels of the interior gentry, and were the abodes either of the wealthier burghers, or of the neighbouring proprietors, who occasionally dwelt within the town. 'In each village or town,' says Sir Walter Scott, 'were several small towers, having battlements projecting over the side wall, and usually an advanced angle or two, with shot-holes for flanking the door way, which was always defended by a strong door of oak, studded with nails, and often by an exterior door of iron. These small peel-houses were ordinarily inhabited by the principal feuders and their families, but upon the alarm of approaching danger, the whole inhabitants thronged from their own miserable cottages, which were situated around, to garison these points of defence. It was then no easy matter for a hostile party to penetrate into the village; for the men were habituated to the use of bows and firearms, and the towers being generally so placed that the discharge from one crossed that of the other, it was impossible to assault any of them individually.' In the village of Lessudden, when burned by Sir Ralph Evans, in 1654, there were as many as sixteen of these strongholds, which afforded excellent posts for resisting the assaults of an enemy, even after the town was taken. On the approach of a superior army, the chieftains and their retainers usually took to the woods and mountains, leaving their habitations to the fate of war. There is scarcely a single instance known of a distinguished baron having been made prisoner in his own house.

In these dismal times all the ordinary class of houses in the Border towns were thatched; and as it was almost certain that these would be set on fire by the enemy, it was customary for the inhabitants, at the approach of invaders, to clear off all the thatch from their dwellings, and, if possible, flee with their cattle and other property, to the mountains. Still further to guard against fire, as well as rapine, the lower storeys of the houses were vaulted, and accessible only by a low doorway. Domestic strongholds of this kind may still be seen in all the Border, and some other of the old towns of Scotland. A few remain in Peebles, which was frequently burned in the troublous times to which we refer.

To guard against sudden attack, it was usual for the Scottish Borderers to give telegraphic warning of the approach of an enemy by means of beacon or bale fires, lighted on the tops of the hills or loftiest battlements of the principal castles. Thus signals from Berwick, up the vale of Tweed to Lanarkshire, and from the Tweed to the Forth, made the whole country aware of the coming danger.

The precautions taken by the English against the inroads of their northern neighbours were of a somewhat different kind, and suited to their superior wealth and civilisation. They paid greater attention to defence, as they had something of value to defend. All along the English frontiers arose baronial castles of magnificent structure, great extent and fortified with all the art or the age. Their great strength afforded an asylum to their inhabitants, and enabled them to set at defiance the attacks of the Borderers. Newcastle, Hexham, Carlisle, and other towns along the English Border were in like manner much more strongly and skilfully fortified than those of the opposite frontier, and afforded therefore a much better protection from invasion. A line of communication was established along the whole Border from Berwick to Carlisle, with settlers and searchers, sleuth hounds and watchers, by day and night. The fords over the rivers were either strictly guarded, or stopped and destroyed, and narrow defiles through the mountains were blocked up or rendered impassable. But although these precautions served to a considerable extent to protect the English frontier from extensive invasions, they were wholly insufficient to prevent the desultory incursions of the Scottish marauders, who, making sudden and rapid inroads into particular districts, laid all waste, and returned loaded with spoil before a sufficient force could be collected to present an obstacle to their return. These unceasing raids were scarcely less destructive than the more extensive invasions of the English armies.

In their frequent invasions of England, the Scottish Borderers always manifested a desire of spoil rather than of slaughter. Their great object was to collect as much booty as possible. Hence it was their policy on such occasions to avoid a regular engagement, and by hasty marches to elude any hostile force that might be sent against them, in order that they might carry off unmolested, their prisoners and plunder. Of the success of these tactics we have a striking example in the destructive inroad which Douglas and Randolph made into England about the close of the reign of Robert Bruce. For many days the English army followed the smoke of the houses and villages which the Scots had burned without being able even to get sight of the destroyers. And when at length the offer of a large reward obtained for King Edward information where the enemy lay, he found them encamped in an impregnable position, which could not even be reached without the greatest danger. Here the two armies lay opposite to each other for several days, the English vainly endeavouring, by manœuvres and bravadoes to induce the Scottish leaders to abandon their strong ground and risk