

## A Derbyshire Cavalier.

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TO the impartial historian it does not appear that Derbyshire displayed much enthusiasm for the Royal cause during the Civil War; what energy was shown was on the other side. The stubborn independent dwellers in the county, accustomed to liberty of thought and action, had little sympathy with the divine right or the privileges of kings; they were the determined upholders of the rights of freemen. Some few noblemen and gentlemen who nominally held their broad lands of the King by knight's-service might feel themselves compelled, even against their better instincts, to follow their monarch to the field; others, from pride of birth or devotion to his person, might consecrate their lives and fortunes to his cause; but the majority of Derbyshire men, both gentle and simple, were ready and willing to fight to the last for their inherited constitutional rights.

The history of the Civil War discloses but few Derbyshire names in the Royal ranks. It is true that we find Cavendish, Harpur, Fullwood, Shallcross, and the Roman Catholic families of Eyre, Powtrel, and Fitzherbert, amongst the Royalists; but on the other side are ranked the greater part of our county gentry—Gells, Bradshawes, Curzons, Gresleys, Morewoods, Cokes, Ashenhursts, and many others. It is also true that Mr. Fullwood endeavoured to raise a corps of Derbyshire miners to act as a bodyguard for the King, but they showed little inclination and less alacrity to enter into such a dangerous service.

Whilst engaged in some literary research in the library of the British Museum, I stumbled upon divers notices of a devoted follower of Charles I., which may be interesting to Derbyshire folk, as he was descended from a High Peak family, and worthily upheld the honour of his native county.

Lewis Kirke's father was born in the little village of Norton, on the Yorkshire borderland, a place which, in later years, was to become celebrated as the birthplace of the great sculptor Chantrey. His grandfather was born at Whitehough, in the parish of Chapel-en-le-Frith, about a mile from Bradshaw Hall.

Lewis himself was born at Dieppe, whither his father had migrated, and where, marrying a French lady, he had established a thriving business as a merchant and shipowner. Lewis Kirke and his elder brother, David, were early distinguished as daring seamen and successful traders, as M. Ferland (*Cours d'Histoire du Canada*) says, "The brothers had contracted a taste for dangerous enterprises, and were respected as very good navigators by the Dieppians, at that time the most skilful and hardy sailors of France. Thanks to their talents and energy, the Kirkes advanced rapidly in England."

Gervase Kirke, the father of Lewis, formed a company of merchant adventurers for trade and piracy on the coast of North America. Drake and Hawkins had set an example to bold English mariners which they were quite ready to follow; the morals of the age in which they lived left a wide margin for reckless and illegal adventure. The declaration of war between England and France in 1626 gave the desired opening, and the Kirkes eagerly launched themselves in an armed trading venture against the newly-established French colonies on the St. Lawrence and the coasts of Acadia.

It is not my intention to follow David Kirke and his brothers in their successful raid; has it not already been described in book-form, and in a previous number of this

*Journal*?<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that Lewis Kirke distinguished himself by bravery and courtesy, and was the first to hoist the flag of St. George over the citadel of Quebec. For three years, as Commandant of the Settlement in Canada, he kept that flag flying, until, in obedience to his King's commands, who had basely truckled to the French king for the sake of his own queen's dowry, he sadly hauled it down and returned to England.

Although he had deprived Lewis Kirke of the reward of his exploits, King Charles recognized his worth, and made him captain of the *Leopard*, one of H.M. ships in the Channel Squadron. Here he did good service, guarding the narrow seas and upholding the honour of the British flag.

When in command of H.M.S. *Leopard*, Captain Lewis Kirke met eighteen Dunkirk men-of-war about two leagues from that coast. "Two of them came within shot; the *Leopard* shot at them, and they struck and gave him each of them a gun. Afterwards the admiral sent a sloop, that came with his topsails up; but a shot being made from the *Leopard*, he struck and brought a compliment on board." [Letter of the Earl of Lindsey to Secretary of State.] Captain Kirke served in other men-of-war for several years with conspicuous success.

In February, 1649, he had an unpleasant experience. Political feeling was at that time running high; the breach between King and Parliament was imminent; Strafford's impeachment was decided on; men began to range themselves on one side or the other; duels and brawls were frequent. On one occasion Lewis Kirke was drinking in a tavern with Lord Morley and Mounteagle, and one Captain Peter Clarke. Wine was flowing freely, words were high, swords, which all gentlemen wore, were handy; a fight ensued, in which Captain Clarke was mortally wounded. Lord Morley tried to throw all the blame upon Kirke, but Clarke's widow, in her petition to the King for justice, asserted that it was Morley himself who struck the fatal blow. Both men were put upon their

<sup>1</sup> *The First English Conquest of Canada*, Sampson Low, Marston & Co.; *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 1880, p. 17.

trial, with what result I know not, but it must have ended favourably for the accused, as in the following year we find Lewis Kirke in command of a troop of horse, and employed under Lt.-Col. Monck and the Earl of Ormond in the suppression of the rebellion in Ireland. In this ruthless campaign, when the King's troops executed martial law on the insurgents, laying waste the country, and slaying the fugitives without distinction or mercy, Lewis Kirke was conspicuous for his bravery and clemency.

In the attack upon Knock Castle, not far from Trim, he was dangerously wounded, but as soon as his wounds were healed we find him again in the front fighting line.

When King Charles raised his standard at Nottingham, Lewis Kirke joined the Royal forces. He accompanied the King to the West of England, fought in the bloody and indecisive battle of Edgehill, and took part in the siege of Gloucester and in the battle of Newbury. Here he behaved with such marked gallantry that a few days after the battle he was knighted by the King at Oxford on the 23rd April, 1643.

In 1644 we find him Governor of Bridgnorth Castle,<sup>1</sup> and commander of the forces which supplied the various garrisons on the Severn valley from Shrewsbury to Worcester. He was under the immediate command of Prince Rupert, with whom he was in constant correspondence. His position was a difficult one: the country was disaffected, treachery and lukewarmness to the Royal cause conspicuous. In a letter dated February 22nd, 1644, Sir Lewis writes to Prince Rupert:

“ May it please your Highnes.

“ By the treachery of the townsmen of Salop y<sup>r</sup> towne is surprisid & taken by the rebels, & the castle by composition yielded up. Wherefore y<sup>r</sup> garrison of Bridgnorth under my

<sup>1</sup> 1644. Item. For a quarte of burnt sacke and a quarte of burnt claret bestowed upon Sir Lewis Kirke, Governor of the towne, at his first coming to this towne (Bridgnorth *MS.*).

command being next unto them & y<sup>e</sup> cuntry about us plundered by them of such provision as sh<sup>d</sup> supply our wants, so we are not able to resist them by reason of our want of horse & foot. Your Highness knowing our condition & farther disabled in not receiving y<sup>e</sup> supplies of food from Ludlow which was ordered by y<sup>r</sup> Highness, nor contributions from y<sup>e</sup> cuntry this three months, nor like to receive any, the inhabitants & cuntry in general being rotten. After notice given them of our wants withdrawing themselves from assisting us either in provisions, monie or personal aid. Even Sir Edward Acton our next neighbour not appearing for our relief.

“ I am enforced to present for your Highness consideration of our condition here, humbly requesting your Highness to put mee into the power of 1,000 horse & foot if you shall think fitt, & then I doubt not by God’s assistance to give sufficient account of what is committed to my charge. Concerning your Highness letter for y<sup>e</sup> bringing into y<sup>e</sup> garrison y<sup>e</sup> provision of corne about y<sup>e</sup> cuntry adjacent, I desired the assistance of y<sup>e</sup> gentlemen of y<sup>e</sup> cuntry about us for y<sup>e</sup> performance of your order, who in their wonted delays referred it to a generall hearinge of all y<sup>e</sup> cuntry gentlemen which was intended to be next week at Salop, but in the sudden change all is frustrated, & I fear y<sup>e</sup> enemy will prevent us in this design unless your Highness supplie us with a speedy power of horse & foot.

“ Sir, I shall ever rest

“ Your Highness most humble servant,

“ Lewis Kirke.”

Short of provisions, without sufficient force of men-at-arms to make himself respected, the unfortunate Governor might well find the county and inhabitants altogether “rotten.” The country gentlemen were shuffling, and the capture of Shrewsbury put a crown to his misfortunes. There is a gleam of hope in his next letter :

“ May it please your Highness.

“ The happy newes of your Highness success at Newarke came to mee by the hands of Colonell Bagott Sunday morning : wee had that day a public thanksgiving here for itt, & signified it to Shrewsbury, where I presume there was that night much rejoicing. The same day Apley House was by Colonell Ellice retaken & in itt 10 commanders & 73 common souldiers of which 23 horse, with the loss of 4 men & 8 wounded nott dangerously. The Rebels commanded by Fox have possessed themselves of Stowerton Castle, Staffordshire, eight miles from this towne, the dwelling of one Horwood, a disaffected person. I have thither brought store of arms : If they shall be able to continue itt they will be a greate hindrance to the intercourse with Worcester. On the East syde of Severne Sir Gilbert Gerrard from Worcester Hartlebury Bewdley & Kydderminster hath drawne a partye of horse and foot & some odd ordnance that way with purpose to endeavour y<sup>e</sup> recovery of itt. I have sent 30 horse & 60 musqueteers to his ayde, & this day we expect to give your Highness some further account of the proceedings in that service.

“ I humbly take leave & subscribe myself,

“ Your Highness most humble servant,

“ Bridgnorth,

“ Lewis Kirke.

“ 25th March, 1644.”

The success at Newark refers to Prince Rupert's forced march from Shrewsbury, when he surprised the Parliamentary army before Newark, and, after a short action, compelled it to capitulate. Again he writes :

“ May it please your Highness.

“ I this daye rec<sup>d</sup>. a letter from Sir Walter Wrotesley desiring a convoy for some plate which he had layd up in his garrison & with which he says he intends to paye a Privy Seal of £50 sent him from Oxford. I desire to know your Highness pleasure, whether I shall convoy itt accordingly

or detain it here to abide y<sup>r</sup> Highness orders, & humbly take leave to rest,

“ Your Highness most humble servant,

“ Lewis Kirke.

“ Bridg-north,

“ 9th April, 1644.

“ I humbly pray y<sup>r</sup> Highness speedy answer. Sir Walter's servant attending the returne.”

Again, on the 18th April, he sends the following :

“ May itt please y<sup>r</sup> Highness.

“ Your orders for the delivery of the shott & sending the match to Shrewsbury came yesterday at noone to my hands, the shott I delivered immediately what the Commissary hath sent down to Worcester by the way on the west side Severne where he will neede no convoy. This course was his owne election. I had also punctually obeyed y<sup>r</sup> Highness order for a convoy. I sent away the match soe soon as possibly a carte could be gotten, soe that albeit your order came soe late as itt could not bee brought att y<sup>e</sup> tyme yett itt will be at Shrewsbury as neare y<sup>e</sup> tyme as could be contrived. Your Highness is pleased to signifie that itt was stopped by mee ; be pleased to know that it was here voluntarily left by the waggoner, his waggon being broken. I should not else have presumed to have stayed any ammuniton in going to y<sup>r</sup> Highness.

“ Here is great want of provision for your souldiers, there being nothing but bread & wine left to distribute to them, & that pay which is allowed to them makes them apt to mutter out their discontent, & will adapt them to quitt the service. The officers also are in much want & the towne so poore that they cannot afford them free quarters. I beseech y<sup>r</sup> Highness that consideration may be had of these things, & such orders given as are in y<sup>r</sup> Highness judgment shall be thought most fitt. I have this daye made staye of a barge

coming from Worcester in which I find ten bagges of monie which if they be silver I consider to bee about £100. I have sealed them up. They are said to belong to Mr. Boycott the muster-master. Your Highness may please to reserve itt here & paye itt by a note to Mr. Ashburnham att Oxford.

“ I shall in all obey & pursue y<sup>r</sup> Highness orders as becometh

“ Your most obedient servant,

“ Lewis Kirke.”

The Governor is now apparently in great distress, only wine and bread for the soldiers, no proper pay, discontent and grumblings; officers even in want. He has certainly a windfall in the ten bags of money, but that must be sent to the King's mint in Oxford. So they went on, with fitful gleams of success; but a steady depression was gradually deepening around them. The Royalist cause was evidently in jeopardy. Marston Moor was fought and lost, and the beginning of the end was apparent. In a letter dated 21st August, 1644, Sir Lewis writes:

“ May it please your Highness.

“ According to an order from y<sup>r</sup> Highness commissioners for the levying of the contribution I gave order for a party to be sent from Tonge Castle to Shyfnall on Sunday last to demand their contribution having not paid any hither for these latter months. And when they came thither the Lieutenant that commanded the party enquired for the Collector, who hearinge thereoff gott himself out of the church back door; then he took the constable & goinge away Sir Morton Briggs told the parishioners itt was a shame for them to see their constable carried away with soe few a number, & encouraged them to resist, which they did accordingly, & wounded most of the souldiers, & disarmed them, and called them Papish rogues & Papish dogges, & kept them prisoners five or six hours; and one Jobber in the companie of Sir Morton Briggs challenged to give battel to all the



forces in Bridgnorth & Tonge if they should come thither ; & divers other outrages were committed by them. Desiring your Highness pleasure what shall be done in itt & that you would give me leave to wayte on you. I am,

“ Y<sup>r</sup> Highness most humble servant,

“ Lewis Kirke.”

Evidently the heaven is working : the Royalist soldiers are despised and insulted ; one Jobber dares to defy the Royal authority, and, backed up by Sir Morton Briggs, challenges all Sir Lewis Kirke's forces to deadly combat. Bridgnorth itself soon afterwards became untenable ; Sir Lewis withdraws to Oxford. But the game is up. King Charles escapes in disguise from that city and surrenders to the Scotch army. Oxford itself, without food and hard pressed by the Parliamentary army, capitulates, and Sir Lewis Kirke was one of the signatories to the conditions of surrender.

The battle was fought out—to the victors the spoils. All Royalists had to compound for their lives and estates before the Commissioners for Compounding ; Sir Lewis was mulcted in the sum of £151. A certain noisy citizen of Bridgnorth, by name John Creswell, appeared before the commission and made claims against Sir Lewis for that “ his wife was for twenty-five weeks imprisoned in Bridgnorth by Sir Lewis Kirke & put to exquisite & unutterable torment with twisted cords, screws and fire until her nails and flesh was bored through, & the marrow fired out of her bones, on pretence that she gave intelligence to the Parliamentary party. He had been to great expense on her account ; his house burnt by the Cavaliers.” So he requests that Sir Lewis be made to compensate him. But even the stern and rancorous commissioners refused to believe such base calumnies, so John Creswell was hustled out without redress.

We have no record of our Cavalier from 1648, when he appeared before the Commission, until the Restoration, when the son of the unhappy King whom he had served so well made him Paymaster and Standard Bearer of the Corps of

Gentlemen-at-Arms, in which honourable post he remained until his death, which occurred in 1663, in the sixty-fifth year of his age. On his deathbed he dictated a petition to the King praying him to appoint his brother, John Kirke, who had acted as his deputy since he became Standard Bearer, to succeed him as Paymaster of the Pensioners, as he is dying. The place had been granted him for loyal services by sea and land, and brought him in £100 a year, being £2 for each pensioner, for keeping the accounts and other matters. His body was laid by the side of his father in the old church of All Hallows, in Bread Street.

Surely an active, honourable life, this of Sir Lewis Kirke; worthy of the race and country from which he sprang, and not unworthy of being recorded in the pages of this *Journal*.