

### III.—THE BIGG MARKET MILITARY EXECUTION, 1640.

#### THE YEAR OF NEWBURN.

BY JAMES CLEPHAN.

[Read on the 31st March, 1886.]

THE Bigg Market of Newcastle attests its antiquity by its name. The commodity of which it was once the mart has long since ceased to be sold within its borders. I had come to the conclusion, indeed, in my lack of knowledge, that it was, so to speak, obsolete in the land, until, midway in this nineteenth century, it happened to me to see in the Island of Iona a standing crop of peculiar aspect, and, inquiring its name, was answered "Bigg;" "bear or bigg," says Sir Walter Scott, "a coarse kind of barley, usually sown with oats on alternate ridges."

Memorable was the year in which a soldier was shot in our Bigg Market for mutiny. It gave birth to the Short Parliament that came and went with the spring, and saw the opening of the Long Parliament that endured from year to year, and lives for ever. In its month of May was written, in the church books of St. Andrew's, the burial record since copied with reiteration by our local annalists. In the autumn was fought the brief battle of Newburn that gave protracted occupation of Newcastle to the victorious Scots. Notable texts, threatening long discourse, but preliminary only to a few pages of trespass on the Transactions of the Society.

Let us first turn to the quaint tale told in the parish register when the soldier had been shot; of which, some few years ago, a careful copy was made for me through the courtesy of the Rev. W. B. East, now Vicar of Matfen:—"2 sogers, for denying the Kinge's pay, were by a kownsell of war apoyted to be shot at, and a pare of galos set up befor Tho. Malabers dore in the byg market. Thay kust lotes wich should dy, and the lotes did fall of one Mr. Anthone Wiccens, and he was set against a wall, and shot at by 6 lyght horsmen, and was bured in owre church yard the sam day, May, 16 day."

The parochial narrative is not without its difficulties ; it has its obscurities and perplexities ; but the fabled horn gives forth its fulness in time, and the locked-up story becomes vocal in our ears. Centuries after the year of Newburn comes the Calendar of State Papers (*Domestic*), scattered among whose leaves of 1640 are passages which make the dry bones live. Little thought the church historian of the month of May, while making his artless record, that Viscount Conway, then in chief command on the Tyne, was preparing dispatches, whose contents, condensed in a distant day into the *St. Andrew's Church Worker*, should make the parishioners so much better informed than their forefathers as to the mutiny of the year of Newburn. It was in the interval between the two Parliaments of 1640 that the death of Viccars was registered. Sir Fulke Huncks had arrived in Newcastle on the 29th of April, with his troop of seventy horse ; and it was within its ranks, in the ensuing month, that the mutiny occurred giving rise to the execution. It had been intended that the sentence of death should be carried into effect by the gallows, and, as the register shows, preparations were made accordingly. The intention, however, proved abortive ; and the explanation of the difficulty appears in one of the letters written from Newcastle, on Wednesday in the week subsequent to the burial, by Lord Conway, General of the Horse and Deputy-General of the Army, who commanded the English forces at Newburn in the month of August thereafter.

Making report of the mutiny to Archbishop Laud, his lordship writes :—" We had a mutiny here last week upon the pay-day for the twopence which is taken for arms. The spokesman on the occasion was apprehended. The next day, when I sent for the prisoner, twenty or more soldiers of the troop came very mutinously to my door. I took one of them, and condemned both to be hanged ; but believing that the death of one would terrify the rest sufficiently, I caused them to cast dice, and one of them was shot dead by five of his fellows, because I could not get one to hang him. The soldiers and townsmen thought—the one that I would not put him to death, the other that I durst not. I hear, (adds his lordship) that there has been a mutiny at London. If there should be occasion to use the horse that way, I think it would not be amiss to show them favour in not taking the twopence for arms, because that it is dear travelling, and it would not be fit to grieve the country."

To Algernon, Earl of Northumberland, Lord High Admiral of England and Lord General of the Army, Conway sends a similar account of the mutiny, and suggests that it might be well for him "to consider how that the horseman pays for all that he has, and dear enough. They are made to pay 20d. the pound for powder, which, if they must pay for at all, ought to be sold at the usual rate; and their arms are so very bad that many soldiers have had to pay 8s. or 10s. for mending them, but they can never be made good. Whosoever thinks that he does the King good service in putting off ill arms to them, shall be deceived if the King please to take notice of his losses."

In like manner, after reporting the mutiny to Secretary Sir Henry Vane, Treasurer of the Household, Conway closes his communication with a statement of the defects of the arms supplied to the troopers. Hardly any of the pistols sound: divers of the barrels without touch-holes. Prices of gunpowder and provisions excessive.

To Secretary Sir Francis Windebank his lordship had the like tale to tell; and on the 8th June he is writing to Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, Lieutenant-General of the Army in the North. "There are," says Conway, "two things which ought to be taken into consideration, the price of pistol-powder, and the extreme naughtiness [badness] of the pistols and carbines. They are patched up, and now that they come to trial they prove unserviceable, and it is not possible to mend them. Should the soldiers buy two case of pistols? I have written of it, but can get no answer. I verily believe that there be some that would be glad if the troops did mutiny; which they will do, if there be no consideration had of what they pay."

Thus did his lordship keep writing from Newcastle to men in office and authority. June and July wore away. English doubts as to a Scotch invasion lingered into August, despite Conway's contrary conclusions; confirmed, when the month was far spent, by information received from Sir John Clavering, of the crossing of the Tweed by the Covenanters on the 20th, "a world of men." Kept back in 1639, they are irrepressible in 1640. Horse and foot, sword and pike, musket and pistol, they stream over the Borders, "the Highlanders with bows and arrows, some swords, some none, the nakedest men ever I saw." Astounded is "Dugald Dalgetty, of Mareschal College, Aberdeen, follower of the immortal Gustavus," when, in the seven-

teenth century, "and in civilised war," he beholds the apparition of "the old artillery." "Bows and arrows!" he exclaims, "have we Robin Hood and Little John back again?"

From Lieutenant-General Sir John Conyers, Governor of Berwick, there is word that the invaders have "11 pieces of cannon, 54 field pieces, little drakes, and 80 frams, *alias* Sandy Hamilton's guns;" those "bend-leather guns," of which, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, Mrs. Bartoline Saddletree discourses with less rigid regard to the requirements of history than Dr. Robert Chambers in his *Traditions of Edinburgh*. Alexander Hamilton, General of Artillery in the Army of the Scots, a cadet of the noble house of Haddington, is at Newburn on the 28th with his leathern ordnance, known as "Sandy's stoups." Our forerunners in the Bigg Market beheld the invading host, with their motley arms, ancient and modern, in possession of the conquered and humiliated town. Here they were remaining from month to month, till 1640 gave place to 1641; and in July of the latter year, the St. Andrew's books are again contributing to our chapter of local history a significant burial note:—"James Ffylder, the 17 day, which fell of the walles and brand [brained] himself, one of the Skotes army, being one of the watch at Pilgram stre gayt." And so the story of the time moves on, Newcastle only passing away from the swift capture of 1640 to encounter the slow-coming shadow of the siege of 1644.