

SKIRMISH OF DRUMCLOG, AND BATTLE OF  
BOTHWELL BRIDGE.\*

A.D. 1679.

ON the morning of Sunday, the 1st of June 1679, Colonel Graham of Claverhouse, afterwards the gallant Viscount of Dundee, beloved beyond measure by the Highlanders, and detested by the Lowland Covenanters as the *Bloody Claverse*, marched from Hamilton up the vale of the Avon in Lanarkshire, carrying with him two field-preachers, whom

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\* Wodrow's MSS. Advocates' Library, and Wodrow's History; Hume's History of England; Chambers' Picture of Scotland; Statistical Account of Scotland; Macpherson's History of Great Britain; Life of the Viscount of Dundee; Life of the Duke of Monmouth.

he had apprehended in the vicinity of the town of Hamilton. His troops were composed of part of a regiment of Life Guards, of which he was the commander. He had been informed that one of those religious meetings, commonly called Conventicles, and declared by the Government to be treasonable, was to be held that day on a knoll or eminence known by the name of the Hare Law, near Loudon Hill, and as he knew the language which would be uttered, and the furious denunciations which would be levelled against the King and the Government, he resolved to disperse the assembled fraternity.

It was the custom of many of the male Covenanters to come armed to their religious meetings, and from the localities which they selected for their devotions and preaching they were commonly denominated *Hill men*. To give timely notice of the approach of the military, and especially of Graham of Claverhouse, whose name inspired them with terror and trembling, it was customary to place sentinels on adjacent hills, and on this occasion a watch was posted on Loudon Hill, which commands a view of the country many miles. Colonel Graham halted at the village of Strathaven to breakfast after a ride of seven or eight miles, and at that time the only inn in the village was a house built of stone, and two stories in height, opposite the parish churchyard gate, popularly called the Tower, on account of its being the best house in the place. The house is still standing with a modern front, and in it the mortal enemy of the Covenanters partook of his *dejeuné* on the 1st of June 1679, and not in the castle of Tillietudlem, generally supposed to indicate Craginethan, as the Author of *Waverley*, for the purposes of his delightful story, introduces in *OLD MORTALITY*.

While Colonel Graham was halting at Strathaven, he was informed that the conventicle he intended to disperse was not to be held on that day, and relying on the accuracy of this intimation, he turned off from the village, and pro-

ceded towards Glasgow. He had not, however, marched far with his cavalier Guards, when he discovered that the information he had received at Strathaven was erroneous, and that the conventicle had actually assembled. He immediately turned, and resuming his march towards the head of the vale of the Avon, he passed over several miles of muir and waste land, and about mid-day he came suddenly in sight of the *hill men*.

The scout on Loudon Hill gave due notice of the approach of the royal troops, whom he discovered shortly after they had passed Strathaven. The Covenanters were in number some hundreds of armed men, besides women, though, according to the Author of Waverley, "the total number of the insurgents might amount to about a thousand men, but of these there were scarce a hundred cavalry, nor were the one half of them even tolerably armed. The strength of their position, however, the sense of their having taken a desperate step, the superiority of their numbers, but, above all, the ardour of their enthusiasm, were the means on which their leaders reckoned for supplying the want of arms, equipage, and military discipline. On the side of the hill which rose above the array of battle which they had adopted, were seen the women and even the children, whom zeal had driven into the wilderness. They seemed stationed there to be spectators of the engagement, by which their own fate, as well as that of their parents, husbands, and sons, was to be decided. Like the females of the ancient German tribes, the shrill cries which they raised, when they beheld the glittering ranks of their enemy appear on the brow of the opposing eminence, acted as an incentive to their relatives to fight to the last in defence of that which was dearest to them. Such exhortations seemed to have their full and emphatic effect, for a wild halloo, which went from rank to rank, on the appearance of the soldiers, intimated the resolution of the insur-

gents to fight to the uttermost." Another statement is, that they amounted only to fifty armed horse and as many foot, with a hundred and fifty persons merely armed with pikes or rustic implements, but there can be little doubt that they greatly exceeded the royal troops in numbers. The author of the Statistical Account of the Parish of Avondale or Strathaven, in which lies the scene of action, asserts that they amounted to about three hundred armed men. They were under the leadership of the notorious John Balfour of Burleigh, David Hackston of Rathillet, John Nisbet of Hardhill, and one Cleland, who after the Revolution was killed at the head of the Cameronian regiment. The two first, and especially Balfour, were two of the murderers of Archbishop Sharp.

Colonel Graham's troopers were upwards of two hundred, but they arrived in a state of considerable fatigue, after a march of more than twelve miles on a sultry summer morning, and over bogs, morasses, and other inconveniences which lay in their way. The Covenanters stood, at the moment they saw the royal troops, upon a field gently declining from Stabbieside towards a narrow marsh, and recognised the dragoons passing the farm-house of High Drumclog, which is still inhabited by the descendants of the family who then possessed it, and who were zealous Covenanters. When the dragoons arrived at the ridge of a declivity corresponding to that in which the insurgents were posted, both parties stood still for a little and surveyed each other, only about half a mile distant.

It appeared that if both the Covenanters and the dragoons continued to advance, they must meet in the morass at the bottom of the declivities on which for the moment they severally stood. Colonel Graham arranged his cavalry, and moved down the hill deliberately to the attack, having previously stationed the two field-preachers, his prisoners, with their arms pinioned, under a small guard in

the farm-house of High or Upper Drumclog. One of these field-preachers figures in Old Mortality under the appropriate name of Gabriel Kettledrummle. The Covenanters in like manner moved down their hill, after bidding defiance to the summons to surrender, under the control of a gentleman named Hamilton, a brother of the Laird of Preston, and not a field-preacher, as some writers have erroneously stated, who acted as a kind of commanding officer, and drew up in order, singing psalms by the way. Both parties met upon the ground between the adjacent farm-houses of Stabbieside and Upper Drumclog, about a mile to the west of the high road from Strathaven to Kilmarnock, and two miles north-east of Loudon Hill. The circumstance of the ground being marshy, and all the valley swampy, was most unfortunate for Colonel Graham, and the horses were of the greatest incumbrance to the dragoons. Before he descended to the bottom of the declivity he ordered his troopers to fire a volley, which the Covenanters very adroitly avoided by falling on their faces. He then ordered them to charge, when they plunged into the bog, which they had not seen, and were speedily thrown into disorder.

The appearance of the Covenanters is described in a spirited manner in Old Mortality. "Their infantry was divided into three lines. The first, tolerably provided with fire-arms, were advanced almost close to the verge of the bog, so that their fire must necessarily annoy the royal cavalry as they descended the opposite hill, the whole front of which was exposed, and would probably be yet more fatal, if they attempted to cross the morass. Behind the first line was a body of pikemen, designed for their support in case the dragoons should force the passage of the marsh. In their rear was the third line, consisting of countrymen armed with scythes set straight on the poles, hay-forks, spits, clubs, goads, fish-spears, and such other

rustic implements as hasty resentment had converted into instruments of war. On each flank of the infantry, but a little backward from the bog, as if to allow themselves dry and sound ground whereon to act in case their enemies should force the pass, there was drawn up a small body of cavalry, who were in general but indifferently armed, and worse mounted, but full of zeal for the cause, being chiefly either landholders of small property or farmers of the better class, whose means enabled them to serve on horse-back."

When the Covenanters, after receiving the volley of the dragoons, which passed over their heads by the act of prostrating themselves on the ground, observed the soldiers plunging in disorder, one of their leaders exclaimed—"Over the bog, and at them, lads." A loud shout arose, mingled with enthusiastic quotations from Scripture, such as, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and others pouring forth a considerable portion of nasal psalmody. The whole of the tumultuous insurgents rushed upon the dragoons with irresistible violence, who, finding themselves so suddenly attacked, gave way, and attempted by reaching the dry ground to retreat backward up the hill. Some dreadful personal encounters took place, characterized by all the ferocious hatred which both parties entertained towards each other, and of which the combat between Balfour of Burleigh and Sergeant Bothwell is an excellent illustration. Colonel Graham did every thing which a commander could do by voice and example to rally his dragoons, but the pressure of the triumphant insurgents was overwhelming. His horse was killed under him, and he was often in the greatest personal danger. As the Covenanters entertained a fanatical and superstitious notion that he was impervious to lead, many an aim was deliberately taken at him with silver coins, and the narrow escapes he made were almost miraculous. Easily distinguished by his dress, he

was the foremost in all the charges he made at every favourable opportunity to arrest the pressure of the pursuers, and to cover the retreat of his dragoons. While thus employed he seemed to be invulnerable to the shot of the Covenanters, and as they viewed him "as a man gifted by the Evil Spirit with supernatural means of defence," they afterwards averred and thoroughly believed that "they saw the bullets recoil from his jack-boots and buff coat like hailstones from a rock of granite, as he galloped to and from amid the storm of the battle." But the bravery of the gallant Graham of Claverhouse was of no avail. It was in vain to contend with the enemy, more numerous and animated by an enthusiasm increased by the advantage they knew well they had gained, amid bogs and swamps; the horses were utterly useless, and became at every plunge more entangled in the morass. A hasty retreat was the only alternative, which was successfully done, leaving thirty-six of the dragoons dead upon the field, while the insurgents lost only six. To their disgrace, notwithstanding all their religious pretensions, they carried their madness so far as to employ themselves in mutilating and slashing the dead dragoons. They buried their own dead, one of whom, named Dingwall, had assisted in the murder of Archbishop Sharp of St Andrews, in Strathaven churchyard. There is still a monument to this man in that churchyard, on which there is an epitaph describing him as a *martyr to the faith of Christ!*

The guard over the two field-preachers also fled, leaving their prisoners pinioned in an out-house, the farm-steading of Upper Drumclog. When they found themselves at liberty, and overjoyed at the triumph of their party, they ran into the farmer's dwelling-house, and called for some one to cut the cords which bound them like a couple of condemned criminals. The farmer's wife, who was the only person in the house, bustled about, but could not find a knife, when one of the field-preachers recollected that he had one in

his own pocket, and told her to *ripe for't*. She soon found it in his capacious wallets, and set him and his companion at liberty. This knife was never reclaimed, and was kept for many years by the occupants of the farm as a valuable relic. It is stated that one of those field-preachers, named King, returned a jest which Colonel Graham uttered in the morning, by calling out to him, as he rode rapidly past, *to stay an' tak the afternoon's discourse along wi' him*.

The writer of the Statistical Account of the Parish of Strathaven gives it as his opinion, that if the insurgents had pursued the royal troops they might have cut every one of them off. This may be greatly doubted. It cannot be denied that it was not the superior bravery of the Covenanters, but the nature of the field of battle, which procured for them the victory, and if they had attempted a pursuit on firm ground, the dragoons would have inflicted on them a terrible vengeance. Of this, however, they seem to have been duly sensible, and they wisely abstained from running any such hazard. They contented themselves by singing psalms, and listening to long extemporaneous orations from the two liberated field-preachers.

Nevertheless, elated at their victory, they now resolved to take the field as aggressors, and in a district so deeply infected with enthusiasm as Lanarkshire was, it was an easy matter to collect adherents. Some thousands were brought together and organized before the 22d of June, the day on which the engagement at Bothwell Bridge took place. During the interval they made an attempt on Glasgow, towards which city Colonel Graham had retired with his discomfited band, but were repulsed with considerable loss. About the middle of the month they marched down Avondale to Hamilton, and in the neighbourhood of that town they resolved to hazard a battle with the royal forces now sent against them. They formed a kind of preaching camp at this place, and it has been truly

observed that the chief talent of their leaders consisted in extemporary praying and political expositions of the historical books of the Old Testament.

As soon as the Government in London was informed of the repulse sustained by Colonel Graham in his attack on the conventicle at Drumclog, and that the Covenanters were assembling in great numbers, Charles II. sent the celebrated and eventually unfortunate Duke of Monmouth, then commander-in-chief of all his forces, into Scotland, to put down the insurrection. The Duke left London on the 15th of June with a very few attendants; he arrived in the Scottish capital on the 19th, being only four days on the road—a remarkable instance of speed, when we consider what the mode of travelling between London and Edinburgh was in far more recent times; and on the 19th he marched westward at the head of a small body of English cavalry, the Scottish Guards, and some regiments of militia levied from the well-affected counties.

When the royal troops found the insurgents they were posted very securely on the Hamilton end of Bothwell Bridge, which was next to their stronghold district of Avondale. They were in number eight thousand, but none of the nobility and few gentlemen of note had joined them, the field-preachers being in reality the generals, though it is suspected that they were instigated to proceed to such extremities by some influential individuals in combination with the popular leaders in England. They showed great judgment in the choice of their position, but neither skill nor courage in any other part of their proceedings. The old and celebrated bridge over the Clyde at Bothwell, which has been long an object of intense interest, was then very different from what it at present appears. It was a long narrow bridge of four arches, about one hundred and twenty feet in length, and the breadth, exclusive of the parapets, was only twelve feet.

It was paved with round unhewn stones, resembling the ancient Roman roads in this country. In the centre it was fortified by a gateway, as was often the case in those times with bridges, and a man resided in a small house at one extremity to attend to the passage across. This gateway rose from the pier nearest the south-east bank, and the keeper's house stood at the other extremity—the house also serving as a kind of inn or *travellers' rest*, affording, as is often naively depicted on the sign-boards of country *publics* at the present time, *entertainment for men and horses*. Three-fourths of the bridge were left unprotected by the gateway upon that side from which any annoyance might proceed. Such was the far-famed Bothwell Bridge in 1679, and such it continued till 1826, although the gateway, gate, and the hostelry of the warden of the bridge, had been long removed, when, during the summer of the year now mentioned, twenty-two feet were added to the original breadth of twelve on the upper side, and thus, depriving it of nearly all its former features, it was converted into a broad and level structure corresponding to the excellent roads with which it is connected. The appearance of the country around is also completely changed. The great muir of Bothwell, through which the royal forces advanced to the bridge, is now a beautiful and fertile district; the summit of the knoll on which the Duke of Monmouth appeared on a white steed directing the fire of the artillery is now marked by a pretty little villa; and the then open space on the Hamilton end of the bridge, where the insurgents had posted themselves, is now turned into well enclosed fields and thriving plantations.

The Covenanters were commanded by the heroes of Drumclog, but Hamilton, who is designated by those who bitterly assail the Government as a “conscientious but weak-minded man,” and to “whose obstinacy the ruinous dissensions on the eve of the battle must chiefly be attributed,”

took no part in the engagement. Whether these charges be true or not it is unnecessary to inquire; but it is certain that discord, timidity, and confusion, prevailed among them. Some proposed to lay their grievances before Monmouth, a measure strongly opposed by Balfour of Burleigh and others, yet it prevailed, and messengers were sent to the Duke, who received them with great courtesy, but they were told that no negotiation would be entertained unless they made an unconditional surrender. They were informed that if they would trust to the royal mercy they would be favourably received. To this proposal they replied—"Yes, and hang next." They were allowed half an hour to consider the condition, which was scornfully rejected by these madmen, who were in no condition to resist, being without order, and having little ammunition.

The insurgents had taken the precaution to divest the bridge over which the royal troops were to advance of its parapets, as the Clyde was not fordable for a considerable way above it, and they had also barricaded the gateway. For the defence of the bridge they had posted at the hostelry of the warder three hundred of their best men, under the command, it is generally said, of Hackston of Rathillet, but one Ure of Shargarton claims this honour for himself, and Hamilton, who had hitherto acted as the nominal leader in their former exploits, ascribes it to one John Fowler, who was afterwards killed at Aird's Moss. The main body of the insurgents lay in dense masses within a quarter of a mile of the bridge.

On the morning of Sunday, the 22d of June, the half hour of grace having expired, a few shots were exchanged between a royal picquet and the party posted to defend the bridge. The Duke of Monmouth now advanced to disperse the tumultuary band, whose physical strength had been completely rendered unavailing by religious dissensions and prudential considerations. Instead of being

drawn up in line of battle, and prepared to take advantage of the strong and advantageous position they occupied, they were crowding together, as a well known author observes, in a confined mass that rolled and agitated itself like the waves of the sea, while thousands of tongues spoke or rather vociferated, and not a single ear to listen. To some parties the field-preachers were haranguing on their usual religious topics, blended with passages and illustrations from the Old Testament, bitter denunciations of the King, the royal forces, Graham of Claverhouse, Erastianism, Prelacy, Nullifidians, lukewarm Presbyterians, and Anti-Covenanters. At length some degree of order was obtained, and they suffered themselves to be formed into ranks with the docility of a flock of sheep, exhibiting at the same time no more courage or energy, but rather experiencing a sinking of the heart at their impending fate. Some of the field-preachers prevailed upon a number, after the manner of Drumclog, to strike up a psalm, but this attempt was observed by several of the superstitious among them as an ill omen, for it sank into "a quaver of consternation," and "resembled," says the Author of Waverley, "rather a penitentiary stave sung on the scaffold of a condemned criminal, than the bold strain which had resounded along the wild heath of Loudon Hill in anticipation of that day's victory. The melancholy melody soon received a rough accompaniment, for the cannon began to fire on one side, and the musquetry on both, and the bridge of Bothwell, with the banks adjacent, were involved in wreaths of smoke."

The Duke of Monmouth, mounted on a superb white charger, was conspicuous on the Bothwell side of the river, animating his troops and giving directions to his artillery, but the cannon of those times were wrought much more slowly than at the present day, and did not produce the effect to the extent anticipated. The two regiments of

Foot Guards, formed into close column, rushed forward to the Clyde, and deploying along the right bank, one corps commenced a galling fire on the defenders of the bridge, while another pressed on to occupy the important pass. The Covenanters sustained the attack with considerable courage, one party returning the fire across the river, and another discharging their musquets upon the further end of the bridge, and every avenue by which it could be approached by the soldiers. Those under Hackston of Rathillet, or whoever was the commander, who defended the bridge, made a gallant resistance till their ammunition was spent, when, afraid of being exposed to the fire of the artillery, now directed chiefly against the bridge, they retired towards the main body. This finished the encounter. The portal gate was broken open by the royal troops, the trunks of trees and other materials of the barricade were thrown into the river; and when a portion of the royal forces passed over, they found the insurgents in irrecoverable confusion. The noise of the artillery made the rude work-horses, on which some of them were mounted, completely unmanageable, and they galloped about treading down many of the foot. The Duke of Monmouth crossed the bridge with the Foot Guards, followed by General Dalzell at the head of a body of Lennox Highlanders, who raised their tremendous war-cry of *Loch-sloy*. Graham of Claverhouse now appeared, burning with revenge for his defeat at Drumclog; and at the head of his dragoons, who on the same account partook of their Colonel's exasperation, he fell on the distracted rustics with a fury irresistible, while the royal troops were peaceably forming on the other side of the river now gained by the passage of the bridge. A flight ensued, for few were anxious to encounter the wrath of Claverhouse and his dragoons. No fewer than seven hundred of the insurgents fell in the action, and especially in the pursuit, and twelve hundred surrendered and

were made prisoners. If Monmouth had not interfered, and ordered the fugitives to be spared, the slaughter would have been much greater. With his characteristic mildness and clemency he restrained the fury of the royal troops, and ordered them to spare all who submitted. The loss on the side of the victors was very little. There is a curious tradition that the piper of Graham of Claverhouse was mortally wounded while standing on a steep bank of the Clyde, and playing the air of the well-known Jacobite song, *Awa', Whigs, awa'*. The man rolled down the declivity still blowing his bagpipes, and setting forth a strain odious to the insurgents, until the river received him, and silenced him for ever.

Such of the prisoners as promised to live peaceably were dismissed; some hundreds, who were so obstinate as to refuse any conditions, were shipped at Leith for Barbadoes, but were wrecked, and all of them, except forty, drowned on the voyage—a violent tempest overtaking them in the Orkneys. Many of the fugitives found a refuge in the wooded domain of Hamilton Palace, where they were protected by the Duchess Anne, the eldest surviving daughter of James first Duke of Hamilton, who was beheaded for his loyal attachment to Charles I. in March 1649. Her Grace sent a message to the Duke of Monmouth, desiring him to prevent his soldiers *from trespassing upon her grounds*. Hamilton, the commander at the conflict of Drumclog, and some of the leaders, fled to Ayrshire, and were accommodated for a night in Loudon Castle, but the Earl would not see them in person. As a specimen of the insanity of the insurgents occasioned by their religious tenets, it may be mentioned, that when Hamilton became heir to his elder brother he refused to take possession of the estate, simply because, in the legal business which must have attended his infestment, he would have been obliged to acknowledge King William, who was not only an *uncove-*

*nanted King*, but obstinately refused to show any countenance to that extraordinary document.

Two of the field-preachers taken prisoners at Bothwell, named King and Kid, were carried prisoners to Edinburgh, and as it was resolved to make an example of them, they were indicted before the High Court of Justiciary for being with the rebels, and having incurred the penalties of high treason. They were executed on the 14th of August at the Cross of Edinburgh, and their heads were affixed on the Tolbooth. Their execution took place on the afternoon of that day on which the Magistrates of the city proclaimed the King's indemnity in their robes, amid the ringing of bells and the sounding of trumpets; but although this act of indemnity was granted, the subsequent proceedings of the Covenanters made it of little avail.