

## THE FIGHTS AND FORAYS OF BRANXHOLM.

THE Castle of Branxholm is situated in the vale of the Teviot, about 3 miles above Hawick. It possesses great celebrity as the ancient seat of the ducal family of Buccleuch, as the central point of vast military strength in the roystering period of the border forays, as the key for ages to all the strong places in Teviotdale, and as a prominent locality and brilliant figurant in Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel. It was long the scene of great baronial splendour, and it is classical alike in old balladry and in some of the finest modern songs and lyrics. The original pile—or rather that of the most sumptuous period—was burnt down in 1532 by the Earl of Northumberland, and blown up with gunpowder in 1570 during the invasion of the Earl of Surrey; and a successor to it was commenced in 1571 by its owner, Sir Walter Scott of Branxholm, and completed in 1574 by his widow. The present structure is very much smaller than the ancient one; and, with the exception of an old square tower of immense strength of masonry, it looks less like a castle than an old Scottish mansion-house. But its situation is strong and beautiful, and must evidently have invested it with mighty importance in the olden troublous times. The site is a bold bank, overhanging the river, surrounded by fine young thriving wood, and shut suddenly in by heights which give the vale

for some distance the narrowness of a dell; and so abruptly does the place burst on the view of a traveller from either above or below that he would be perfectly charm-struck with it, even were it unaided by any historical association; and so sternly did the ancient castle overawe the gorge, and hold armed men in readiness to defend it, that any attempt of English marauders to pass through without subduing the garrison must have been absolutely hopeless.

In the reign of James I., one-half of the barony of Branxholm belonged to Sir Thomas Inglis; and this gentleman was a lover of peace, ill able to bear the excitements and conflicts and perils of the Border warfare; and, happening one day to meet Sir William Scott of Buccleuch, who was then proprietor of the estate of Murdiestone in Lanarkshire, he strongly expressed to him his disgust at being obliged to sleep every night in boots and shirt of mail, and to hold himself in constant readiness for action with English freebooters, and his envy of the quiet and security and continual ease which the lairds of Clydesdale enjoyed at a distance from the Border, and behind the ramparts of the Leadshill mountains. Scott loved rolicking and feud as much as Inglis hated them; and he abruptly answered, "What say you to an exchange of estates? I like that dry land of yours much better than this stretch of wet clay." "Are you serious?" replied Inglis. "If you be, take the dry land with all my heart, and let me have the clay." They made short work of the bargain; and Scott soon found himself laird of Branxholm, and significantly remarked as he got possession of it that the cattle of Cumberland were as good as those of Teviotdale.

Scott promptly gathered around him a strong body of hardy, active, resolute, unscrupulous, well-mounted retainers, and rode so often and vigorously at their head across the Border, and made such smart reprisals upon the English for any occasional injury they did him, that he soon and permanently made the balance of account between Cumberland

and Teviotdale very much in his own favour; and his successors, for several generations, rivalled his energy and closely followed his example,—so that they rendered all the country round them resonant with the clang of arms, and rich with well-defended or rapidly augmented flocks. In the reign of James II., the other half of the barony of Braxholm became their property; and from that time till the conditions of society were altered by the general pacification of the Borders, and by the desuetude of feudal broils and usages, Braxholm Castle was the constant residence of the Buccleuch family,—the scene of their baronial magnificence,—the court and centre of their martial pomp and quasi-princely state. How vividly does the great modern bard of their name and clan, the mighty magician of modern Scotland, depict their ancient Hall, and restore its every-day scenes of crowded greatness, in the following stanzas!—

“ The feast was over in Braxholm tower,  
 And the lady had gone to her secret bower;  
 Her bower that was guarded by word and by spell  
 Deadly to hear, and deadly to tell—  
 Jesu Maria, shield us well!  
 No living wight, save the lady alone,  
 Had dared to cross the threshold stone.

The tables were drawn, it was idlesse all;  
 Knight and page, and household squire  
 Loitered through the lofty hall,  
 Or crowded round the ample fire;  
 The stag-hounds, weary with the chase,  
 Lay stretched upon the rushy floor,  
 And urged, in dreams, the forest race,  
 From Teviot stone to Eskdale-moor.

Nine-and-twenty knights of fame  
 Hung their shields in Branxholm Hall;  
 Nine-and-twenty squires of name  
 Brought them their steeds to bower from stall;  
     Nine-and-twenty yeomen tall  
     Waited duteous, on them all;  
     They were all knights of mettle true,  
     Kinsmen to the bold Buccleuch.

Ten of them were sheathed in steel,  
 With belted sword, and spur on heel;  
 They quitted not their harness bright  
 Neither by day, nor yet by night;  
     They lay down to rest  
     With corselet laced,  
 Pillowed on buckler, cold and hard;  
     They carved at the meal  
     With gloves of steel  
 And they drank the red wine through the helmet barred.

Ten squires, ten yeomen, mail-clad men,  
 Waited the beck of the wardour's ten;  
 Thirty steeds, both fleet and wight,  
 Stood saddled in stable day and night,  
 Barbed with frontlet of steel, I trow,  
 And with Jedwood-axe at saddle-bow;  
 A hundred more fed free in stall;  
 Such was the custom of Branxholm Hall."

The history of Branxholm fights and forays, if we had all due materials for it and could patiently use them, might be run out to volumes; and, even with such materials as we possess, could be woven into a huge portion of the almost endless tales of the Borders. But there is much sameness in it; and a long ballad, entitled "Jamie Telfer of the Fair

Dodhead," and given by Sir Walter Scott in his *Border Minstrelsy*, may be quoted as a fascinating substitute for the whole, exhibiting all its spirit, some of the most striking of its main characters, and a sufficient specimen of its most ordinary incidents; and though very long, it will amply atone for the space it occupies by affording "the truest possible picture of the eternal turmoil that prevailed in those times," for "it is very characteristic of the manners of the times, and perfectly shows how the weak and small were compelled to hang for protection on the great and powerful,"—and "the anxiety with which each respective baron asks the question, 'Whae's this brings the fraye to me?' proves how formidable they were in the habit of considering what the consequences of the 'fraye' were likely to be, and of course accounting for their unwillingness too rashly to involve themselves in them."

" It fell about the Martinmas tyde,  
 When our border steads get corn and hay;  
 The Captain of Bewcastle hath bouhd him to ryde,  
 And he's ower to Teviotdale to drive a prey.

The first ae guide that they met wi',  
 It was high up in Hardhaughswire,  
 The second guide that they met wi'  
 It was laigh down in Borthwick Water.

' What tidings, what tidings, my trusty guide?'  
 ' Nae tidings, nae tidings, I hae to thee,  
 But gin ye'll gae to the fair Dodhead,  
 Mony a cow's calf I let thee see.

And when they came to the fair Dodhead,  
 Right hastily they clamb the Peel;  
 He loosed the ky out ane and a',  
 And ranshakled the house right weel.

Now Jamie Telfer's heart was sair,  
 The tear ay rowing in his e'e;  
 He pled with the Captain to ha'e his geer,  
 Or else revenged he wad be.

The Captain turned him round and leugh;  
 Said, 'Man there's naething in thy house  
 But ae auld sword, without a sheath,  
 That hardly now would fell a mouse.'

The sun was nae up, but the moon was down,  
 It was the gryming of a new fa'en snaw';  
 Jamie Telfer has run ten miles afoot,  
 Between the Dodhead and the Stob's Ha';

And when he cam' to the fair tower gate,  
 He shouted loud and cried weel he,  
 Till out bespak' auld Gibby Elliot—  
 'Whae's this that brings the fraye to me?'

'It's I, Jamie Telfer, o' the fair Dodhead,  
 And a harried man I think I be;  
 There's naething left at the fair Dodhead  
 But a waefu' wife and bairnies three.'

'Gae seek your succour at Branksome Ha';  
 For succour ye'se get nane frae me;  
 Gae seek your succour where ye paid black mail,  
 For, man, ye ne'er paid money to me.'

Jamie has turned him round about—  
 I wat the tear blinded his e'e;  
 'I'll ne'er pay mail to Elliot again,  
 And the fair Dodhead I'll never see.'

My hounds may a' rin masterless,  
 My hawks may fly from tree to tree,  
 My lord may grip my vassal lands,  
 For there again maun I never be.'

He has turned him to the Teviot side,  
 E'en as fast as he could drie,  
 Till he cam' to the Coultart cleugh,  
 And there he shouted baith loud and hie.

Then up bespak' him auld Jock Grieve—  
 ' Whae's this that brings the fraye to me? '  
 ' It's I, Jamie Telfer, o' the fair Dodhead,  
 A harried man, I trow, I be.

There's naething left in the fair Dodhead,  
 But a greeting wife and bairnies three;  
 And sax poor ca's stand in the sta',  
 A' routing loudly for their minnie.'

' Alack a wae!' quo' auld Jock Grieve,  
 ' Alack! my heart is sair for thee!  
 For I was married on the elder sister,  
 And you are the youngest of a' the three.'

Then he has ta'en out a bonny black,  
 Was right weel fed with corn and hay,  
 And he's set Jamie Telfer on his back  
 To the Catslockhill to tak' the fraye.

And whan he cam' to the Catslockhill  
 He shouted loud, and cried weel hie;  
 Till out and spak' him William's Wat—  
 ' O whae's this brings the fraye to me? '

‘It’s I, Jamie Telfer, o’ the fair Dodhead,  
 A harried man I think I be;  
 The Captain of Bewcastle has driven my gear—  
 For God’s sake rise and succour me!’

‘Alas for wae!’ quoth William’s Wat,  
 ‘Alack! for thee my heart is sair!  
 I never cam’ by the fair Dodhead  
 That ever I found thy basket bare.’

He’s set his twa sons on coal black steads,  
 Himself upon a freckled gray,  
 And they are on wi’ Jamie Telfer  
 To Branksome Ha’, to tak’ the fraye.

And when they cam’ to Branksome Ha’,  
 They shouted a’ baith loud and hie,  
 Till up and spak’ him auld Buccleuch,  
 Said—‘Whae’s this brings the fraye to me?’

‘It’s I, Jamie Telfer, o’ the fair Dodhead,  
 And a harried man I think I be;  
 There’s nought left in the fair Dodhead,  
 But a greeting wife and bairnies three.’

‘Alack for wae!’ quoth the guid auld lord,  
 ‘And ever my heart is wae for thee!  
 But fye gar cry on Willie, my son,  
 And see that he come to me speedilie.’

‘Gar warn the water braid and wide,  
 Gar warn it sure and hastilie;  
 They that winna ride for Telfer’s kye,  
 Let them never look in the face o’ me.’



‘ Warn Wat o’ Harden and his sons,  
 Wi’ them will Borthwick Water ride;  
 Warn Gaudilands, and Allanhaugh,  
 And Gilmanscleugh, and Commonsidge.

‘ Ride by the gate at Priesthaughswire,  
 And warn the Curror’s o’ the Lee;  
 As ye come down the Hermitage slack,  
 Warn doughty Willie o’ Gorrieberry.’

The Scots they rade, the Scots they ran,  
 Sae starkly and sae steadily;  
 And aye the owerword o’ the thrang  
 Was—‘ Rise for Branksome readilie!’

The gear was driven the Frostylee up,  
 Frae the Frostylee unto the plain,  
 Whan Willie has looked his men before,  
 And saw the kye right fast drivand.

‘ Whae drives thir kye?’ ‘gan Willie say,  
 ‘ To make an outspeckle o’ me?’  
 ‘ It’s I, the Captain o’ Bewcastle, Willie,  
 I winna layne my name for thee.’

‘ O will ye let Telfer’s kye gae back?  
 Or will ye do aught for regard o’ me?  
 Or, by the faith of my body,’ quo’ Willie Scott,  
 ‘ I’se ware my dame’s caufskin on thee.’

‘ I winna let the kye gae back,  
 Neither for thy love, nor yet thy fear;  
 But I will drive Jamie Telfer’s kye,  
 In spite of every Scot that’s here.’

‘ Let on them lads!’ quo’ Willie than,  
 ‘ Fye, lads, set on them cruellie!  
 For ere they win to the Ritterford,  
 Mony a toom saddle there sall be!’

Then till’t they gaed, wi’ heart and hand,  
 The blows fell thick as bickering hail;  
 And mony a horse ran masterless,  
 And mony a comely cheek was pale.

But Willie was stricken ower the head,  
 And thro’ the knapsack the sword has gane;  
 And Harden grat for very rage,  
 When Willie on the grund lay slane.

But he’s ta’en aff his gude steel cap,  
 And thrice he’s waved it in the air—  
 The Dinlay snaw was ne’er mair white,  
 Nor the lyart locks of Harden’s hair.

‘ Revenge! revenge!’ and Wat ’gan cry;  
 ‘ Fye, lads, lay on them cruellie!  
 We’ll ne’er see Teviotside again,  
 Or Willie’s death revenged sall be.’

O mony a horse ran masterless,  
 The splintered lances flew on hie;  
 But or they wan to the Kershope fords,  
 The Scots had gotten the victory.

John o’ Brigham there was slain,  
 And John o’ Barlow, as I heard say;  
 And thirty mae o’ the Captain’s men  
 Lay bleeding on the grund that day.

The Captain was run through the thick of the thigh,  
 And broken was his right leg bane;  
 If he had lived this hundred years,  
 He had ne'er been loved by woman again.

' Hae back the kye!' the Captain said;  
 ' Dear kye, I trow, to some they be!  
 For gin I suld live a hundred years,  
 There will ne'er fair lady smile on me.'

Then word is gane to the Captain's bride,  
 Even in the bower where that she lay,  
 That her lord was prisoner in enemy's land,  
 Since in Tividale he had led the way.

' I wad lourd have had a winding sheet,  
 And helped to put it ower his head,  
 Ere he had been disgraced by the border Scot,  
 When he ower Liddel his men did lead!'

There was a wild gallant among us a',  
 His name was Watty wi' the Wudspurs,  
 Cried—' On for his house in Stamgirthside,  
 If ony man will ride with us?'

When they cam' to the Stamgirthside,  
 They dang wi' trees and burst the door;  
 They loosed out a' the Captain's kye,  
 And set them forth our lads before.

There was an auld wyfe ayont the fire,  
 A wee bit o' the Captain's kin—  
 ' Whae dar loose out the Captain's kye,  
 Or answer to him and his men?'

‘ It’s I, Watty Wudspurs, loose the kye,  
I winna layne my name frae thee ;  
And I will loose out the Captain’s kye,  
In scorn of a’ his men and he.’

When they came to the fair Dodhead,  
They were a welcome sight to see ;  
For instead of his ain ten milk kye,  
Jamie Telfer had gotten thirty and three.

And he has paid the rescue shot  
Baith with goud and white monie ;  
And at the burial o’ Willie Scott,  
I wat was many a weeping e’e.

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