

I.

ON THE LOCALITY OF THE ABDUCTION OF QUEEN MARY. BY ROBERT CHAMBERS, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Mary was seized by the Earl of Bothwell, on the 24th April 1567, as she was returning from Stirling to Edinburgh, whether with her own will or otherwise has ever since been one of the questions connected with her perplexing history. To determine the locality may obviously be a point of some importance for the solution of the problem, for we can easily suppose that, in a case of collusion, one place might seem more suitable than another, while it is not less evident that the place might be such as to make collusion appear to us as highly improbable. It has been customary hitherto for writers of Scottish history to represent the Queen as taken captive at *the river Almond*, about seven miles west of Edinburgh. The only exceptions are three, all of them writers with a strong leaning towards Mary; namely, *first*, David Crawford of Drumsoy, in his *Memoirs of the Affairs of Scotland*; *second*, Walter Goodall, in his *Examination of the Letters, &c.*; *third*, Agnes Strickland, in her recently published *Lives of the Queens of Scotland*. These three writers represent the incident as taking place at a hamlet or suburb, formerly called Foulbriggs, now Fountainbridge, near Edinburgh.

Miss Strickland lays great stress on the fact which she endeavours to establish, that Mary had nearly reached the West Port of Edinburgh before Bothwell met her with his band; for, she says,—“Mary either started earlier than was anticipated, or pushed forward with such unwonted speed to get into Edinburgh, that Bothwell, instead of surprising her, as he had calculated, in a lonely part of the old Linlithgow road, which then ran in an almost straight line near the coast [an error], encountered her and her little train in the suburban hamlet, anciently called Foulbriggs, between Colt Bridge and the West Port. If he had been ten minutes later, she would have escaped him altogether, for she was actually within three quarters of a mile of the castle,” &c. Miss Strickland speaks of “a vast amount of falsehood” as being overthrown by this view of the locality, substantiated as she thinks it is.

As this view of the incident has been taken three times in a century, with the

inference that there was no collusion between Mary and Bothwell, it may be worth while to inquire into the grounds on which its rests.

Let us first review the accounts given by contemporary writers. Buchanan says—"Bothwell waited for her coming at the Almond Bridge, as they had agreed, and took her, not against her will, to Dunbar." Herries, a partisan of Mary, says—"He stayed at the Almond Bridge till she came up." Robert Birrell, the Edinburgh citizen, in his *Diary*, speaks of the incident as taking place "at the Bridge of Cramond" (a bridge on the Almond river, though not the right one). Sir James Melville, who was in the queen's company on the occasion, only says—"in her back-coming betwixt Linlithgow and Edinburgh;" a vague phrase, but one much more likely to have been used regarding a spot midway between the two extremities of the journey, than one near its termination. An anonymous *Chronicle of the Kings of Scotland*, printed by the Maitland Club, gives "the brig of awmont" as the place. Finally, another anonymous, but remarkably faithful book, the *Diurnal of Occurrents*, printed for the Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, says, "between Kirkliston and Edinburgh, at ane place callit the *Briggs*" [the Briggs being to this day the name of a farm-house close to the Almond river, where it is crossed by the road between Linlithgow and Edinburgh]. Here are six writers of the period, of whom five clearly place the incident at the Almond river, while there is no contemporary writer who states or implies a locality close to Edinburgh.

Miss Strickland is content to overlook all contemporary historians and diarists in favour of one authority, and that is the Act of Parliament, passed seven months after the event, for the forfeiture of Bothwell, which, she says, describes the Queen's abduction as taking place when she was "on her way from Linlithgow to the town of Edinburgh, near the bridges vulgarly called Foulbriggis." This she considers as clearly referring to the suburb Fountainbridge, which once bore the name of Foulbriggs. But does it so?

The Act of Parliament in question is in Latin, and the words are "ad pontes vulgo vocatos foulbriggis." Is this rightly translated, as she translates it, "at the bridges vulgarly called Foulbriggis?" If so, is the modern Fountainbridge the place meant? These are questions which must be determined affirmatively before a modern historian is entitled to assume that this famous abduction happened in the immediate vicinity of Edinburgh.

That it is sometimes not easy to determine a locality in Scotland from a name, even when clearly expressed, must be well known to most persons acquainted with our country. Were we to read of an event of the sixteenth century as occurring at Ormiston or Normiston, how should we be able to tell whether it happened in East Lothian, West Lothian, or Peeblesshire, seeing there is an

Ormiston in each of these counties? Suppose Newton were assigned as the scene, where should we place it? The same may be said of Scotstown, Milltown, Kirktown, and many other names of places. Although, then, the Act of Parliament had indicated simply *Foulbriggs*, it would be by no means certain that the suburb of Edinburgh, once so called, was the place meant. This suburb might not bear such a name at the time. There might be some other Foulbriggs then so called, much more likely, from circumstances, to have been the scene of this famous abduction.¹

Now, so far from our having any proof of this suburb having then borne the name of Foulbriggs, we have no evidence that any such suburb then existed. We have no notice of either the suburb or the name previous to the beginning of the last century.

The possibility of there being some other place then called Foulbriggs, though not now known by any such name, will be readily admitted, when we consider that it was confessedly a vulgar or slang name for the place in question—*vulgo vocatos foulbriggis*. The casual and precarious nature of such names of places is well known, and is instanced in the history of this suburb itself, which certainly was called Foulbriggs during the first half of the last century, but for a long time has had a more elegant appellation. Suppose a different place, commonly or familiarly called Foulbriggs in the sixteenth century, but which got a new and handsomer name about two hundred and fifty years ago, could we be surprised at the old name in that case being forgotten?

But to revert to the Act of Parliament, the locality of the abduction is not simply stated as *Foulbriggs*. It is said to be *ad pontes, vulgo vocatos foulbriggis*. The assumption is, that this refers to “bridges” as a matter of fact, or description connected with the place, as if there could be no other interpretation for the words. But there are in reality no bridges at the suburb of Fountainbridge; at the most, there is a cover for a drain. The word *pontes*, as a descriptive term, does not apply there at all. Yet this part of the description calls to be disposed of before the Fountainbridge reading of the act can be accepted.

While it is clearly impossible to make the above phrase of the act apply rationally to the spot set forth with so much zeal by Crawford, Goodall, and Strickland, it can be interpreted in a tolerably satisfactory manner as relating to a spot harmonizing with the accounts of the contemporary historians. There is a well-known Latin description of Edinburghshire, written about the time of Charles I., and preserved among Sir Robert Sibbald’s papers in the Advocates’ Library, where the Gogar burn is described as flowing into the Almond river,

¹ It appears from Armstrong’s *Description of Tweeddale*, that there actually is a place of marshy character in the parish of Manor, which is called the *Foulbrig*.

"*a fontibus orientabilibus.*" The translation which fact requires for this is "at Easter Briggs;" for just in the fork between the two waters is a farm-house so called. There are, in fact, two farm-houses in this nook of land, both bearing the name of Briggs; but the one, situated near the Almond, and called in the maps as *per excellantiam* Briggs, or occasionally Wester Briggs, while the other is more generally named Old Briggs, but occasionally Easter Briggs. They have evidently got their common name from the two bridges of the Almond and Gogar, respectively adjoining to them, and within half a mile of each other. Now here we see *Pontes* given as the proper Latin for a place called *Briggs*. It was the fashion of that age so to Latinize names of places. In the same paper we have the Wyndbora burn called *Cornuftexuis*; Redhall styled *Aula-rubra*; Coates given as *Ovilia*, and so forth. Read by this light, the clause of the act of forfeiture presents itself in English as "at the Briggs, vulgarly called *Foulbriggs*. Can we doubt that it refers to the very place spoken of in Sibbald's manuscript—the very place stated in the *Diurnal of Occurrents*—the place which all the contemporary writers had in view when they spoke of "the Almond," and "the Bridge of Almond," for which terms it is exactly appropriate,—one of the houses being situated little more than a gunshot from the bridge by which the road from Linlithgow to Edinburgh crosses that river? As for the secondary slang name, *Foulbriggs*, it is easy to see how it might be temporarily acquired. The place, lying low on the banks of two rivulets, was formerly a remarkably wet spot, noted for inundations and marsh-water. When Charles I. was about to pay his first visit to Scotland, and the roads over which he was to travel were inspected, this portion of the Linlithgow road was reported to be not passable.¹ Such being the character of the spot, the *Briggs*—considering this as a general name for the two farms—might very well be at one time called *Foulbriggs*. The ground was afterwards drained, and the road improved, and then, of course, the qualifying syllable ceasing to be applicable, would naturally fall out of use, though there continues a trace of the name, or of the circumstances from which it arose, in the term *Foulmyre*, which continued at the beginning of this century to be applied to the park in which Easter Briggs is situated.

¹ In the Privy Council Record, we find large deliberations about the state of the roads over which the king's coach would pass. The following is the passage referred to in the text:—"There is no settled course resolved upon how that part of the hie ways fra the west part of the parish of Cramond to Kirkliston fords, wherein that part callit the Brigs stands, sall be helpit and repairit; whilk for the present is so ruinous, and the calsey leading to the said brigs so broken, as there is no sure passage that way, neither for horse nor coaches, whilk will be ane very great hinder to his Majesty in his remove fra Holyroodhouse to Linlithgow, and will be ane very great discredit to the country," &c.

It is of some importance to observe that the Briggs appears to be a name of antiquity beyond the era of Mary's abduction. In the Register of the Privy Seal is a letter, August 23, 1543, to Robert Hamilton *in Briggs*, making him captain and keeper of the Palace of Linlithgow. The name obviously arose from the bridges which had anciently existed at the spot for the passage of the contiguous rivers Almond and Gogar. Previous to the erection of the present bridge over the Almond at a late period in the last century, the river was for an unknown length of time deficient in a bridge at this spot; but not the less might a bridge have existed in an earlier age. The Tay itself was without a bridge at Perth from 1622 to 1778.

In assuming that the Act of Parliament clearly points to Foulbriggs, near Edinburgh—which, however, we have seen that it does not—much importance has been attached to it as a *State document*—a voice paramount to all others on the subject. But it happens that there is another State document which places the event at the Almond river. This is a remission under the Privy Seal, granted on the 1st October 1567, to Andrew Redpath in Deringtowne, for “art and part of treasonably coming in company with James Earl of Bothwell, and unbesetting the Queen's way on her return from the burgh of Stirling to the burgh of Edinburgh, *near the water of Almond.*” Admit that we are to set an Act of Parliament very decidedly above an entry in the Privy Seal Record, where their voices are equally explicit, what are we to say when we find the inferior document clear and explicit, whilst the so-called superior document is obscure and equivocal? If we farther find that the expression of the superior document is susceptible of an interpretation in conformity with the inferior, and with all other reports on the subject, what are we to say? These are questions which seem hardly to need an answer.

The evidence for the Almond locality is, after all, not yet exhausted. We are instructed both by the paper usually called *Murray's Diary*, and by French Paris's confession, that Bothwell spent the night preceding the abduction at Hatton, a place obviously convenient for the purpose, if the attack was to be made at the Almond bridge, being little more than three miles directly southward, but far from being a suitable basis of operations for an attack at Fountainbridge, near Edinburgh. Paris, moreover, states that the Queen, at Linlithgow, told him to say to Bothwell, at Hatton, that she would assuredly meet him at the bridge (*le pont*), a phrase suitable for the Almond locality, but manifestly not so for that pleaded for by our three historians.

There is a geographical objection to the Fountainbridge locality which should not be overlooked, and which should perhaps have been adverted to at an earlier point in this discussion. Fountainbridge is not upon the road from Linlithgow

to Edinburgh. It is upon the Glasgow road. And the Queen, travelling from Linlithgow to Edinburgh, could not have passed through the supposed Foulbriggs of those days without turning back at a point close to the city.

Another important local consideration is the singular suitableness of the spot called the Briggs for the capture of the Queen. Situated in an angular piece of marshy ground between two waters, it afforded no safe means of flight for a party attacked from the south. If Bothwell had no reason to believe that Mary was willing to be taken, or had any grounds for apprehension that her little train of councillors and servants would attempt a rescue or favour her flight, he could not have selected a place where he was surer of his victim. Of course, it was equally a suitable place for keeping up the show of an unwilling capture. Here there can be no argument on either side. But the case is obviously different with the Fountainbridge locality. Collusion or no collusion, the abduction could not have been attempted there without putting the whole scheme to hazard.

I cannot but fear that this may appear a too laborious treatment of so small a point in the biography of Mary. I can only plead, in apology, that the public rules the taking of an interest in every point of that lady's history which approaches authentication. Perhaps I may further claim that the discussion is calculated to afford us a lesson in the philosophy of evidence, and a profitable exercise of those faculties by which we endeavour to ascertain truth in regard to historical events.