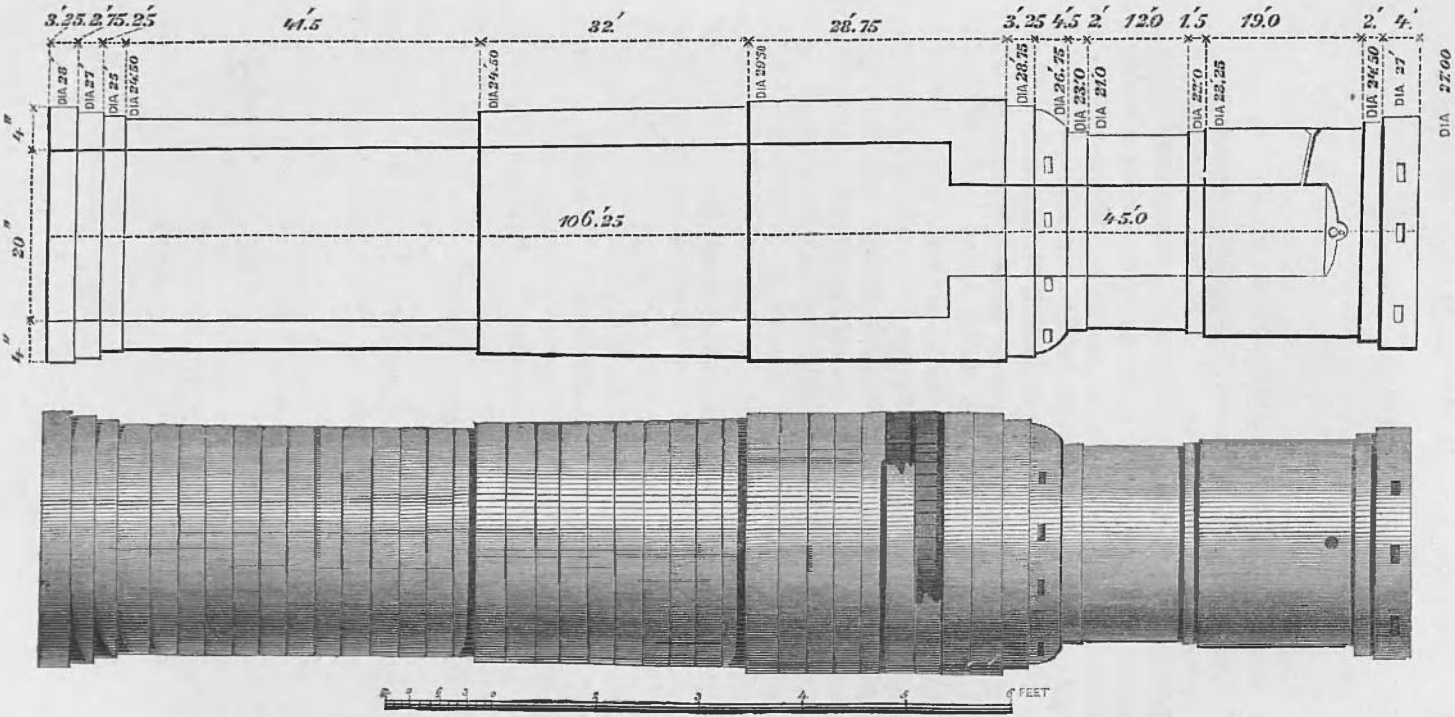


Mons Meg, used at the Siege of Dumbarton, 1489, and at Norham, 1497, in the reign of James IV., King of Scots.

MONS MEG,

THE ANCIENT BOMBARD, PRESERVED AT EDINBURGH CASTLE.

CANNON, constructed of iron staves bound together with hoops of the same material, were in use for so long a period that it becomes very difficult, in the absence of written testimony or well-authenticated tradition, to assign a date to any particular examples that may have come down to us. Of the great gun of Ghent, which, except in its dimensions, is almost identical with *Mons Meg*,[1] Captain Favé has recorded his belief that it is in all probability the very "bombarde merveilleusement grande" mentioned by Froissard as employed by the citizens of Ghent against their neighbours of Oudenarde.[2] And that cannon of this fashion were still in use in the days of Henry VIII., is a fact familiar to us all from the well-known operations upon the wreck of the *Mary Rose*.[3]

Famous guns, like famous nations, begin their history in the faltering accents of tradition. The early days of Mons Meg are chronicled in a Galloway legend; which, however, had so much weight with Sir Walter Scott that he wrote to Mr. Train, a distinguished Scottish antiquary, who had communicated to him the local story with such corroborative facts as he could collect: "You have traced her propinquity so clearly as henceforth to set all conjecture aside."

The legend in question has been preserved in Wilson's "Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time."[4]

"The Earl of Douglas having seized Sir Patrick M'Lellan, Tutor of Bomby, the Sheriff of Galloway and chief of a

[1] A representation of this bombard may be found in the Vade Mecum du Peintre, par Felix De Vigne, Gand, 1844, plate C.

[2] Du reste, il existe encore aujourd'hui à Gand une énorme bombarde qui, selon toute probabilité, est celle dont a parlé Froissard."—*Du feu Grégeois, &c.*, p. 174.

[3] Of the wrought-iron bar-and-hoop guns recovered from this vessel, sunk at Spithead in 1545, several very perfect specimens remain. One is preserved in the grounds of the Royal Military Repository at Woolwich; another is in the Tower; and a third is figured and described by Sir Charles Lemon in the Reports of the Royal Institution of Cornwall for 1844. All these retain their wooden carriages, with the blocks by which the chambers were wedged close to the chase.

[4] Vol. i., page 130.

powerful clan, carried him prisoner to Threave Castle, where he caused him to be hanged on 'The Gallows Knob,' a granite block which still remains, projecting over the main gateway of the Castle. The act of forfeiture, passed by Parliament in 1455, at length furnished an opportunity, under the protection of government, of throwing off that iron yoke of the Douglases under which Galloway had groaned for upwards of eighty years. When James the Second arrived with an army at Carlingwark, to besiege the Castle of Threave, the M'Lellans presented him with the piece of ordnance now called 'Mons Meg.' The first discharge of this great gun is said to have consisted of a peck of powder and a granite ball nearly as heavy as a Galloway cow. This ball is believed, in its course through the Castle of Threave, to have carried away the hand of Margaret de Douglas, commonly called the Fair Maid of Galloway, as she sat at table with her lord, and was in the act of raising the wine-cup to her lips. Old people still maintain that the vengeance of God was thereby evidently manifested, in destroying the hand which had been given in wedlock to two brothers, and that even while the lawful spouse of the first was alive. As a recompense for the present of the gun, and for the loyalty of the M'Lellans, the king, before leaving Galloway, raised the town of Kirkcudbright into a Royal Burgh, and granted to *Brawny Kim*, the smith, the lands of *Mollance* in the neighbourhood of Threave Castle. Hence the smith was called Mollance, and his wife's name being Meg, the cannon, in honour of her, received the appellative of 'Mollance Meg.' There is no smithy now at the 'Three Thorns of the Carlingwark;' but a few years ago, when making the great military road to Portpatrick, which passes that way, the workmen had to cut through a deep bed of cinders and ashes, which plainly showed that there had been an extensive forge on that spot at some former period." * * * In addition to this, (adds the correspondent of Sir Walter,) Symson, in his work written nearly a hundred and sixty years ago, says: "The common report also goes in that country, that in the Isle of Threaves, the great iron gun in the Castle of Edinburgh, commonly called *Mount Meg*, was wrought and made."

To the above tradition the sober-minded archaeologist will

probably object that it is of somewhat too melodramatic a character. "Brawny Kim," and the Tutor of Bomby, King James and the rebel Douglas might have passed; but the shot of retribution,—as heavy as a cow, and impelled by a peck of powder,—passing through the walls of the Castle, straight into the banqueting-room of the Fair Maid of Galloway, dashing the wine-cup from her perjured lips, and carrying off her hand; that very hand which had been given in wedlock to two brothers, and given moreover while the lawful spouse of the first was alive: all this smacks too much of the minnesinger's budget to be readily accepted as true history. The transition too from *Mollance* to *Mons* is sufficiently violent, besides having no voucher in contemporary records. But worse than this is, the Lady of Mollance, Brawny Kim's wife Meg, being called in to stand parcell-godmother to the great gun, when we know that in all the ancient records in which it is mentioned, the name *Meg* never appears: the piece is simply called *Mons*, and the first writer who applies to it the name of Meg is Drummond of Hawthornden.

While, however, we hesitate to give full belief to the tradition as it stands, let us remember that we have it in an accumulated form; and that, divested of the marvellous incidents with which three hundred years' currency among the gossips of Galloway may have embellished it, there is nothing in the simple history itself that may not possibly be true.

The first appearance of Mons for which we have a cotemporary voucher, is on the expedition of James IV. to besiege Dumbarton, when she was brought forth from Edinburgh Castle and carried to take part in the attack. In the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland of that period, under date of 10 July, 1489, we have:

"Item, given to the gunners to drink-silver when they cartit Monss, by the king's command, xviij shillings."[5]

In 1497 the great gun was again withdrawn from the Castle of Edinburgh and carried in solemn procession to Holyrood House, from whence she was taken by James IV. to the siege of Norham Castle.

[5] Tytler's Hist. of Scotland, vol. iii., Note U. Third Edition.

In the Scottish Treasury accounts of this time are many interesting notices of our bombard. She was mounted on a new carriage for the occasion, as appears by the following entries :—

July 24, 1497. "Item, to pynouris to bere ye trees to be Mons new cradill to her at St. Leonard's quhare scho lay, iij sh. vi d."

July 28. "Item, for xiij stane of irne to make graith [6] to Monsis new cradill and gavilokkis [7] to gu with her, xxx sh. iiij d."

"Item, to vij wrights for twa dayis and a half ya maid Monsis cradill, xxiij sh. iiij d."

Among other entries of the same period we have :—

"Item, for viij elne of canwas to be Mons claiths to cover her." Another item is for painting the canvas.

"Item, to the Minstralis that playit before Mons doune the gait, xiiij sh." [8]

In 1501, 1527, 1532, and 1539 various payments are recorded for the well-keeping of Mons and her carriage. On one occasion she is "ourelaid with reed leid" and her "quheles and extreis creischit [9] with Orknay butter."[1]

In 1558, on the rejoicings consequent on the marriage of Queen Mary with the Dauphin of France, the great gun was again in request; for, on the 3rd of July in that year, we find this payment made by order of the Queen Regent: "To certain pyonaris for thair labouris in the * * * of Mons furth of her lair, to be schote, and for the finding and carrying of hir bullet efter scho was schot, fra Weirdie Mure [2] to the Castell of Edinburgh, x s. viii d." [3]

In 1578, among the "Towellis, Plenissingis,[4] Artaillierie and Munitioun within the Castell of Edinburgh, pertening to our Soverane Lord and hienes derrest Moder," our bombard again appears as "Ane grit peice, of forgit yron, callit Mons." [5]

In 1633, when King Charles I. visited Edinburgh, Mons

[6] Gear.—*Jamieson.*
[7] Iron crows.—*Ibid.*
[8] Tytler, as above; and Letter of A. Macdonald, Esq., Curator of the Museum of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland, to the Board of Ordnance, Oct. 1835. See also Sir Walter Scott's "Provincial Antiq. of Scotland," vol. i., p. 21.
[9] Wheels and axletrees greased.
[1] Macdonald, as above.
[2] Wardie is fully two miles from the castle.—*Wilson*, p. 131.
[3] Macdonald.
[4] Furniture.—*Jamieson.*
[5] Macdonald.

was found unfit to join in the salute which welcomed His Majesty from the Castle: "Item, to * * * * for rining and wining of the tuich hole of the iron peice that had beene poysoned thir many yeares by gane, iij * * *."[6]

At the surrender of Edinburgh Castle in 1650, Mons appears under a new style and title: "The great Iron Murderer called Muckle Meg;" and in another document she is denominated "the Great Mag."[7]

Sir John Lauder of Fountainhall, in his Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs, records that in October, 1680, "the Duke of York having visited the Castle of Edinburgh,—for a testimony of joy, the gun called *Muns Meg* being charged by the advice of ane English Canonier, in the shooting was riven; which some foolishly called a bad omen. The Scots resented it extremely, thinking the Englishman might of malice have done it purposely, they having no cannon in all England so big as she."

In Maitland's History of Edinburgh, published in 1753, we read: "Adjoining to the fourth or innermost gate of the Castle, *on the ground*, lies a huge piece of ordnance denominated *Mount's Meg*." By the phrase, "on the ground," it would appear that Mons was at this time without a carriage.

In 1754 our venerable bombard, riven, rusty, and carriageless, was sent to England; but she does not seem to have quitted the land of her glories without a plunge, for in the Tower books of this date we find John Dick applying to the Board of Ordnance for compensation "for injury to his vessel and hawser on shipping the great gun at Leith for conveyance to the Tower."

In 1829, on an application to George the Fourth, in which Sir Walter Scott was prominently active, Mons Meg was restored to Scotland; and in her march from Leith to Edinburgh she was "attended in grand procession, and with a military Guard of Honour, to her ancient quarters in the Castle."[8]

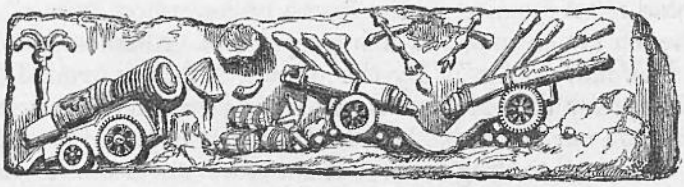
Under date of June, 1835, the Officer commanding Royal Artillery at Leith Fort informs the Board of Ordnance that "the large gun called Mons Meg, placed in the Battery in the Castle of Edinburgh, fell down with a great crash." The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland also report the wreck

[6] Macdonald. [7] Ibid. [8] Ibid.

of "the old wooden carriage, which had crumbled almost to dust," and pray the Board to grant the supply of a new one. In accordance with this wish, a new carriage was constructed at the Royal Carriage Department at Woolwich, and forwarded to Edinburgh in 1836. It is of cast-iron, and still supports the honoured remains of *The Great Murtherer*.

The name of *Mons* borne by this bombard is generally attributed to its having been fabricated at the town of that name in Flanders; and this probability seems to gather strength from the circumstance of the great gun of Ghent resembling it so closely in model and construction. Hall tells us besides how James II. of Scots in 1460 besieged Roxburgh Castle with "his newe Bombarde lately cast in Flaunders, called *the Lion*."

At various periods of her career, the appearance of Mons Meg has been preserved by the arts of portraiture: by the sculptor, the modeller, and the engraver.



An ancient sculptured stone, apparently of the close of the sixteenth century, which once formed part of a gateway in Edinburgh Castle, and is now fixed over the entrance to the Ordnance Office there, exhibits the figure of Mons mounted on one of her old "cradills." In the "Memorials of Edinburgh" is an engraving of this stone, which, by the kindness of the author, we are enabled to place before our readers. The appearance of Mons, when forming one of the "Lions" of the Tower, may be seen in the model which is still preserved in the Tower Armories.

The engraving at the commencement of this paper is from a drawing also preserved in the Tower; the one furnished by Lieutenant Bingham, R.A., for the purpose of constructing that new carriage which, we have seen, was supplied in 1836. On the technical accuracy, therefore, both of forms and figures, we may entirely rely. The Commanding Officer of Royal

Artillery, in forwarding this drawing from Scotland, communicates also the traditional account, that "the fracture disclosing the longitudinal bars took place the last time the gun was fired." It is scarcely necessary to say that the bursting of the cannon may be attributed to the increased strength of the powder of the seventeenth century as compared with "a peck" of that of the fifteenth. Of the extraordinary charges used anciently for various kinds of *gonnes*, there is no more curious instance than that cited by Captain Favé (*Du feu Grégeois*, &c., p. 158), from an old treatise of "Canonnerie," of unknown date, printed at Paris in 1561. To charge your "baston de canonnerie :"

"Vous debvez mesurer la longueur du baston par dedans, despuis la bouche d'iceluy jusques au fond, et icelle longueur diviser en cinq parties égales ; desquelles l'une sera pour mettre le tampon, et l'autre sera vuide, et les autres dernieres doivent estres chargées de bonne poudre." That is, the charge of "strong powder" is to occupy *three-fifths* of the barrel.

The mode of construction of the Scottish Gun is plainly shown at the point where it has been "riven." Longitudinal strips of iron are ranged like the staves of a cask and welded together ; and then a number of rings or hoops, also of wrought iron, are driven tightly over them. The thickness of the bars is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches ; that of the hoops, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. There is no core beneath the strips, as in some early bar-and-hoop guns (for instance, Nos. 118 and 119 of the collection at the Royal Military Repository at Woolwich) ; but the welded staves themselves form the concave cylinder. The magnitude of this engine, the contrivance of its parts, and the nice proportions of its outline, show that it is by no means one of the earliest efforts of the gunsmith's art. Cannon at first were conical in form, a curious example of which will be found in a Sloane manuscript in the British Museum, No. 2433, vol. B, fol. 113 ; figured by Strutt in his *Dress and Habits*, and by the Emperor of the French in his *Études sur l'Artillerie*. When first made cylindrical, the gun would probably be of equal thickness throughout. The next step would be to strengthen the portion near the charge. Further experiences would show that the action of the powder on the various parts of the piece would be best met by a graduated construction ; and thus we arrive at the plan

of the gun before us ; consisting of chamber, first and second reinforce, and chase. To such a model one can scarcely accord a higher antiquity than about the middle of the fifteenth century. The apertures shown at the base ring and at the upper end of the chamber are of unusual occurrence ; but they are found in the Great Gun of Ghent, and appear also in the figure of an ancient pierrier given by Ufano. The purpose of them, according to the local tradition (for the communication of which we are indebted to Robert M'Kerlie, Esq., Ordnance Storekeeper at Edinburgh Castle), was "for moving Mons Meg from her bed or 'lair,' when that was found necessary, by means of iron levers."

Monstrelet, under the year 1478, has an amusing account of the trial of a "grosse bombarde," carrying a ball of "ccccc livres de fer," made at Tours ; which may be consulted by those who find interest in the details of the early days of "Canonnerie."

J. HEWITT.