

VII.—THE RAID ON HAYDON BRIDGE, 1587.

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In 1587, less than twenty years before the Union of the Crowns, raiding or "riding" was still a full time occupation and means of livelihood for many Borderers. The sack of Haydon Bridge was no isolated incident. Encouraged by the enmity of Elizabeth and James VI who, despite expressions of goodwill and friendship, were willing to harbour the disaffected subjects of the opposite realm and unwilling to bring to justice those of their own subjects for offences against those of the other realm, almost nightly raids took place over the Border in both directions. Horses, cattle and sheep were driven off, houses, corn and hay burned and murder committed. Even at the meetings of the Wardens to administer justice it was not always possible to preserve the peace, feelings ran so high. At one such meeting in 1575 Sir George Heron, Keeper of Tyndale, was killed and at another in 1585 Lord Russell was murdered.

Justice was seldom obtained. A note on the decay of the Middle March in October, 1587, by Sir Cuthbert Collingwood, claimed that most of the murders, burnings and ransoms sustained at the hands of the Scots for the past eighteen years were unredressed and moreover that the Scots were being allowed to enter and leave the March freely and "no man durst find fault with them".¹ In fact the Scots were grown so bold that day raids were nearly as common as night and an anonymous writer to Burghley² suggested the desperate expedient of building a fortification on the model

¹ *Calendar of Border Papers* (hereafter *CBP*) i, no. 554. I have modernized the spelling and dating throughout.

² *CBP* i, no. 581.

of Hadrian's Wall as a defence against the Scots. A survey of the Border defences in 1580 had shown how badly they had fallen into decay, but nothing seems to have been done about them and the troops supplied for the defence of the countryside were few in number and poor in quality.³ But neither the weakness of the defences nor the breakdown of the machinery of justice were wholly responsible for the increasing lawlessness of the Borders. The great political crisis of February, 1587, the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, which led to a temporary outburst of indignation on the part of James VI and the Scottish Catholics, only intensified the raids. It was not so much the cause as the excuse for hostility and, although both sides gathered troops on the Border, the threat of war was not serious, for James could not afford so to compromise himself. However, in a postscript to a letter to Walsingham⁴ Sir John Forster wrote, "I am credibly informed that one of the chief men of Liddesdale was with the King, who commanded him and his company to take all that could be gotten out of England."

The "taking up" of Haydon Bridge is typical of many incidents not only of 1587 but of any year during the 1580's and 1590's and the story of the raid, which has been preserved in considerable detail, shows how deep rooted were the troubles of the Borders. On the one hand some Northumbrian and Cumbrian gentlemen, including some who held Border offices, were securing their own immunity from spoliation at the expense of their neighbours, and on the other James VI was not merely unable to bring to justice members of the powerful Border families and their followers, but was actively encouraging their raids. Both sides of the Border the countries were weakened by internal blood feuds between some of the families, in Scotland the Johnstones and Maxwells and in England the Grahams and Musgraves.

Shortly before the raid on Haydon Bridge "a great part"⁵ of the barony of Langley was spoiled by a few riders

³ CBP i, p. 282.

⁴ CBP i, no. 491, from Alnwick, Feb. 26, 1587.

⁵ CBP i, no. 557.

from Liddesdale who burned some houses and crops and came and went unmolested. Hunsdon,⁶ reporting the incident to Burghley, said that "none will help his neighbour though the Scots come by their doors with the spoil, saving Mr. William Fenwick,^{6a} Mr. Heron⁷ and now Sir Cuthbert Collingwood, perhaps by reason of his office,⁸ but before as little as any". This raid seems to have been in part a reconnaissance for the "taking up" of Haydon Bridge, at that time a town with about 200 men who could be expected to defend it.

The attack on the town itself was made by day early in October by a party of 400 horsemen from Liddesdale, Ewesdale, Eskdale and Annandale, led by William Armstrong of Morton Rigg, best known then and now as Kinmont Willie. The route they took is not very clear from contemporary accounts.⁹ It is possible that the Scots crossed the Border at the head of the Liddel and came south along high ground to the west of the North Tyne, but considering the composition of the party, it is more likely that they advanced over the Bewcastle and Spadeadam Wastes, an area much weakened by the feuds of the Grahams and Musgraves. A memoranda of 1584 describes it as in a defenceless state.¹⁰ Sir Simon Musgrave was Captain of Bewcastle, with his son as deputy, at the time of the raid, but the castle was in need of repair. Askerton Castle, nominally the headquarters of the Steward of Gilsland, and Naworth were also in disrepair. Moreover Thomas Carlton of Askerton had conspired with Kinmont two years pre-

⁶ Hunsdon was appointed Keeper of Berwick and Warden of the East March in 1568. In August, 1587, he was appointed also Warden of the Middle March in succession to Sir John Forster. *CBP* i, p. 269.

^{6a} Fenwick of Wallington married Grace, daughter of Sir John Forster. *NCH* iii, p. 57.

⁷ John Heron of Chipchase, son of Sir George, appointed Keeper of Tyndale in August, 1587, died c. 1590.

⁸ Collingwood was appointed Captain of Harbottle Castle in August, 1587. *CBP* i, p. 269.

⁹ The account of the raid is built up from Hunsdon's letters. *CBP* i, nos. 556, 7, 563, 574.

¹⁰ *CBP* i, no. 274.

viously and allowed him to enter the barony of Gilsland. So this side of the country lay open to the riders. In Henry VIII's time a party raiding the barony of Langley had crossed the Wastes and entered the South Tyne valley by Busy Gap, near Greenhead,¹¹ but on this later occasion they appear to have kept to the high ground until they were nearer their objective, for Mr. Heron's son saw them "where they came over the fell", and reported to his father, John Heron, whom one would expect to be in residence at Chipchase. Mr. Ridley of Willimontswike¹² also had news of their coming by 11 a.m. But in spite of their approach being known, the Scots were able to reach Haydon Bridge unopposed. Here at last they met with some resistance from the townsmen and some were wounded on either side. No help came from the men of the barony and Langley Castle, which was recommended as a fit place for a garrison in 1580,¹³ was in a state of ruin and unoccupied, so the riders were able to pillage the town and burn four houses before riding off.

Elated by their success, they decided to split forces on the way home, one party to go through the West March "taking up" two towns on the way, the other to go straight back over the Border. Here they miscalculated the temper of the countryside. The party returning by the West March were attacked and chased over the Border without "taking up" the towns as planned. One of their men was killed, another wounded and taken prisoner and part of the spoil, including horses, recaptured. The second party fell in with the men of North Tyndale who took 7 Scots prisoner and rescued 20 or 30 head of cattle.

The first news to reach Hunsdon at Berwick was satisfactory, except that the men of the barony had failed to aid the town. Mr. Heron appeared to have acted promptly in intercepting one of the returning parties. Soon, however,

¹¹ Hodgson, *History of Northumberland*, pt. ii, vol. iii, p. 385.

¹² William Ridley married Barbara, daughter of John Heron. *NCH* iv, p. 417.

¹³ Memoranda on the State of the Borders. *CBP* i, p. 32.

the report of Mr. Shaftoe, one of Hunsdon's men and a brother-in-law of Heron,¹⁴ showed a very different state of affairs. Shaftoe had been with Heron at the time of the raid and saw that he did not act on the information given him by his son. He neither warned the countryside nor gathered any men together until the Scots reached Haydon Bridge and "the fray was raised". Shaftoe claimed that he had much ado to make Heron move at all until he threatened to report the matter to Hunsdon. Then Heron raised some 5 or 600 men "but he would not go forward to Haydon Bridge . . . and being requested to go up onto the fells where he was sure to meet them . . . he would not by any means or entreaty but would needs keep up the water of the Tyne where he was sure he could do no harm". The attack on the returning Scots had taken place in spite of Heron, for some of his party had broken away from him and gone up onto the fells of their own accord. In fact, Hunsdon wrote, Heron and Ridley between them could have prevented the spoiling of the town and "given Liddesdale such an overthrow that England had been quiet of them this year". Hunsdon was enraged at his official and the local gentry not doing their duty and so making his task of keeping the peace in the Marches impossible. In addition he had "very vehement suspicions" that the Ridleys and some others had been acquainted with the idea of the raid beforehand and had even been "the drawers of the Scots to Haydon Bridge". Also Mr. Heron was said to be "at kindness and friendship" with Liddesdale, an extraordinary position for a Keeper of Tyndale. Certainly on this occasion neither Ridley's nor Heron's lands had been spoiled. Hunsdon threatened to make them "hop headless whosoever they be" if he found the charges true.

By 24 November^{14a} he had the evidence, for he had found and questioned the man who acted as messenger between "Reginald Heron, Mr. Heron's second son, and the Arm-

¹⁴ Edward Shaftoe of Little Bravington married Margaret, sister of John Heron. *NCH* iv, p. 340.

^{14a} *Calendar of Scottish Papers*, ix, p. 508.

strongs". At least twelve or fourteen people were involved. Then he wrote to Queen Elizabeth to have permission to remove Heron from his office as Keeper of Tyndale as he was not fit for the place. Heron was charged with "negligence in that service at the burning of Haydon Bridge" and "sundry other causes". He was only suspected of bringing in the Scots, but his son and his son-in-law, William Ridley, whom Hunsdon had then in ward with "sundry other" Ridleys, were directly charged with bringing in the Scots and Heron was said to be under their influence. Three or four other members of the Ridley family had fled successfully, presumably over the Border, and those taken had only been captured after a great chase. The case came up for trial at the Warden's Court, held at Alnwick on March 12, 1588,¹⁵ to deal with cases from both the East and Middle Marches. One unnamed man was condemned for his part in bringing the Scots to Haydon Bridge and other places. Both William Ridley and Reginald Heron refused to stand trial for March treason, for which the penalty was death, preferring to submit themselves to the Queen's mercy and presumably compounding for a fine. Certainly neither was executed, for William Ridley was killed in 1590¹⁶ and Reginald Heron was alive when his mother made her will in 1612.¹⁷

Hunsdon could do justice in his own Marches but he could not get satisfaction from the Scots. It was notorious that Kinmont and his followers, many of whom lived in the Debateable Land and Liddesdale, could not be brought to justice. Scrope, Warden of the West March, had tried many times. In 1583 he asked cautiously if he might apprehend "without offence to the Queen and Council"¹⁸ some of Kinmont's relatives by marriage who lived on the English side of the Border within his March, presumably intending to hold them as pledges. The answer is not known, but

¹⁵ *CBP* i, no. 574.

¹⁶ *CBP* ii, nos. 1065, 6. He was killed in a fray near Bewcastle.

¹⁷ *NCH* iv, p. 344.

¹⁸ *CBP* i, no. 169.

there is no record of any action being taken. In the following year Scrope was offering¹⁹ to the Scottish Warden Johnstone, both Walter and Robert Graham, whom he wanted to answer for crimes in his wardenry, in exchange for Kinmont but Johnstone refused to hand him over. This was after more than ten years as a "rider" and in the face of numerous complaints filed against him. Two typical examples may be quoted. The Dodds of "Thorneborne" and Blacklawe filed a bill against Kinmont and about 400 men who ran a day foray about midsummer of 1579 and took four score kine and oxen, 1000 sheep and slew Oswald Dodd. The Hunters and Milburns accused him and about 300 other Armstrongs of running a day foray into Tarsat at Michaelmas, 1584, and driving off some 40 score kine and oxen, three score horses and mares, 500 sheep, burning 60 houses and killing 10 men. These complaints (the figures are plainly exaggerated) were still unredressed in February, 1588.²⁰ In July of 1585 Scrope wrote to Justice Clark²¹ that he was always willing to do justice "saving for such offences as have been committed for revenge of the outrageous offences done by Kinmont Willie, his friends and accomplices". Indeed the only hope of checking these riders was to allow private vengeance.

James VI's actions in these years were not very creditable and did nothing to promote justice. In March of 1585 Warden Johnstone had managed to get hold of Kinmont's son and a friend of his and to keep them in the pledge chamber at Dumfries.²² But by the King's command they "were brought and presented to His Grace by the Earl of Morton . . . who having taken delivery of them for this purpose hath set them at liberty". Morton's object, in which he succeeded, was to gain the support of the Armstrongs in his feud against the Johnstones, but his action made it impossible to bring any Armstrong to justice since they had clearly the goodwill of the King. Even the Treaty of

¹⁹ CBP i, no. 245.

²⁰ CBP i, no. 595.

²¹ *Hamilton Papers* ii, no. 470.

²² CBP i, no. 291.

Berwick in July, 1586, made no difference to his attitude, although he became thereby a pensioner of Elizabeth. However, after the outburst of raiding in the spring and early summer of the following year, he seems to have felt some action necessary and on August 12, 1587, issued a proclamation against incursions into England.²³ Neither he nor his subjects seemed to have taken it seriously, for James himself, who was at Peebles at the time, apparently inspired the raid on Haydon Bridge, although Hunsdon thought that James intended some other town in the Middle March to be sacked.²⁴ However, he does not seem to have cared much which town it was, for after the raid he is said to have received Kinmont in his cabinet for above an hour and Hunsdon reported²⁵ with surprise that he was believed to have given him 100 crowns when he left. The reward sounds unlikely as James was in desperate straits at that time for even small sums of money. His pension from England had not been paid at all that year²⁶ and in October the borough of Ayr made, "at his special request", a loan of 1000 marks.²⁷ Hunsdon must have accused James directly of countenancing the riders, for Carmichael brought him a letter in James' own hand which, amongst other things, stated that it was "ever our intention to maintain justice and repress all insolent disorders upon our Borders".²⁸ Such an answer was only to be expected. But the complaint seems to have had some effect, for when James went away from the Borders he left behind as his lieutenant the Earl of Angus who threatened to ride over to "burn and destroy their [Armstrong's] corn, which has made them quiet and compelled Will of Kinmont to come in upon assurance of his life".²⁹ There is no evidence of any action taken against Kinmont at this time; certainly he soon resumed his career of riding, but it closes the Haydon Bridge episode.

²³ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* iv, p. 221.

²⁴ *CBP* i, no. 557.

²⁵ *CBP* i, no. 556.

²⁶ *CBP* i, no. 988.

²⁷ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* iv, p. 222.

²⁸ *Calendar of Scottish Papers* ix, p. 549. March 10, 1588.

²⁹ *Calendar of Scottish Papers* ix, no. 480.