

THE JACOBITES

FROM

FOR A WEB BEGUN

THE STORY OF DUNFERMLINE (P. 106)

BY W.T. BARR

It is with surprise that a man learns of Dunfermline's steadfast official opposition to the Jacobite cause through the two risings in the eighteenth century. After all, so much of the City's previous contemporary and later story is bound up with resistance to the establishments, both religious and civil, that one is led to expect the population to take sides with hopeless, but picturesque, causes. And such were the causes of the Stewarts. However, the bare record of officialdom may conceal the real sympathies of the people - and I have discovered at least three scraps which may, or may not, point to an under-steam of warm feeling for the Kings who were "over the water." And what writer, in these days of proud acclaim for the cause of the handsome Prince Charles and of his misguided father, the Old Pretender, could resist the tiniest, sympathetic word which linked his subject with main figures of the memorable incidents?

The first of these is a lovely poem probably not written contemporarily with the incident which it depicts, but it is a Dunfermline traditional production by a man named William Blair, and it is as beautiful as any of the other sentimental ballads which have come to characterise the feeling for Bonnie Prince Charlie.

The title of Blair's Jacobite poem is *The Highland Maid*, and two of its verses run:

"My true love fell by Charlie's side,
Wi; mony a clansman dear.
A Gallant youth - ah! was betide
The cruel Southron's spear.
And bloody blue is fallen now,
And bloody is the plaid
That aften on the mountain's brow
Has wrapped his Highland maid.

My father's sheiling on the hill
Is cheerless noo an' sad;
The passing breezes whisper still,
'You've lost your Highland lad,'
Upon Culloden's fatal heath
He spak' o' me they said,
An' falter'd wi' his dying breath,
'Adieu! My Highland Maid.'"

A man cannot, surely, be blamed for the inference that an ardent Jacobite heart was behind that!

There is, too, a noble Jacobitism about a Dunfermline story, one end of which stretches into the nineteenth century. In the possession of a Mrs Walker, who kept an inn in the City, was the nuptial bed of James VI, and Anne of Denmark. Mrs Walker was a professed supporter of the crushed Stewart cause, and she venerated the handsome bed which had once adorned the Royal Chamber of the Palace. On one occasion, a visiting Irish Bishop offered her fifty guineas for it, but Mrs Walker irately told him that all the money in Ireland could not buy her precious tie with the Stewarts. She resisted the temptation to sell the bed, and shortly before she died, she made a present of it to the Earl of Elgin of Broomhall. Once again, it might be inferred, the innkeeper who resisted the lure of money to perpetuate a link with the Stewarts must have been descended from a Jacobite line. Indeed, the triumph of her principle to the end almost stamps her of the Highland race which fought Charlie's cause!

Do I recognise in one more incident some practical support for the cause of Charlie? The incident involved Colonel Forbes the proprietor of Pittencrieff estate during the '45'. At the south-eastern angle of the Palace wall, there is a vaulted apartment which was once called "The Magazine." The title of the room stuck after the Highlanders marching south for Charlie had been allowed by Colonel Forbes to quarter in his property and store their powder in the vault of the Palace. The privilege had been refused to them in all other parts of the City. Can you read from that kindness on the part of the Colonel a sly support for the Stewarts - and suspect an after-dinner glass raised in the lounge of Pittencrieff House in a toast to the success-in-arms of the young Prince?

Those things mean what they will, but the fact remains that Dunfermline was officially hostile to the Stewarts and loyal to the constitution. When the country was threatened with a general rising to place the Old Pretender on the throne, the Dunfermline Fencibles were in arms to defend the King. Powder and shot was bought by the Town Council and distributed to those who had arms in the City, as the threat of rebellion grew.

The crisis came, and frail Stewart cause was launched by the Old Pretender in 1715 - and Scotland was seized with the semiromanticism which attracted all those who, for forty years, served and suffered in the cause of Jacobitism.

Sir Walter Scott tells a little epic story which is centred on Dunfermline in the best history of Scotland ever written - his *Tales of a Grandfather*. The story concerns the rising of 1715 and though it run many of the famous names of the time. I will quote it in full and rounded whole, because it is one of the clearest and most illustrative examples of the whole tragic rising:

"A detachment of about four score horse and three Highland foot-chiefly the followers of the Marquis of Huntly-was sent from Perth to raise the Cess. The direct road from Perth to Dunfermline is considerably short but the troops had orders to take the route by Castle-Campbell, which prolonged the journey considerably, for no apparent purpose but to insult the Duke of Argyle's garrison there by marching in their view. When the detachment arrived at Dunfermline, Gordon of Glenbucket, who commanded the Highlanders, conducted them into the Abbey, which is strongly situated, and there placed a sentinel. He took up is own quarters in the town, and placed a sentinel there also. The commander of the horse, Major Graham, took the ineffectual precaution of doing the same at the bridge, but used no further measures to

avoid surprise. The gentlemen of the squadron sought each his personal accommodation, with their usual neglect of discipline, neither knowing with accuracy where they were to find their horses, nor fixing on any alarm-post where they were to rendezvous. Their officers sat down to a bottle of wine.

During all this scene of confusion the Honourable Colonel (afterwards Lord) Cathcart was lying without the town, with a strong party of cavalry, and obtaining regular information from his spies within it. About five o'clock in the morning of the 24th October he entered the town with two parties of his dragoons - one mounted, the other on foot. The surprise was complete, and the Jacobite cavaliers suffered in proportion; several were killed and wounded, and about twenty more prisoners, whose loss was the more felt as they were all gentlemen, and some of them considerable proprietors.

The assailants lost no time in their enterprise, and retreated as speedily as they entered. The neighbourhood of the Highland infantry in the Abbey was a strong reason for despatch.

This slight affair seemed considerable in a war, which had been as yet so little marked by military incident. The appearance of the prisoners at Stirling, and the list of their names, gave éclat to the Duke of Argyle's tactics, and threw disparagement in those of Mar. On the other side, stories were circulated in Perth of the loss which Cathcart had sustained in the action, with rumours of men buried in the night, and horses returned to Stirling without their riders. This account, however fabulous, was received with credit even by those who were engaged at Dunfermline; for the confusion having become general, no one knew what was the fate of his comrade.

But, in very deed, the whole return of casualties on Colonel Cathcart's side amounted to a dragoon hurt in the cheek, and a horse wounded. This little affair was made the subject of songs and pasquils in the army at Perth which increased the Marquis of Huntly's disgust at the enterprise."

In that exciting account can be seen, if not the full flower of defeat, then at least the unripened seeds which doomed the bid of the Old Pretender from the start.

Thirty years later there might have been seen on High Street, Dunfermline, a worried procession of nineteen men walking towards the Tolbooth. A special meeting of the Town Council was about to be held, to discuss a matter raised in a letter which the courier had delivered to the Town Clerk in late September 1745. It could not have been, altogether, an unexpected letter, for the streets had been ringing with the news for weeks past that the forces of Charles Edward Stewart had, after a ludicrously unpromising start, swept down from the Highland hills and had actually now displaced the elegant garrison in the Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh. The "Heillantmen" in kilts and plaids and - as depicted to Scots southerners - addicted to wearing shaggy, red beards, had done the miraculous in sending the orthodox Sir John Cope's army fleeing headlong at the Battle of Prestonpans. Now, the judgment had come to loyal Dunfermline; and the nineteen councillors knitted their brows wondering what they were to do.

The letter, which was from the young Cavalier's secretary, Mr Murray of Broughton, was dated from Holyroodhouse on 28th September, 1745, and said brusquely:

"Sir: You are hereby ordered upon receipt of this to repair to the Secretary's Office at the Palace of Holyrood-house, there to have the contribution to be paid by your

town of Dunfermline for the Highness use ascertained, which shall be done according and in proportion to the duty's of excyse arising out of the said town of Dunfermline for the repayment of which contribution the said duty shall be assigned. This you are ordered upon pain of rebellion forthwith to obey - By his Highness command.

(Sgd.) J. Murray."

Two of the City Bailies brought events up-to-the-minute when the nineteen men had assembled in the Council chamber. They said that, when the letter was received, they had gone to Edinburgh, interviewed two under-secretaries of Mr Murray's and discovered to their astonishment, evidently that the duty due to be paid by the City was £80 sterling. It was a crushing tax that to be paid by a Burgh which, earlier in the century, had appealed for help to the Convention and at that time had only £82. 15s. in the entire Common Good Fund. The meeting hurriedly appointed the Dean of Guild to interview the Deacon of Craft and the business community for advice on how the money was to be paid, "or by whom meantime."

There was an excited survey for the opinions of the brethren of the Dean in the morning and the nineteen men met again at midday. The unanimous opinion of the town was that the contribution should be paid from the Common Good Fund, rather than have the whole place plundered; but the trades delayed making decision as to how much each would contribute to the impoverished Fund. The Council agreed that this course should be followed, but when the treasurer was asked to declare what money was in the hand of the town at the time it was revealed that the total wealth was £22 sterling! Something approaching consternation seized the Council - and, no doubt, visions of a plundered City in the hands of red-bearded Highlanders appeared to them. The snag, however, was tackled by a decision which authorised the treasurer to borrow the £58 deficit in the name of the City. On the same day there was a further shock for the worried Council. It was reported that the Highlanders, in addition to demanding the £80 excise levy, were to collect £20 as the land cess! The hard-pressed men discussed anew, and decided that they had no alternative but to pay this also.

But the men who were conducting Prince Charlie's flourishing money affairs became impatient. The Earl of Kellie and a party of Highlanders arrived in Dunfermline and summoned one of the Bailies before them. The Council was called together again to hear his report and to deal with the previous matter of the £80. At 10 a.m. there was the sederunt of the nineteen. The treasurer, a man named John Knox made a remarkable report. Faced with the problem of raising £58 in double quick time, he had taken the direct route to the nearest pockets! In other words, the harassed official had borrowed £34 from his colleague Bailie Scotland £14 from Councillor Crawford, and £10 from an outsider named Robert Addie. The Council approved - and that matter was disposed of.

Then came the disturbing purpose of Earl Kellie's Highlanders. They wanted, at once, the Council's land cess, and Baillie Adie was informed, by the Earl himself, that if this matter of £20 was not forthcoming immediately, military execution and plundering would begin - and after it was over, the land cess would still have to be paid. It was all extremely urgent while the Highlander were swinging their kilts in the streets, their trumpeter lodged comfortably in the fashionable St Catherin Wynd, and a store of powder under guard in the Palace Vault. The Council parried, and sent a deputation to meet Kellie and the Highland leaders with a view to "getting matters as easy for the town as possible;"

Colonel Seton met the deputation and informed them, in effect, that the town was being let down lightly by being only faced with a demand for £20. The cess amounted to much more than that; but, if they paid promptly, he would make it his business to see that they were not asked to pay another instalment for some considerable time. No doubt, the deputation left feeling very grateful to the Colonel; at any rate the Council, on hearing the report decided to authorise Mr Knox to raise another loan in the town's name.

Presumably, Dunfermline settled to its crushing debt and the loss of its land cess for some time after that. Anyway the nondescript army of Bonnie Prince Charlie had stretched itself to Derby and was back on the way to Culloden before the pecuniary arm stretched over the Forth again. In December, 1745, Mr Douglas, another official of Charlie's finances, came with a party of the Highland army demanding the town's cess instalment. "Considering the force," the nineteen burdened men record, "the Council appoints the treasurer to pay the town's cess to him on receipt."

Ten days later, the Council is called together again, and a note of final despair creeps into the official minute of the proceedings. Dated two days after Christmas, this naked minute says: "Which date, John Knox, late treasurer informed the Council that a great party of Highland army came yesterday to raise the cess. excise etc; and that in consequence of the Council's Act of the 16th current, he went to pay the town's land cess, but that they want and demand not only the town's land cess but the town's supply or cess, under threat of military execution, etc - all which being considered by the Council, they warranted and empowered John Knox, late treasurer, to pay not only the town's land cess but their supply, providing that the supply do not exceed sixteen pounds sterling, and that to Mr Douglas, who is just now in town with the said party demanding the sum as said is."

It is not difficult to see the gloom on the faces of the men leaving the Council Chamber after making that reluctant decision; and to see too the disgust with which they turned away from the first party of Highlanders they met as they faced the hill from the Tolbooth to the Hie Gait.

The story of the Jacobite times and the irritating monetary skirmish which was going on in Dunfermline ends with a dramatic, explosive little note which probably caused more public comment than all the arguments in the Council room. The Provost of the City at that time was Lord Charles Hay, a member of the Tweeddale family. Lord Hay was an officer of the King's army and, as such, he had probably been in opposition to the Rebellion since the opening phases in 1745.

A short time after the Highland Army had left Dunfermline, his Lordship was in the City, and decided to climb the stairs to the Church Steeple in order to view the surrounding countryside. There is no proof that his climb was undertaken for anything but the enjoyment of the view of five counties which, it is said, can be seen from the steeple on a clear day. While he was there, a Highlander who had stayed behind as a spy, caught sight of him high up and inhaling the crisp December air.

Probably the sight of an officer in the King's uniform was too much for the Highlander. He drew his pistol, and aimed carefully, and shot-just off the true. One of the earcurls of His Lordship's military peruke was clipped clean off by the bullet and fell on the steeple floor!

The incident had many witnesses, and maybe there can be implied from the lack of information in the later story of the Highlander, a suspicion that he escaped with full approval.

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Mention the Duke of Cumberland in many parts of North Scotland and our local companion will probably answer: "The Butcher, you mean?" You correct yourself and go on to ask something about the man who crushed Bonnie Prince Charlie; Ten chances to one the local man will turn to a ruined building around which the sheep are grazing and indicate, disgustedly, that "Butcher" Cumberland did that after the `45. Levelled and burned homes are Cumberland's memorials in the north, and after 200 year men get riled when he is mentioned.

It is strange then to find that the ancient capital of Scotland, the pivot of Scots freedom movements, and a fortress of the independent Kingship, has a record of having offered congratulations to the Duke on his victories against Charles' forces. Dunfermline, at a meeting of its Council on 10th February, 1746, decided to join with other Royal Burghs in sending a deputation "to wait upon His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, and in the name of the Royal Burghs to congratulate His Highness upon his arrival in this country, and his success against the rebels."
