

CHAPTER I.

THE BIRTHPLACE.

OH softly, JED, thy silver currents lead,
Round every hazel copse, and smiling mead,
Where lines of firs the glowing landscape screen,
And crown the heights with tufts of deeper green ;
While mid the cliffs, to crop the flowery thyme,
The shaggy goats with steady footsteps climb.

LEYDEN'S Scenes of Infancy.

THE low countries of Scotland combine much of the beauty of the sister kingdoms. We have the sparkling rivers, the purpled hills, the woods of pine and birch, the moory wastes with their varied glories of gorse and heather, while blended with these Scotch attributes, we have cultivated meadows, smiling cottages and hedges, that would do honour to the broad lands south of the Tweed. Roxburghshire adds to this twofold beauty the renown of being classic ground, for the wand of the Northern Wizard has given it a world-wide name for all that is interesting in legendary history and in modern literature. The Tweed, the glorious Border river, is a name which wakes a peculiar thrill of love and interest in all those who have been dwellers on its banks, and the blue Cheviots are scarcely less familiar household words. Various tributaries of the Tweed are likewise dear to Lowland hearts—the Yarrow, the Leader, the Liddell, the Gala, and, very specially to

some of us, that clear little stream, the surroundings of which Burns commemorated as

“Eden scenes on crystal JED.”

As the poet was in love with a fair Jedburgh lady¹ that same year, his praises, however, of Jedburgh localities, must be taken *cum grano salis*. With all deductions, much true beauty remains in the deep valley, with its wooded banks and its bright waters, and its varied combinations of colour, for,—blended with the green of summer, and the spring flushes of orchard blossom, and the russets of golden autumn,—there are rich-coloured precipices of old red sandstone—called in local parlance “scours,”²—which are very noted features in the landscapes of Jed. On this little river, and in the centre of its valley, we find the small and not very populous town of Jedburgh—or Jedworth, as it used to be called, from *ged*, signifying withes or twigs, and *worth*, a court or lawn, which suited well its old locality—a town or court with stretches of forest on every side;—a noted and busy place in its day, though its fame was not always of a pacific or praiseworthy sort.

Only ten miles from the Border, Jedburgh was the centre of Border warfare. It was the gathering-place of Scottish armies, and the favourite point of attack of the English, who burned it to the ground six or seven times, while their soldiers frequently occupied the castle. It was not a walled town, but its houses were

¹ Miss Isabella Lindsay, daughter of Dr. Lindsay. She married a Mr. Armstrong, and became the mother of the late General Armstrong, Master of the Mint to the Emperor of Russia. Before Burns left Jedburgh he presented his portrait to this young lady (1787).—Cunningham's *Life of Burns*.

² Each scour has its name. Thus we have Todlaw Brae, Sunny Brae, Linthaulghlee, Hundalee, and even (alas! for poetry) there is the Grumphie Scour!

so constructed as to admit of but four entrances, which had gates, and were named Castlegate, Highgate, Canongate, and Burn Wynd, which circumstance gave rise to the belief that it was a regularly fortified town. The Earl of Surrey wrote to Henry VIII. of "the fine houses, and six good towers" which he destroyed, and a red flush upon the ruined Abbey still tells its tale of the fires then kindled. He added, "I found the Scottes at this time the boldest men and the hottest that ever I saw in any nation."

The Raid of Redeswire terminated the Border warfare in a manner very creditable to the warlike fame of Jedburgh. This celebrated engagement took place in 1575, between the Scots, headed by the Rutherfurds of Hunthill and Hundalee, and the English, under Sir George Heron, Keeper of Tyndale. It was fought on the slopes of the Carter Fell, at the pass into England by Redesdale, over which marched the invading armies of both countries. A sudden onslaught of Jedburgh citizens gave the victory to the Scots, when

"They raised the slogan with ane shout,
Fy, Tyndail, to it—Jedburgh's out!"¹

In the vicinity of Jedburgh there still remain many landmarks of the patriotic past. A mile and a half from the town, on the top of a scaur overlooking the Jed, are the remains of the celebrated camp of that "good Sir James of Douglas" who

"Quhen he was blyth he was luffy,
And meyk and sweyt in cumpany;
But quha in battaill mycht him se,
Anither countenance had he."²

It is said that he defeated ten thousand Englishmen

¹ Scott's *Border Minstrelsy*.

² Barbour's *Bruce*.

near the Lintalee camp, a victory which "added another blazon to the shield of Douglas," and secured all the south of Scotland for King Robert the Bruce, who was then absent in Ireland. Half a mile above the camp is Fernyhurst Castle, the ancient seat of the Kerrs, and the scene of fierce struggles and wild legends. Then there is Bairnkin, an old fastness of the Oliphants, and four miles farther up the river the ruined church of Old Jedworth, founded by Egred, Bishop of Lindisfarne, about the year 800. On every side are traces of peels and camps, especially of the latter, at Scraesburgh, Gilliestongues, Rink or Camp-town, and Chesters; while the frequent caves in the scaurs, as at Hundalee, Lintalee, and Mossburnsford, were probably favourite places of refuge for border heroes in their ever changing tides of fortune. It was at the church of Southdean,¹ or "Sooden" as it is called, on the Jed, that the Scottish army, as described by Froissart, assembled for the expedition which terminated in the battle of Otterburn in "Chevy Chase."

The ballad lore, and the numerous remains of peel-houses and fortified towers throughout Roxburghshire, as well as stern historical facts, leave no room for doubt that the little forest town was frequently the scene of other encounters and adventures less patriotic and creditable than struggles against the usurpation of England. "Dalesmen" and "marchers," or in other words thieves and freebooters, carried on a guerilla warfare from the fastnesses of the neighbouring forests, so that Jedburgh was kept in a constant moil of civil strife of a vexatious and ignoble kind, from the earliest monarchies till the days of the Regent Moray, who

¹ White's *Battle of Otterburn*, p. 23.

exerted his authority with some success against the rule of rapine which existed in the Border county. The proverbial expression of "Jeddart justice" itself tells a vivid tale of the Lynch-like manners and customs of the place, where it was said to be the fashion "to hang first and try afterwards!"¹ A ferocious-looking weapon of Border warfare, a sort of battle-axe, helped on the dubious character of that anti-pacific locality by its satiric name of "a Jedburgh staff"!

Jedburgh Castle was entirely demolished as early as 1490. It was situated on a hill at the head of the town, and was a favourite residence of the early Scottish kings. David I. held his court principally at Roxburgh; but had also his royal castle at Jedworth; Malcolm IV. died within its walls; Alexander III. celebrated there with great festivities his marriage with the beautiful Jolande of France. Mr. Cosmo Innes gives the following interesting account of Jedburgh at this period:—"Alexander III. and his queen, the daughter of the lordly De Coucy, chose Jedburgh and its lovely valley as a favourite residence. After the death of that king, John Cumin rendered his account as bailiff of the king's manor of Jedworth, in which he charges himself with 66s. 8d. as the rent of the new park, which used to be the place of the queen's stud (*equicium reginæ*), 26s. 8d. for the sales of dead wood; and states his outlay for mowing 66 acres of meadow, and for winning and carry-

¹ The magistrates of Jedburgh had the power of life and death as well as the barons, and their arbitrary exercise of it at a comparatively recent period reminds one vividly of the old Jedburgh proverb. In 1715—"Mar's year," as it was called—some suspected rebels were brought before the zealous magistrates. Only one crime could be clearly "proven," which was that they were "real natural-born Irishers," on which conviction they were forthwith taken to "the goose pool, and haddan down, and drownit till they were dead."

ing it for forage for the castle. *Item*, for 900 perches of ditch and hedge (*fosse et haye*) constructed about both the wood and the meadows of Jedworth, 116s. 6d. I think I cannot be mistaken in translating these words ditch and hedge; and if so, you have by far the earliest instance of such a fence on record. I suppose the wood so enclosed may have been the bank of Fernyhurst, and the meadows those fairy fields by the side of the Jed which form one of the most beautiful and peculiarly Scotch scenes I have ever seen."¹

Queen Mary Stuart kept court at Jedburgh on several occasions, her residence being an ancient house, carefully preserved, and associated with her name. From thence too she started on her wild visit to Bothwell in 1566, at Hermitage Castle, in Liddesdale, twenty statute miles from Jedburgh, a distance which she performed to and fro in one day on horseback, on the roughest roads, and in the midst of Border perils. The fatigue and anxiety so shook her nerves that she lay sick of a lingering fever for a whole month, in the dark wainscoted rooms of the old Jedburgh house.

Jedburgh was also a favourite resort of the ecclesiastical world. Its noble abbey—presenting in its chancel, a fine specimen of the earlier Norman architecture, as well as of the later in the beautiful door of the cloister, and in the western gable—was founded by David I., and owes its demolition, not to the Reformation, but to English soldiers. There were also large monastic and conventual establishments, of which but the names remain, such as the "Friars'" and the "Lady's Yards." The gardens and the orchards, which so beautifully mingle with the town buildings, owe their celebrity,

¹ *Scotland in the Middle Ages*, by Cosmo Innes, pp. 125-6.

it is said, to the careful culture of the old monks. Magnificent old pear-trees from French grafts, planted by them, were much admired for their picturesque beauty, many being three feet in diameter; but those that remain, though old and gnarled, are but the offshoots, and none date further back than three or four hundred years. Jedburgh pears have long been widely famed, and the Jedburgh plum is of rare excellence, rivalling the green gage. Some of the ecclesiastics of Jedburgh, however, had wider celebrity than that of being good horticulturists, and Adam Bell, one of its Carmelite friars, wrote a History of Scotland.

At the foot of the Canongate, spanning the Jed, there is a fine old bridge of ashlar, with three circular ribbed arches, dating from the time of the building of the Abbey. In "the '45,"¹ when "Prince Charlie" entered Jedburgh by this bridge, it was the scene of a vehement and rejoicing Jacobite welcome. He took up his quarters at the hostelry of The Nag's Head, still in existence.

After all the sore, yet, on the whole, successful battles which Jedburgh waged for the liberty and independence of Scotland, it was at last the Union with England, which, by ruining its trade, did it more harm, and brought it nearer absolute ruin, than Surrey and all his soldiers. In the middle and towards the end of last century Jedburgh had greatly declined; its citizens were called "idlers," the old trees were cut down, the churchyard lay open to all intruders, and the fine old Abbey was a quarry from whence was taken the material for parochial buildings. From one of its aisles

¹ Mr. Veitch's mother remembered seeing on this occasion, from Bonjedward, the Highlanders shoot the sheep on the opposite slopes of the hill of Ulston.

ascended daily the hum of the lessons or the shouts of the play-time of unruly schoolboys. Jedburgh, in short, was in a bad case, and, following the general rule in such circumstances, Superstition abode within its shades. Witches and fairies supplied the place of more substantial inhabitants. The Witches' green was a real and abiding locality, and a window in the Abbey was called the Witch's Wheel, through which it was believed that veritable fairies danced by moonlight.

Neither the presence of superstition, desolation, and ruined stone and mortar, nor the absence of red chimneys, successful money-making, and the modern wear and tear of life, could prevent a new and deeper *renaissance* of the old energy and activity of Jedburgh. It was not only that men of poetry and adventure began to arise throughout Roxburghshire, such as Leyden, Thomson,¹ Pringle,² and others; such gifts might be expected amidst the stirring memories of the past, and the beautiful scenery of the present. The deeper gifts of intellect, however, appear about this time to have been lavished with no scanty hand upon the men of Jedburgh, so that the peculiarly gifted ones who were yet to arise in their midst found a fit nursing-place, and helping hands on every side to cherish and uphold. The thews and the sinews of the men of old reappeared in the mental conformation of their descendants. Battles of a higher life went bravely

¹ One of the poems of Thomson, which is less known than his *Seasons*, is an *Ode to Sir Isaac Newton*—

“When Newton rose, our philosophic sun,”

so that appreciation of science was not wanting even among the poets.

² Thomas Pringle, author of *Scenes of Teviotdale*, *Ephemerides*, and a series of *African Poetical Sketches*, of which “The Bush Boy” is the best known. He was connected with *Blackwood's Magazine* at its commencement.

on in the fields, forests, streets, and ruins, where in the old-world days valiant yet useless conflicts of flesh and blood had been lost and won. Conquerors went forth conquering from the valley of the Jed, subduing ignorance, combating superstition, inventing new blessings for the nations, discovering new laws and beneficent designs, and bringing glory to Him who reigneth over mind as well as matter.