

HUME CASTLE

It is sometimes said that the people of Hume look down on everyone else. This, in a literal sense, is undoubtedly true. The height of the hill on which the Castle stands is given in geographical records variously from 898 feet downwards, while we learn from a stone tablet inserted near the west wall that the base of the building is 742 feet above high watermark of sea at Berwick. Whatever may be the exact height, we can, I think, without boasting, claim to be considerably above our neighbours.

For centuries the Castle has frowned in power and dignity over the Mersey and a large portion of Roxburghshire, and has been well-named from its place of vantage the "Sentinel" of the former.

In early times it was an imposing and lofty structure, increasing in strength and fortifications with the wealth of its owners, the barons, but after the invention of gunpowder it was allowed to go to ruin by degrees. The present walls are comparatively modern, having been erected less than 200 years ago by the last Earl of Marchmont, and enclosed a much smaller area than the edifice from whose debris they were built. These, during the proprietorship of Sir John Hume, Purves Hume Campbell, being considered unsafe, were carefully cemented with a view to preservation. The concrete used for this purpose by no means added to the beauty of the venerable pile, and the repairing was even regarded by some as an act of vandalism; there is a touch of unconscious irony in the words of a youthful essayist, who, during the strengthening process, described it thus:--"Workmen are at present busy plastering up the walls of Hume Castle, and, when they are finished, it will be as good as new!"

Traces of a former site can still be seen, particularly towards the southern slope, but the only portion of the original walls is that in the centre of the enclosure now picturesquely smothered in ivy and a veritable joy to juvenile picknickers in their games of "Hide and Seek." Watching these childish frolics, one becomes reminiscent, and ponders on the grim games of "Hide and Seek" played centuries ago on the same spot, when two great nations strove for supremacy, and the stake was life or property.

The donjon or dungeon was situated towards the northwest corner, and this included the well, which, so far as tradition goes, is probably the most interesting item of the subject.

It was during the beginning of the 13th century that we first read of the Castle and adjoining lands, which were then given as a dowry to Ada, daughter of Waldeve, the 6th Earl of Dunbar, who married her cousin William, son of Patrick of Greenlaw. The Earldom of Dunbar at the time extended over a very large part of the southern district, and its lords were powerful and wealthy. Ada's husband assumed the name of Home, which has from that date until a few years ago been associated with the domain. Thus the family of Home sprang from these renowned Earls of Dunbar.

The Castle achieved its greatest historical importance during the next 200 years, and in 1513 a Lord Home, jointly with Lord Huntly, led the left wing of the Scottish Army at Flodden, where, on that fateful field, he left many of his kinsmen lying amongst the "Floo'ers o' the Forest":--

"The Border slogan rent the sky!
'A Home,' 'A Gordon,' was the cry."

There is a legend to the effect that, after the battle, the Earl of Home took possession of his Royal master's body, had it conveyed secretly to his Border seat, and thrown into the well. How many children, familiar with this story locally from the days of nursery rhymes, have peered into these dark depths,

fondly imagining that the wonderful penance-belt would appear floating on the surface of the water! Sir Walter Scott refers to this legend in the lines in "Marmion":--

"Nor to yon Border castle high
Look northward with upbraiding eye; Nor cherish hope in vain
That, journeying far on foreign strand,
The Royal Pilgrim to his land
May yet return again."

On one of the author's many sojourns at Sandyknowe, he visited the Castle, and, on asking the custodian if he believed there was any truth in the story of James IV.'s skeleton and his iron belt, that individual, with characteristic Scottish caution, replied that if the well were emptied and cleaned out he "wadna wunner" if these articles were found!

For generations, the fortress was alternately in the hands of the English or Scots according to the strength of the invading or defending troops, and it seemed to be the invariable custom of the victors to burn down or otherwise destroy everything possible.

After the death of James IV., and during the regency of the Duke of Albany, Alexander, Lord Home, was convicted of plotting to seize the person of the infant King James V., and his estates were confiscated. Subsequently, he was restored to the regent's favour, but later during a sitting of Parliament in Edinburgh, was convicted of many crimes, and put to death in 1516. His numerous offices of great importance were bestowed on persons outwith his own family; all his titles and lands were for the next six years vested in the Crown. But a kinsman, Home of Wedderburn, took fearful revenge. He captured Anthony de la Bastie, who had been appointed to one of the posts, viz., that of Warden of the Marches, and slew him at Langton, near Duns. The victor cut off his victim's head, tied it to his saddlebow by the flowing locks, and seized both the castles of Home and Wedderburn, holding them in definance of the Government. The gruesome trophy, the head, was exhibited on the highest spikes of Hume's battlements, so as to signal his triumph. In 1522 the title and lands were restored to George, one of the famous "seven spears of Wedderburn" and so the Castle passed into the hands of this collateral branch, the first bearing the name of "David de Hum." George, by reasons of his turbulent spirits, suffered various terms of imprisonment, and met his death in a skirmish preceding the battle of Pinkie (1547).

In this same year the Duke of Somerset, as Protector, attacked the stronghold from Hardacreshill, where his army was encamped. After strong resistance by Lady Home, it was obliged to surrender, but the following year it was recaptured by Alexander, the 4th Earl, who put to death the entire English garrison. A few years later, this same Earl signed the order for the imprisonment of Queen Mary in Lochleven Castle, and after her romantic escape he led 600 followers to the Battle of Langside, where, although he was severely wounded, he is said to have turned the fortune of the field. Later still, he veered round, and became one of Mary's adherents, and we hear of that ill-fated monarch enjoying his hospitality while on her journey to the court of her cousin Elizabeth. En route she is said to have traveled south by what is now, presumably in honour of the Royal journey, called Queenscairn.

Once again, in 1650, the Castle was bombarded, this time at close quarters, by Colonel Fenwick, under Oliver Cromwell. In answer to an imperative summons to surrender, the Governor, Sir Thomas Cockburn, sent two missives, which have been carefully preserved as examples of how frolicking humour sometimes bubbles up even in the tragedies of war. The first ran thus:--

Right Honourable,

I have received a trumpeter of yours, as he tells me, without a pass, to surrender Home Castle to the Lord General Cromwell. Please you, I never saw your General. As for Home Castle, it stands upon a rock. Given at Home Castle this day before seven o'clock. So resteth, without prejudice to my native country.

Your most humble servant,

T. COCKBURN.

The second reply was expressed in the doggerel lines well-known to all Border schoolboys, who often are heard chanting them in ignorance of their true origin:--

"I, Willie Wastle,
Stand firm in my castle;
And a' the dogs in your toun
Will no' pu' Willie Wastle down."

The garrison, however, after the third volley of Kenwick's cannon, readily surrendered, and in a very short time Cromwell's Ironsides entered in triumph.

James, who was Earl during the civil war of the Commonwealth, survived its perils, and after the Restoration regained his possessions.

Another George of the Wedderburn family was taken prisoner at the Battle of Preston, and to be sold as a slave. He was erroneously supposed to have died without issue, but it was through his descendants that the Castle passed to the Marchmont family, who were at this period a wealthier and more influential branch than the main stock; but in 1794 that earldom became extinct, and since then the property has known many vicissitudes. It has long been disassociated from the direct line of that illustrious and noble family who for generations ruled over the Merse, befriended monarch, and took a conspicuous part in guiding the destiny of the nation. The name and the motto -- "True to the End" -- are the only surviving links with a glorious and renowned past. Long may they prevail!

Occasionally visitors make enquiries as to the moat; like many other fortresses there was no moat as is generally understood by that term. Standing, however, on any of the rocky heights near by, and viewing such old-time obstacles as Gordon Moss, Lurgie Loch, Greenlaw Moor, and the Mires, one can almost read that in early days there was "no road this way," while on the south side Lambden Burn is said to have had much larger proportions than at present. The King's Ford at Hume M111 is, perhaps, the only one now distinguishable of the various fords on its course.

The artillery of the Castle was used for the last time during the '45 Rebellion, when a body of rebel troops was marching towards Kelso, and at the request of that town the cannon lent its aid in arresting the advance. After this date the building was used as a signalling station, figuring prominently in the False Alarm of 1804.

The accounts of that stirring and thrilling time are many and varied. The following information regarding the part played by Hume in the Alarm has been gleaned from stories of that period as told by a present-day descendant of Sergeant Tait, who was then in charge of the Castle:--Instructions had been given to the custodian to light his beacon immediately he observed the signal on Derrington Law.

Mistaking a light somewhere in the vicinity of that height for the expected one, he forthwith applied a torch to his own pile. Then, seeing Derrington Law blaze forth after his own, he realized his mistake but it was too late to rectify matters. The Dunlon and Boon Hill followed suit, and so on, Hume thus forging the first link in the long chain of beacons extending throughout the land. Tait, with all possible speed, summoned the local contingent of volunteers to march to the rendezvous, Kelso Square, and it is recorded that, so frantic was his haste to be "first on the field," he donned one sock and put the other in his pocket, and that when he reached the Little Mill he ignored the foot-bridge entirely, and splashed through the burn! It is still proudly recalled that the village men were the first to arrive in Kelso. (Incidentally, they aroused the Stitchel Volunteers from their slumbers on their way through!) The standard-bearer was another Hume, Robert, whose father built the cottage (now in ruins) adjoining the school playground, and whose daughter "Marget" lived in this same house during all her 96 years, passing away about 14 years ago.

In like manner as the dimensions of the Castle area changed, so did those of the parish. In former days it was four times its present extent, and included part of the territories of Gordon and Westruther. The older lords of the manor, i.e., the Earls of Dunbar, were patrons of the church (which was dedicated to St. Nicholas), and traces of its site can, with care, be discerned near the centre of the churchyard at the place now occupied by a family burying-vault of the Homes. In the 12th century, 'the monks of Kelso Abbey gained possession of the church and the entire parish, and, through their influence, the latter was reduced to almost its present area. The church was demolished prior to the Reformation, and since then there has been none in the parish.

Many place-names in the vicinity are not without historical interest, particularly the fields lying in close proximity to the Castle:--

(A.) THE POST LANDS.--Lord Home once ordered certain despatches to be conveyed from the Castle to Edinburgh Castle. The command, having been given towards evening, his Lordship next morning, noticing the trooper to whom the papers had been entrusted engaged in his usual duties, was about to vent his displeasure at his mandate not having been carried out when he was informed that the journey to, and return from, the Capital had been accomplished between sunset and sunrise. Impulsive in appreciation of meritorious service as well as unmerciful to apparent neglect, the Earl promptly bestowed on the messenger this field to the immediate south of the Castle. From this incident the name of "Post Lands" is derived.

(B.) THE BOW-BUTTS.--This field to the west of the village was the practice ground used by the archers. One Norman Home captained a large number of these bowmen.

(C.) THE BELLIS HILL.--South of the last-mentioned field. Over this name there is diversity of opinion, one theory being that the bell-tower of the church was situated in this part, while some assert that it is derived from the French, *bel* beautiful, and is only one of many examples of the effect of the Norman Conquest on our language.

(D.) THE KIRKLANDS OR KIRKFLAT.--A continuation of the Bellis Hill obviously gained its name from its proximity to the church.

(E.) THE HOUGHANS.--The heights behind the village are so called from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning a promontory or headland, but locally it is considered to be a misnomer, or rather the name is erroneously spelt so for Hewans, so called because the Scots were continually "hewin" down the English!

(F.) THE BARRACKS FIELD AND GATES, on Caldside farm, occupy the place where many of the Home retainers dwelt.

HUME ORCHARD farm includes portions of fields where the monks possessed a large and desirable orchard.

LOGARS (OR IN THE OLD FORM LOAGUERS) was a secret meeting place of a section of the Covenanters who were forced, through the

Romanism to conceal their place of worship. One of these Covenanters, an Alexander Hume, was hanged in 1682, in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh, and his dying testimony was the words of the 15th verse of Psalm xvii:--

But as for me, I thine own face
In righteousness will see;
And with thy likeness when I wake,
I satisfied shall be.

The water of the WYND WELL near the Quarry, was the bleaching-fluid for the good wives of the village in former days, who conveyed their yarn and webs of linen from their spinning wheels and hand-loomers erected in the "ben end" of the dwellings to be spread out on the grassy enclosure (made for this purpose) thus rendering the fabric "a thing of beauty and a joy" for many future generations.

THE HORNERS' KNOWE lies a few yards west of the school. Here bands of vagrants or gypsies took up their winter quarters, spending their time in manufacturing hornspoons, which in summer they hawked from door to door. Round this Knowe was the village green, on which the annual fair was held, a noteworthy feature of these assemblies being the selling or "swapping" of a large number of donkeys.

Two great eras have left their marks on the physical features of the neighbourhood. The vale of Tweed below is an immense glacial scoop, while one can see on a smaller scale near at hand, evidences of the Ice Age in the red boulder clay thrown out almost daily during the quarry excavations.

A glance round to the Lammermoors, Cheviots, Eildons, and to many other lesser heights nearer home, with their beautifully dome-shaped summits, convinces us that the igneous rocks (chiefly whinstone) prevailing, were the product of a period of great volcanic activity.