

ART. XII.—*The Fords of the Solway.* By W. T. McINTIRE.

A GLANCE at the map of the north-west of England will show that the district now comprised within the boundaries of Cumberland and North Westmorland is almost completely isolated from the surrounding lands by ranges of hills. On the east rises the wall of the Pennines; on the west is the barrier of the Lake Mountains; while to the south, uniting these eastern and western boundaries and closing up the gap between them, is a high ridge, which, though traversed by several passes, nevertheless to the present day proves a formidable obstacle to intercourse. All strangers who penetrated their way into Cumberland in the past from the south or east, whether their purposes were those of peaceful commerce or hostile aggression, had to cross these barriers by routes which in early times must have involved difficult and dangerous travelling, and the partial isolation from the rest of England thus brought about has had a profound influence upon the history of Cumberland.

From the north only, over the low lying plains which fringe the head waters of the great Solway estuary, is there easy access to Cumberland, and throughout the course of recorded history relations, sometimes friendly but often alas hostile, have been maintained between the inhabitants of Cumberland and those of the neighbouring districts of Scotland.\*

This intercourse between the peoples inhabiting the opposite coast-lands of the Solway makes the study of the

\* An attempt to illustrate this intimate connection between the two districts has been made in an article, "Historical Relations between Dumfriesshire and Cumberland," in *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, Third Series, xxi, 70-87.

means of communication between them one of more than usual interest and directs attention to the history of the ancient fords of the Solway and its tributary rivers which formed such important links in the routes between the two countries. Certainly in medieval times and during the years which preceded the union of the crowns of England and Scotland the vital importance of these waths or fords was realised. As will be shown later on, they were jealously watched and guarded, and the sites of more than one of them became recognised meeting places for representatives of the two kingdoms for the discussion of matters of international interest. The fact moreover that these fords were often used by invading armies frequently caused commanders of such hosts to encamp near the neighbouring villages and gave these hamlets an importance which they have lost since the union.

Naturally the waths most often used were those across the lower waters of the Sark, Esk and Eden before these rivers unite their waters to form the wider expanse of the Solway Firth, but the delay involved in taking the long circuitous route round the head of the estuary was a frequent cause of travellers preferring to face the perils of the tides and quicksands of the Solway itself and making use of one of its recognised fords in order to shorten the journey to or from West Cumberland. These Solway fords were moreover always at the disposal of invading armies or bands of raiders. Camden, not without national prejudice, described the inhabitants of the Scottish shore in 1586 as "a War-like kind of Men, who have been infamous for Robberies and Depredations; for they dwell upon the *Solway Frith*, a foordable arm of the Sea at Lowwaters through which they made many times out-rides into England for to fetch in Booties." He adds in more cheerful strain a passage which perhaps inspired Sir Walter Scott to write the description of the Solway salmon hunt in *Redgauntlet*:—"The Inhabitants thereabout on

both sides with pleasant Pastime and delightful Sight on Horseback with Spears hunt Salmons whereof there is abundance."

These lower fords of the Solway will be dealt with in detail later in this article, but those over the tributary streams must first be described. The best known of these were those of Greenbed or "Willie of the Boats" over the Esk, not far from its confluence with the Solway, the Peatwath across the Eden near Castletown and the Rockliffe Wath, also across the Eden, about two miles higher up the stream and almost opposite Rockliffe Church.

An ancient track led from Dumfriesshire across the Esk at Willie of the Boats and on to the Eden which was forded at the Peat Wath. Its course may then be traced along field roads to Beaumont, whence it made for Carlisle, where, passing beneath the western slope of the castle hill, it continued along the line now occupied by Collier Lane and went on by Wreay to Penrith.

This route was frequently used by invaders and raiders who crossed the Eden, either by the Peat Wath or Rockliffe Wath. The Peat Wath was specially popular with invaders as a convenient route for getting into Cumberland without having to pass near the strong fortress of Carlisle. During the Edwardian wars against Scotland this route was frequently employed by English armies. When the dying Edward I in 1307 assembled his army at Burgh-by-Sands, he probably contemplated leading his troops over into Scotland by the Peat Wath or the neighbouring Sand Wath over the Solway.

Beaumont, during the course of these military operations, must have become a place of no little importance and the discovery there of the "Beaumont hoard" of coins of Edwardian and earlier date (*Transactions*, o.s., viii, 373ff.), perhaps bears witness to Scottish reprisals which led to its concealment during the woeful period

after the death of the " Hammer of the Scots." It was by the Peat Wath that Robert Bruce entered Cumberland in 1322 upon the occasion of the terrible raid described so vividly by the Lanercost Chronicler (*Lanercost Chronicle*, translated by Sir Herbert Maxwell, pp. 237-238), when he plundered Rose Castle and Holm Cultram Abbey, and leaving death and destruction in his train, penetrated as far into England as Preston, returning with impunity.

A study of the map reproduced from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, to illustrate Hutchinson's account of the battle of Sollom Moss in 1542 (*History of Cumberland* II, 548) or of that given with the late Mr. W. Nanson's article upon that battle (*Transactions*, o.s., viii, 257), will make it evident that it was for the Peat Wath or Rockcliffe ford that the Scottish army was making when it was overwhelmed by the sudden attack of the English and its own internal dissensions.

The Jacobite army in the rising of 1715 was foiled in its attempt to cross the Peat Wath by the height of the swollen waters of the flooded river and was likewise frustrated at the fords at Cargo and Grinsdale, higher up the Eden. It had to follow the right bank of that river as far as the neighbourhood of Brampton before it was able to proceed on its southern march.

Prince Charlie was more fortunate in 1745, for one of the divisions of his army, including the Prince himself, who had taken a short period of repose at Rockcliffe Hall was able to cross the Eden by the Peat Wath. This is the last time the famous ford was used for military operations (See Beattie's *Prince Charlie and the Borderland*, 49). The prince passed the following night, that of November 9th, at the hamlet of Moorhouse, four miles west of Carlisle, in a still existing house known as Stonehouse.

It must have been at the Peat Wath that, in 1216, an invading host of Scots met with a disaster recorded in rather triumphant strains by the chroniclers of Melrose

and Lanercost. The Scots under Alexander II had invaded Cumberland in revenge for King John's invasion of Berwick, and a party of the Scottish king's followers, despite their leader's promise to respect the property of religious houses, had plundered Holm Cultram Abbey, carrying off books, vestments and vessels of the altar, as well as the horses and cattle belonging to the abbey. So thorough was their work of spoilation that we are told they stripped the coverlet from the bed of a monk who was lying sick to death in the infirmary. What the monks regarded as divine vengeance was not slow in overtaking the robbers; for while they were crossing the Eden near its junction with the Solway on the return journey to Scotland they were overtaken by a tidal wave and were drowned to the number of 1900 (*Holm Cultram Register*, pp. 128-29).

The importance of the task of maintaining the defence of the passages of the two waths over the lower Eden did not fail to impress the authorities responsible for the protection of Cumberland, who established at Rockliffe a small castle, "a preate Pile," or "Castel of the lord Dakers," as Leland describes it in 1589, built "over Edon on the further Ripe about a iiii myle frō Cairluel." The scanty remains of this castle have been described by the late Mr. T. H. B. Graham in these *Transactions* (N.S. x, 108) and by the late Mr. J. F. Curwen in *Castles*, 391. What concerns the purpose of the present article is the consideration of the function this fortalice filled in the protection of the ford. This purpose is clearly explained in the "Rules for the Defence of the Borders," prepared for the use of Lord Burghley in 1583 (see *Border Papers*, I, 101). The passage alluding to Rockliffe Castle is as follows:—

*Rokele Castle*.—First—the farthest strength of the West Borders adjoining to Scotland and the sea, is Rokeley castle apperteyninge to the baronie of Broughe in the hands of th'eiers of the late Lord Dacres. Most requysite yt is that there allwaies

be as in the time of the late lord William Dacres and others his predecessors before him, a true hable and sufficient man not onlie to kepe the same, but also chiefilie to se that all the borderers and tenants apperteyninge to the same be well and sufficientlie horst and gerde (geared or armed), as by the tenure of their holdes, lands and farmes, which they have verrie good, and at verrie small or litle or no rentes, they are for the defence of that contrye bounde to be.

And to have 100 or 200 of them nightlie with him, especiallie at the ebbinges of the water, some to watch at the fords for the keepinge out of the Scottishe theves of Greteney, Redhawl, Stilehill and others of the Batable landes of Kinmowthes retynewe that comonlie use to ride in the nighte time throughe the said barronie of Browghe to th' incontrie, and not only breake pore mens howses and onsets, but bereave them of all that they have, both incite, horse and cattle, and that which is worse, their lyves also—which by good keepinge and true foresighte of them that watche maie easillie be holpen and saved, either by their imedyate resistance, or tymelie givinge of their crie and shoote inwarde to that parte of the contrie, that everye man hearinge the same, maie be not onlie redie to save himselfe but to joyne with and helpe his neighbour also. And all this may be done as often yt. is, by the lord wardens comaundement if yt. be well executide, without any chardges or expences to her Majestie, havinge whan anie great nede is, but th' onlie helpe of her Majesties souldiers that then lie at Carlill or thereabouts, which care not nor forceth of their foods (feuds), as the borderers greatlie doe and are afraide of.

Later references to Rockliffe Castle emphasise the same point—the necessity for its being maintained to guard the fords and to serve as an outpost from which the garrison of Carlisle could be summoned to come to the aid of the district in case of a formidable raid. We learn, too, that Rockliffe was often appointed as a meeting place by the wardens of the English and Scottish Marches to discuss difficult questions arising between their respective nations. Thus Lord Scrope, on Sept. 18th, 1590 writes to Burghley: "Yesterday I met Sir John Carmichael at Roakley, where we held a day of march, and entered into such mutual justice as hath not been done this many years" (*Cal. of Border Papers*, I, 367).

Again, on Nov. 25th, 1597, Henry Leigh, acting as deputy for Lord Scrope, writes to the Warden describing an interview he has had at "Roclyffe" with Lord Ochiltree, Lord Herries and others, appointed by King James VI "to burn and subdue the fugitives about Gretnay."

The importance of Rockliffe as a meeting place was eclipsed, however, by that of the next Solway ford to be mentioned—the far famed Sulewath at the mouth of the Esk in Gretna parish. In the days before 1552 when the English and Scottish commissioners established the present border line along the Sark and across by the Scots' Dyke to the Esk, the Esk itself in its lower course was considered the boundary between the two kingdoms. The late Dr. Neilson in his *Annals of the Solway* has explained how the name of the Sulewath, which he derives from the words *sol*, common to the Anglo-Saxon and Norse languages with the meaning "mud", and *waeth* (O.N. *vað*), "a ford" has come gradually to be applied to the whole estuary of the Solway, and from the 13th century onwards the phrase "from the Rere Cross on Stainmore to the Sulewath" became, as the late Mr. T. H. B. Graham aptly expressed it (*Transactions*, n.s. xxix, 343), almost equivalent to the "from Beersheba even unto Dan" of Holy Writ as signifying the whole extent of our district. Numerous examples of its use might be quoted, as for instance that in a Memorandum of the descendants of Waldeve son of Gospatric, lords of Allerdale [Scottish Documents (Chancery), File 9, No. 3], of c. 1275, in which William II is represented as granting to Ranulf le Meschyn "totam terram a loco qui dicitur Rere Crosse super Stayn moram usque flumen versus Scociam quod vocatur Sulewaht ad metas certas ibidem inter Angliam et Scociam." In 1249 the Border sheriffs and jurors declared it to be established that the counties of Dumfries and Cumberland ought to answer at Sulewath, according to the laws and customs heretofore in use

there between the two realms, and it was by the Lochmabenstane\* by the side of the Sulewath that the meetings on "days of truce" between the wardens of the Western Marches of England and Scotland took place. Here, at a spot easily accessible by the representatives of both nations, were held the trials of men accused of border treason, reiving and other offences against the laws of the Marches. The clause in the Border Laws has often been quoted by which a borderer found in unlawful possession of an animal claimed by a subject of the other country, had at an appointed time, to drive the stolen beast into the Esk. If it could pass the middle line of the stream in safety the culprit was held to have satisfied the plaintiff's claim, but if it drowned before reaching mid-stream, the defendant in the case was responsible for its value.

The Lochmabenstane at the Sulewath was not, however, regarded merely as a meeting place for the administration of border justice. On more than one occasion it was the scene of the meetings of royal commissions. Thus in 1494, commissioners of both realms met at the "Loughmabanstane" in an attempt to settle the vexed question of the removal of the fishgarth which the English persisted in constructing in the Esk, a question afterwards deemed to be of such importance that when James IV of Scotland, before the battle of Flodden Field, in 1513, challenged the Earl of Surrey to decide the dispute between England and Scotland by single combat, one of the two questions he proposed to put to the issue of the combat was the destruction of the Esk fishgarth, the other being the possession of Berwick-on-Tweed.

In 1485 there was a meeting of representatives of England and Scotland to arrange a peace. On the other hand, the stone and its neighbourhood were often the scene of bloodshed, notably in 1448 when the famous

\* For an interesting account of the Lochmabenstane, see James Logan Mack. *The Border Line*, 78-81.

battle of the Sark was fought between the Percies and the Douglasses. On that occasion many of the defeated followers of the Percies were slain or drowned in attempting to effect their retreat across the Sulewath.

Another occasion on which severe fighting took place at this famous ford was in 1383. The Earl of Douglas with an army of Scots had made a successful raid into Cumberland in the course of which he and his followers rifled Penrith fair and returned with a rich booty into Scotland. The plunderers however had small cause to rejoice over their victory, for some of the cloth which they had taken at the fair was infected with the plague, which broke out in Scotland and caused, it is said, the deaths of a third of the inhabitants of the districts of Scotland concerned. Moreover, to avenge themselves on the robbers, the English in turn raised a body of raiders and invaded Scotland, burning and pillaging as they went. They were ambushed, however, on their way back near the Sulewath by a body of 500 Scots, who slew 400 of their enemies, while many who survived the sword of the victors perished in the waters of the Solway.

Before quitting the subject of the Sulewath and Lochmabenstane, it is interesting to notice that one of the decisions of the Wardens' court at the Lochmabenstane casts some light upon the situation of the now forgotten manor of Brunscaythe, which Denton in his "Accompt" describes as being "beneath the river Eden, near the wastes," and Nicolson and Burn confuse with Brunstock near Carlisle. The manor of Brunscaythe was held by the de Feritate family of the barony of Liddel.

In 1280 a man named Henry Scot had bought a mare at Carlisle fair, but one John Wyncheles, alleging that the animal had been stolen from him, brought Henry before the court at "Solewath." The jury returned a verdict to the effect that from time immemorial it had been the established custom in case of a robbery the plaintiff must

within a day or night after that robbery, according to the distance of the place where it was committed, declare at Brunscaythe on the English side and Rocheland on the Scottish side the details of the robbery and provide the jury with evidence (*Cal. Doc. Scot.*, II, 58). This record, unfortunately only a fragmentary one, seems to establish the fact that the manor of Brunscaythe was on the part of the Solway Coast between the Esk and the Eden.

It remains to consider the principal fords across the Solway itself, or rather that portion of it which extends from the head of the estuary down to the last fordable place near Bowness. This portion of the estuary, sometimes a waste of sands intersected by narrow channels and streams, at other times a sheet of troubled water after the sudden inrush of the tides, is some twelve miles in length with a width varying from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles to  $3\frac{3}{4}$  miles. Despite the length and dangerous nature of its fords, they were frequently used in medieval times, not only on account of the short cuts they provided on the journey between England and Scotland but also because they afforded additional means of passage for armies which sometimes crossed the Solway fords in three or more separate divisions, to unite their forces at some convenient rendezvous on the opposite shore.

There were two of these fords—the Sandwath, known also as the Dornock Wath, and the Stonywath or Bowness Wath. Of these fords the Sandwath was by far the longer. It led from near Sandsfield on the English shore to some point not far from Dornock on the Scottish side of the Solway. The ancient port of Sandsfield probably owed some of its original importance to its proximity to this ford. It is a well known fact that the waters of the Solway have receded during the course of the last few centuries; witness the alleged discovery of a wharf upon the Esk near Netherby. As recently as 1794 when Hutchinson wrote his history of Cumberland, he added a note to his account

of Rockcliffe:—"The river Eden is navigable at spring tides for vessels of 80 tons burden as far as Rockliff. The district or extent of the port of Carlisle, which is the mother port (under which is Rockliff Sandsfield, Sarkfoot, Bowness, etc.) is from Bankend, near Maryport, to Bankend at the extremity of this parish (Rockcliffe) on the south-east, as the river cannot be navigated further up but by boats, or small sloops" (*History of Cumberland*, II, 526). To his account of Beaumont he adds a note by Houseman: "Sandsfield is a small port, at which are imported considerable quantities of fir timber, iron, flax, tar, rice and merchant goods: the export is small, a little wheat, butter, alabaster, etc." Sandsfield is now merely a small hamlet of interest to some students of Scott, who trying to follow the somewhat difficult topographical allusions in that writer's *Redgauntlet*, identify Sandsfield as the place whither Redgauntlet took and concealed the abducted Darsie Latimer in Father Crackenthorp's inn.

In the days of Border warfare, however, this now quiet hamlet must frequently have witnessed stirring scenes, for the Sandwath was frequently employed by raiders. Such a raid in 1333, is described in the Lanercost Chronicle (Maxwell's translation, p. 277). On this occasion the English raiders were attacked before they were able to get away from Dornock:—

"On the next day to wit, on the vigil of the Annunciation of the Glorious Virgin,\* Sir Antony de Lucy, having collected a strong body of English Marchmen, entered Scotland and marched as far as twelve miles therein, burning many villages. But as he was returning on the following day with the booty he had taken, the Scottish garrison of Lochmaben attacked him near the village of Dornock on the Sand Wath, to wit, Sir Humphrey de Boys and Sir Humphrey de Jardine, knights, William Baird and William of Douglas, notorious malefactors, and about fifty others well armed together with their followers from the whole neighbouring country. They charged with one intent and voice upon the person of Sir Antony, but, by God's help and the gallant aid of

\* March 24th, 1332-3.

his young men, these two knights aforesaid were slain, together with four and twenty men-at-arms. William Baird and William Douglas were captured, and all the rest fled disgracefully. No Englishmen were killed, except two gallant esquires, to wit, Thomas of Plumland and John of Ormsby, who had ever before been a thorn in the eyes of the Scots. Their bodies were straightaway taken to Carlisle and honourably interred. Sir Antony, however, was wounded in the foot, the eye and the hand, but he afterwards recovered well from all these wounds." (See also Dr. George Neilson, on *The Battle of Dornock* in *Transactions* of the Dumfries and Galloway Antiquarian Society, 1895-6, pp. 154-158).

More frequently used than the Sandwath was the Stonewath or Bowness Wath between Bowness and the Scottish coast near Annan. This wath must have been constantly employed during the campaign of Edward I in 1300, when that king, making Skinburness his base of operations, invaded Scotland by way of Dumfriesshire and Galloway, bringing an English fleet into the Solway to follow the march of his army along the coast and to keep it supplied with munitions. Many details of this expedition are to be found in the *Roll of Caerlaverock* and in Dr. Neilson's *Annals of the Solway*. A possible relic of the presence of the English troops at Bowness is a set of thirty silver coins of Edward I of England and Alexander III of Scotland found in 1884 on the road between Bowness and Whitrigg by Mr. Wills, a local farmer. These coins are supposed to have been dropped from a cart laden with sand and gravel from the sea-beach. More coins of Edwardian date were found during the course of excavating the Roman fort at Bowness.

It was probably by the Bowness Wath that Edward's enemy, Robert of Winchelsea, archbishop of Canterbury, who had been waiting impatiently to deliver the message of the pope, bidding the king relinquish his Scottish enterprise and hand over the land already conquered to the papal see, weary of Edward's continued evasion of the desired interview, took a guide and passed over to

Scotland on horseback. The archbishop described the experience as one fraught with danger owing to the perilous channels and quicksands through which his route lay. (*Register of Holm Cultram*).

It would naturally be by this route, as being the nearest way to England and to safety from his enemies, that the usurper of the Scottish throne, Edward Balliol; made one dark December night in 1332 his escape from Annan. Warned in the midst of a banquet of the sudden approach of Lord Archibald Douglas, the unfortunate king mounted half-naked upon his steed, and never drew rein until he reached the protecting walls of Carlisle, where he was honourably received by its captain, Lord Dacre (Creighton, *Carlisle*, pp. 63-64).

One more record we possess of a passage of the Bowness Wath by a medieval traveller, if indeed as the late Dr. Wilson contended (*Transactions*, N.S. xxiii 17-28) it was by the western route that Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, made his return journey from Scotland. The future pope describes his arrival in a village on the English shore which seems to answer in its position to Bowness; he tells of the state of poverty in which he found the inhabitants and their eagerness to share the bread and wine he had brought with him. Of special interest is his account of a false alarm during the night of the approach of a party of raiders from Scotland which, his new acquaintances told him was a frequent occurrence at night when the state of the tide permitted the enemy to wade across the channel. He describes the prompt disappearance of the men who left their women folk to look after themselves. Fortunately the alarm proved to be unfounded, as the travellers who had been observed crossing by the ford turned out to be friends.

Such raids both by Englishmen and Scots were common about the Bowness Wath, and tradition has it that one of the bells in Bowness church is a trophy of such a raid

undertaken by the men of Bowness to retaliate upon a band of Scottish raiders who had stolen the Bowness bell and lost it in the Solway.

To defend the fords of the Solway a line of castles and towers sprang up along the English shore in the course of 14th and 15th centuries. Rockcliffe Castle has been mentioned earlier in this article, and continuing the line of fortalices were Burgh Castle guarding the approaches to the barony of Burgh by the Peat Wath or Sandwath, Drumburgh Castle and Bowness Tower of the Brun or de Feritate family commanding the approaches from the Sandwath and Bowness Wath. The Bowness tower has disappeared, but old pictures of the village show some remains of it near the church, and there were still living in recent years old inhabitants of Bowness who used to state that they remembered the last portion of the ruin being blown up with gunpowder. Finally there was Wolsty Castle, built to protect the property of Holm Cultram abbey. The foundations only of this castle, where legend asserts the books of Michael Scot, the wizard, were once preserved are now to be traced. In addition to these castles were the fortified towers of the churches of Burgh and Newton Arlosh which appear to date from about 1360, or later in the case of Newton Arlosh. The tower, now fallen, of Holm Cultram church also served for the protection of the inhabitants of Abbeytown; for after the dissolution of the abbey they petitioned the crown for its preservation stating that it was their only means of protecting themselves from the attacks of raiders, and adding the plausible argument that if they were deprived of this means of defence they would be so much plundered that they would be unable to pay their dues to the crown.

Despite the protection afforded by this line of fortalices and towers—"the ring of the border between Woolsty and Rowecliffe," as it is aptly called in a "Memorandum on the Borders" of 1580 (*Cal. Border Papers*, p. 32)—the

dwellers in the unfortunate lands opposite the Solway fords continued to suffer from the inroads of the Scots. The verdict and presentment of the Jury of Survey on the attainder of Leonard Dacre in 1589 referring to Drumburgh Castle makes the following report:—Drombrughe. Also we do p'sente that there is a stone house behealded at Drunburghe within the said manner (manor of Bowness) commonly called Drumbrughe Castell the which is in greate decay of Re'ations and it is a house of very good strength for the reliefe of th' inhabitants their aboute both for themselves and their goods if the Scottes should to make any sudden rode or forroo (as when the see ebbeth they may easily do) before other reliefe can come unto them and the same is situate within one myle of Scottelande but the water of eaden there called Sowleway wherein the sea doth flowe is betwixt the same and Scottelande." (*Transactions*, N.S., xx, 221).

That the Scots used these fords on occasions of more distant raids is shown from a statement in a letter written by Lord Scrope to Lord Burghley, dated Nov. 29th 1519. He complains that a band of "8 score of Scotts and outlaws," who had come to burn Stenton (Stainton) near Carlisle but had been "well bett," had spoiled some houses in Drumburgh on their return, evidently by the Stone Wath (*Cal. Border Papers*, II, 811).

It was found necessary to supplement the protection afforded by the line of castles and towers mentioned above with a compulsory system of patrols at all fords and other passages by which the Scottish raiders might pass. The nightly posts of these watchers were specified in the regulations for the defence of the Border in 1552. These regulations are given in Nicolson and Burn, I, lxxxvii, and an examination of them will show that every section of the Solway coast between Bowness and the Sulewath had its appointed watchers. The burden of maintaining this watch must have been a serious one. When in 1544

Henry VIII ordered every fifth man to be taken to serve in France there was consternation in the Holm Cultram district, and one of the arguments used by its inhabitants in a petition for relief from this drastic demand was that their fighting forces would thereby be so depleted that they would be unable to perform their duties of watching the fords or protecting their villages from the raiders. (*Register of Holm Cultram*, 174).

That the duties of these watchers were dangerous is shown by the following description of a raid which took place in 1542 (the year in which the battle of Solway Moss was fought).—"The Scottes upon Mounday a nyght of the secunde of October to the nombre of three score in botes entered into the Lordshippe of Thoome (Holm Cultram) and there ner to the sea burnt two houses and did take two watchers and thre other; ane olde man did they bere away in a shete" (*Ibid.* 174). Here the raiders used boats. It is to be noted that to take vengeance on the raiders a band of English crossed the Solway raided Annandale and burnt thirty houses in Dumfries. Fishing in the Solway was a dangerous employment in Elizabethan times and we find that fishermen in the Holme were compelled to restrict their activities to the Stank, an inland sheet of water described in a petition of 1637 as "a Piscarye contyning twenty acres and upwards called the Stancke." This lake which was used as a watering place for cattle by the tenants of Raby Cote, Saltcoates, Brownrigg, Seville and other neighbouring hamlets has long ago been drained. There does not seem to have been any system of maintaining guides to conduct travellers across the Solway fords similar to that which existed in the cases of the fords over the estuaries of the Kent and Leven where guides were provided by the neighbouring religious houses of Furness, Cartmel and Conishead. Probably there was not the same demand for guidance over the Solway fords where the distances to be covered by the

traveller were short compared with those it was necessary to travel in the cases of the southern estuaries. Very likely the inhabitants of the villages near the waths earned a little money from time to time by conducting travellers.

There seems in the 14th century to have been some system of supervising the traffic which crossed the Solway by the fords, for on November 18th, 1341, Edward III appointed Richard de Denton to inquire into the complaint of William de Bohun, earl of Northampton, constable of England, that his men of Annandale, coming as of old by the Solway, to sell their goods at the fairs and markets of Carlisle, were hindered and unduly taxed by the deputy-keeper of the Solway (*Cal. Doc. Scot.*, iii, 283).

With the union of the crowns of England and Scotland a more peaceful era dawned upon the Solway and its fords. The waths, however, became notorious on account of the manner in which they were employed by smugglers who chose these unfrequented routes to evade the vigilance of the Excisemen. Smugglers of whisky into England became specially active after the Act of Parliament of 1820-21, prohibiting the bringing of whisky from Scotland into England. Very ingenious were the methods employed by these smugglers to conceal their wares. Carts were provided with secret lockers; cheeses were hollowed out and made receptacles for whisky; boxes, trunks, milk cans, knapsacks and garments were used to cover hidden containers of spirits. Bladders were made to fit the bodies of females so as to give them what was euphemistically described as "a certain appearance." Bladders of whisky were attached to dogs who were trained to carry these burdens through the fords from the Scottish shore to men who were waiting to receive them on the other side.

Interesting allusions to the uses of the fords and to the perils which beset the traveller are to be found in Scott's *Redgauntlet* and Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*, in which

Mr. Bramble and his fellow travellers are represented as finding signs of a disaster upon the Solway sands and coming to the mistaken conclusion that one of their friends had perished in the tide.

The ford of Willie of the Boats acquired in the days of the Gretna Green romances a certain romantic interest of its own, for it was frequently employed by run-away couples, who in their haste to escape from their pursuers, chose this hazardous short cut to Gretna in preference to the longer but safer road round by Longtown. They were sometimes foiled, we are told, by the vagaries of the Solway tide, and had to wait impatiently beside the Esk fearing every moment to be overtaken by an irate parent. This ford was superseded by the old "metal bridge" a cast-iron structure, the work of Thomas Telford, when the road between Carlisle and Gretna toll-bar was constructed in 1826. A fragment of the ironwork of this interesting bridge, which in its turn was replaced by a modern structure, when the increased traffic brought about by the establishment of the munition works at Gretna during the time of the Great War gave rise to a demand for a wider road over the Esk, is now in the garden of the Museum at Tullie House, Carlisle.

As an instance of a comparatively late use of one of the Solway fords one might conclude this article with a quotation from the life of George Moore, the Cumbrian philanthropist by Samuel Smiles. A short time before his departure from Cumberland for London in 1825, young George Moore was given a commission by Mr. Todd, a banker at Wigton, to take to a cattle-dealer at Dumfries a sum of money he required for the purchase of some cattle. Accomplishing the journey to Dumfries on horseback, Moore acquitted himself of his commission, and was afterwards persuaded by the cattle-dealer to assist him in driving the cattle into England. To avoid the long road round by Gretna the cattle-dealer resolved to drive his

cattle across Solway Sands and George Moore, ever ready for adventure, expressed his readiness to accompany him. The following is the account of their adventure as related in the biography:—

“ The tide was then at a low ebb. The waste of sand stretched as far as the eye could reach. It was gloaming by this time and the line of the English coast—about five miles distant—looked like a fog-bank. Night came on. It was too dark to cross then. They must wait till the moon rose. It was midnight before its glitter shone upon the placid bosom of the Firth. The cattle-dealer then rose, drew his beasts together, and drove them in upon the sands.

They had proceeded but a short way when they observed that the tide had turned. They pushed the beasts on with as much speed as they could. The sands were becoming softer. They crossed numberless pools of water. Then they saw the sea waves coming upon them. On! On! It was too late. The waves which sometimes rush up the Solway three feet abreast were driving in amongst the cattle. They were carried off their feet and took to swimming. The horses, upon which George Moore and his companion were mounted, also took to swimming. They found it difficult to keep the cattle together—one at one side and one at the other. Yet they pushed on as well as they could. It was a swim for life. The cattle became separated, and were seen in the moonlight swimming in all directions. At last they reached firmer ground, pushed on and landed near Bowness. But many of the cattle had been swept away, and were never afterwards heard of.

With this description of a crossing of the Solway—a description, which, though it seems rather vague with regard to topography, casts a vivid light upon the hardships and perils encountered by the generations of travellers who made use of the Solway fords—must conclude this brief and inadequate account of those ancient routes from Cumberland into Scotland.