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## BORDER NOTES AND QUERIES.

### FATLIPS CASTLE IN ROXBURGHSHIRE.

Jedburgh, July 6, 1927.

Sir,—An English lady tourist, passing recently through Jedburgh, put the pointed query not so easily answered—"Why is it called Fatlips Castle?" She had come down the valley of the Teviot, and had visited Minto Crags, the high rocky feature in the landscape, which the poetical fancy of Sir Walter Scott has invested with a touch of the romantic. On the top of the crags there are still ruins of a peel which in ancient days was the impregnable stronghold of a notorious Border reiver, Turnbull of Barnhill, in the 14th century, and Scott refers to him in these picturesque lines, from the "Lay of the Last Minstrel":—

"On Minto Crags the moon beams glint,  
Where Barnhill hewed his best of flint;  
Who flung his outlaw'd limbs to rest  
Where falcons hang their giddy nest.  
Mid cliffs, from whence his eagle eye  
Full many a league his prey could spy."

The ruin, still to be seen, has long been known by the curious name of Fatlips Castle, which has never been fully explained. In the New Statistical Account of Scotland (1841) the Rev. David Aitken, minister of Minto, gives a very interesting description of the parish, its history, topographical features, etc. He makes passing allusion to the ruin, "commonly called Fatlips Castle," and says it figures in Grose's "Views in Scotland," but he throws no light on the name. Jeffrey, the historian of Roxburghshire, is silent on the subject, although dealing at some length with Minto as a place-name.

But more detailed information is given in a rare, valuable Border history, "The Border Elliots and the Family of Minto," by the Hon. Geo. F. S. Elliot. Fatlips Castle is mentioned as anciently forming the boundary between Upper and Lower Teviotdale. The opinion is expressed that the tower, or peel, was not a human abode, but merely a place of refuge, being too far from a water supply. We are told that the name is marked on estate maps of 1751 and 1766. An interesting point lies in the fact that it crops up elsewhere in Scotland—at Tinto Hill, in Lanarkshire, also near Dunbar, and a fourth example, it seems, occurs south of Roslin.

It is, however, in the "Minstrelsy of the Border" that the solution—if such it can be termed—of the matter is to be found. A long note to Scott's ballad, "The Eve of St John," narrates the strange, weird story of "That nun who ne'er beholds the day," who in the 18th century inhabited a dark vault at Dryburgh Abbey, and only sallied forth at night to get food supplied to her at two county residences, one of which belonged to Mr Haliburton, Sir Walter's great-grandfather. Returning with her lighted peat at midnight, she was wont to tell her neighbours that in her absence a spirit or fairy, to whom she gave the uncouth name of "Fatlips," put her habitation in order. She described him as "a little man, wearing

heavy iron shoes, with which he trampled the clay floor of the vault, to dispel the damp."

Locally the poor woman was regarded as being mentally deranged, and looked upon with superstitious awe. The story ran that she had vowed she would not see the light of day during the absence of her lover, who was killed in the 1745-6 rising. The tradition is vouched for by Sir David Erskine in his Annals of Dryburgh, and he says that in his day (c. 1830) the stone out of which her fowls drank was still at the entrance to the recluse's gloomy abode.

The only theory, I think, that can be advanced for the transference of the name from Dryburgh to Minto is that it was due to the imagination of the country folks, who were prone to believe that ruins like those on Minto Crags were apt to be haunted, and no doubt the Dryburgh legend had inspired the district with a superstitious dread in days when fairies, etc., were firmly believed in. Any other explanation, however, of this grotesque place-name will be welcomed.—I am, etc.,

OLIVER HILSON (in "Scotsman.")