

PLEA FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE EDWARDIAN
FORTIFICATIONS OF BERWICK-ON-TWEED, ADVANCED
BY THE REV. JAMES KING, B.D., AT A GOVERN-
MENT PUBLIC ENQUIRY HELD REGARDING THEM.

In accordance with an order of the Local Government Board a Public Inquiry was held at the Town Hall, Berwick-on-Tweed, on Friday, 24th November, 1905, regarding the ancient monuments of the borough, and at this inquiry, held by P. M. Crosthwaite, Esq., Commissioner of the Local Government Board, the following statement was made by the Rev. James King, B.D. :

The Edwardian Walls of Berwick-on-Tweed are situated in St. Mary's Parish, of which I have been Vicar for twenty-six years. Some years ago a representative of the Board of Works called on me at St. Mary's Vicarage, stating that the First Commissioner of Works had deputed him to inspect and report on the ancient masonry of Berwick, and at his request I accompanied him on a tour of inspection round the fortifications. The largest of three fragments of the old wall had just been wantonly pulled down while the right of building on the site was a matter *sub judice* in the law courts. Gazing on the dilapidated blocks, white as marble, scattered over the grassy mound, the begrimed and neglected fragments near the Bell Tower, and the fosse bestrewed with rubbish, he exclaimed : " This is pitiful, most pitiful." We inspected the Bell Tower, and from the existence of a Tudor arch in the stonework and other indications of comparatively late work, concluded that it belonged to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was merely a restoration or rather a reproduction of an ancient Edwardian tower that occupied the same spot in days of yore. The two neglected fragments are hoary with the age of six centuries, and are now the only frag-

ments standing of the Plantagenet Wall that once extended from the castle eastwards to the large corner fort in the Magdalene Fields. The Commissioner remarked that the Tudor Walls were superior to the Walls of York and Chester, and that Berwick was the best walled town in the whole kingdom. He made a note to the effect that the Elizabethan Walls, under the care of the War Department, were in excellent condition ; the Edwardian masonry under the care of the town, utterly neglected. In ancient times the glory of Jerusalem, Troy, Rome, Athens, etc., consisted in a great measure in their colossal walls, and Berwick's fame largely consists in her ancient masonry. Take this away and our famous town is reduced to the level of a big village unnoticed and unknown.

Shortly afterwards the Town Council sanctioned the demolition of the two remaining fragments of ancient work close by the Bell Tower, precious relics that amid all vicissitudes have stood firm for six hundred years, and link together this twentieth century with the era of the Plantagenets. This demolition was sanctioned on the plea that the site was wanted for the erection of houses, although there is unoccupied ground sufficient for the accommodation of double the number of people living in this small parish. The news of the threatened demolition rapidly spread through the kingdom, and created a storm of indignation, as it was felt that the wanton destruction of precious relics of a glorious era would be an irreparable loss not only to Berwick but to the whole kingdom.

His Honour Judge Greenwell, at a trial held at Berwick, said that the case raised the question how far the Corporation was justified as trustee of a national monument in destroying it for the sake of a paltry ground rent—especially as the Corporation was not like some others, an indigent one.

At the Michaelmas Quarter Sessions held a month ago, H. F. Manisty, Esq., K.C., Recorder of Berwick, said that Berwick was a very ancient and historic town : their history was writ large in their good old walls, and as no man would wish to tear out one single page of his title deeds, so he hoped that the Walls of Berwick might remain a standing evidence of the history of that old

town. Anything which recalled the history of that town should be preserved to the last stone.

The British Archaeological Society, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest, the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries, the Durham and Northumberland Archaeological Society, and many other learned bodies, raised their voices against this needless destruction, and the public press, with a united consensus of opinion, protested against such barbarous Philistinism. Let me quote briefly from two voices which give adequate expression to public feeling.

Mr. Nigel Bond, secretary to the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest, writing to the *Times*, says: "Much damage has been done in the past to the historic remains in Berwick-upon-Tweed but sufficient has yet been spared to remind the inhabitants and visitors to the town of its close connection with the great Plantagenet who there gave judgment between the rival claimants to the Scottish throne at the end of the thirteenth century. The proposed demolition is to be carried out in order that a modern dwelling house may be erected, and the site thus enhanced in money value for the benefit of the 'Freemen' of the town. Resolutions expressing regret at the announcement which have been passed by the Society of Antiquaries and other bodies might be quoted to show the general feeling on the subject among those who have made archaeology a special study, and who are capable of forming a just opinion on the comparative value of such remains. Can it not be brought home to the Freemen of Berwick that they, as landlords, have duties and responsibilities as well as privileges, and that to increase the financial value of their land without regard to any other consideration may be to neglect these responsibilities?"

In the *Quarterly Review*, April, 1905, the writer on "Our Neglected Monuments" says:—"There is a historical city in the north, once the Border capital of two warring kingdoms, the stronghold aimed at in every attack, unique among the cities of the island in the position inherited from those stormy times, and formerly a separate entity between England and Scotland, but not

reckoned to either. This city possesses ancient monuments of singular value. It is enclosed in a complete circuit of fortifications, erected in the days of Queen Elizabeth in a form of particular interest to students of military works, and there exists remains of a far ampler enceinte, taking in a sphere half as large again as the Elizabethan, and larger than the existing town can fill to-day. This is the enceinte made when 'Edwardus Primus Scotorum Malleus' fortified Berwick-upon-Tweed with a fosse eighty feet wide, and built a wall of solid masonry behind it, bristling with towers. It is the enceinte of the ancient days, when the watchmen of these towers looked over to the north and west for the gleam of spears over Halidon Hill, or the swift approach of wild riders on Caledonian ponies round the level strip along the coast. In most parts it has been merged in the later Elizabethan circumvallation, but fifty years ago a stretch of more than half a mile of it remained, with the ditch fully marked, and fragments of Plantagenet masonry at intervals along it. One tower, rebuilt in Tudor times, has been called the 'Bell Tower' because the tocsin was said to be sounded from it at the alarm of a Scottish raid. This part of the circuit faced the side of danger, and was fullest of all in historical associations. On the side towards the Tweed it joined the castle, also of Edwardian origin, in the hall of which the English Justinian gave judgment on the claimants to the Scottish crown. The site of the hall, which both Scot and English might well have united to honour, is now occupied by the platform of the North British Railway station, and the castle has almost passed out of existence. The position of the Edwardian enceinte just referred to remained intact till about 1850, when the Town Council filled in and levelled part of it for a cattle market. Another position was recently destroyed to form a site for a primary school. Early in 1904 the Tower Council of Berwick hammered down another fragment of Edwardian wall, filled up another section of the fosse and built thereon a house, while they let on building leases another ample section of the enceinte. Then at last a public spirited citizen lifted up a voice that for a long time seems to have been almost a solitary one. The Rev. James King, Vicar of St. Mary's, Berwick, wrote to all

the papers and to every person of influence he could think of, and succeeded at last in arousing both official attention and that of the public to the outrageous act of vandalism which was in progress. The Town Council was bombarded with letters of protest in the journals, and remonstrances from antiquarian societies, both local and national. Questions were asked in the House of Commons. Public money, moreover, was actually preferred to make it easier for the town to do what it should have been proud to accomplish, as a duty owed to its own fair fame and historical repute. The spirit in which the Town Council was pleased to receive these representations and the further proceedings in the matter of the threatened enceinte need not here be described. The matter has only been adduced as an object lesson, and no object lesson could display more effectively the attitude we adopt in this country in regard to historical monuments. The proposal was only made because those responsible for the government of the town had no sense of the value of that part of the civic assets, and this shows how precarious is the existence of many monuments which are part of the history of the country, and for the loss of which future generations will call us to account."

The Rt. Hon. James Bryce, M.P., has also written me a sympathetic letter.

Amid the storm of public indignation I informed the Treasury, the War Office, the Board of Public Works, and the Local Government Board of the threatened demolition of the ancient fortifications, but feeling that such public bodies might delay in taking action, I penned a letter direct to His Gracious Majesty the King.

His Majesty, on hearing of the contemplated destruction of these historical remains, at once dispatched a delegate to stay the demolition, and but for His Majesty's prompt intervention the ancient fortifications of Edward the First and King Robert the Bruce, extending as far as the Bell Tower, would have been levelled with the ground. The King's messenger was, however, too late to save a large fragment of Berwick's original wall, namely, a solid block of masonry ten feet high with external ashlar, welded together with hot lime and forming a mass as hard

as adamant. This relic of a stirring era in our national history had witnessed many strange vicissitudes and outlived the downfall of thrones and dynasties, but in spite of much earnest pleading to spare this survival of days of yore, it was battered down by a building contractor.

The King's messenger recommended the Government to purchase the whole of the ancient fortifications extending for about three hundred yards, but the Treasury refused to entirely relieve the Town Council of their responsibility. The Government consented to lease for 150 years the section of the fortifications containing the Bell Tower and the two ancient fragments aforesaid, committing the remainder to the protection of the Town Council.

In spite of Royal intervention and Government aid, in spite of the moral indignation of the nation, it is sad to learn that the Town Council have proposed to sell for building purposes another site on the Edwardian fortifications adjoining the section purchased by the nation; and are now only awaiting the necessary sanction of the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury. There exists no adequate reason for further demolition, since the proposed erection is not for the housing of the working classes, and would not only obscure the ancient work but would also mar the beautiful panorama that meets the eye on passing the cattle mart towards the sea. Should the Government fence off the ground leased, the site threatened would prove a great boon to my humble parishioners. The ruins of our ancient borough, hoary with the age of six centuries, from their historical associations ought to be regarded as inviolable. Let me therefore ask the Local Government Board to protect from further demolition one of the most interesting monuments of antiquity which the United Kingdom possesses. Let me earnestly entreat the Town Council as loyal citizens and trustees of our historic treasures to consider this question in a magnanimous spirit, and resolve to reserve every inch of Berwick's Edwardian fortifications intact to the kingdom and to posterity.