THE MONKS OF MELROSE.

MELROSE ABBEY, situated at the north base of the Eildon Hills, in the valley of the Tweed, 35 miles south of Edinburgh, was founded for Cistertian monks, by King David I., in 1136. The original edifice is said to have been completed in ten years, but was either wholly or partially destroyed by fire in 1322, and must have been greatly inferior in magnificence to its successor. What now remains of the re-edificed structure exhibits a style of architecture ascertained to belong to a later age than that of David, and gives distinct indications of having been in an unfinished state at the Reformation,—appearances of rough temporary closings-up of design, with a view to subsequent resumption and completion. While the nucleus of the building was constructed at one ef-

fort, under the reign and patronage of Robert Bruce, aided perhaps by some preserved and renovated portion of the original erection of David I., the entire edifice, in the extension of its parts, and in the immense profusion of its architectural decorations, seems to have been the progressive work of upwards of two centuries, extending from 1326 till the Reformation. The Cistertians were noted for their industrious habits, and their patronage and practice of such departments of the fine arts and practical science as were known in the Middle ages; and, in common with all the monastic tribes, they regarded the embellishing of ecclesiastical edifices up to a degree as high as their scientific and financial resources could produce, as pre-eminently and even meritoriously a work of piety. The vast magnificence of the Abbey, with its innumerable architectural adjuncts and sculptured adornings, seems thus to have been the result of a constant, untiring, and ambitious effort of the resident monks, powerful in their skill, their numbers, their leisure, and their enthusiasm, and both instigated and aided by the munificent benefactions which made continual additions to their originally princely revenues, and testified the applause of a dark but pompous age for the sumptuousness of the dress thrown around the fane of religious pageants.

The architecture is the richest Gothic, combining the best features of its gracefulness and elaboration, and everywhere showing a delicacy of touch, and a boldness of execution, which evince the perfection of the style. The material, while soft enough to admit great nicety of chiselling, possesses such power of resistance to the weather that even the most minute ornaments retain nearly as much sharpness of edge or integrity of feature as when they were fresh from the chisel. The Abbey, though inferior in proportions to many works of its class, and only about half the dimensions of York Minster, is the most beautiful of all the ecclesiastical structures which seem ever to have been reared in Scotland; and has

seldom, in aggregate architectural excellence, been surpassed, or even equalled, by the edifices of any land. What remains is only the principal part of the church, with some trivial fragments of connexion with the cloister. From observable indications on the north side of the standing ruin, the cloister appears to have been a square 150 feet deep, surrounded with a spacious arcade or piazza, and lined along the east, west, and north walls with the habitations of the monks.

Though the Abbey was regularly noticed in topographical works, and figured boldly in history, and lifted up its alluringly attractive form before the eye of every traveller along the Tweed, it excited so little attention, previous to the present century, as to be coolly abandoned to the rough dilapidations of persons who estimated its sculptured stones at the vulgar quarry-price of building material! Much care has, in recent times, been used, at the expense of the proprietor to strengthen its walls, slate the remaining part of the roof, and furnish various other means of conservation; and it has its reward in a promise that the pile will yet long stand to give practical lessons in majestic architectural beauty. The place incidentally owes nearly all its modern fame to "the mighty minstrel," whose princely earthly domicile at Abbotsford on the west, and his low last resting-place in Dryburgh on the east, compete with it in challenging the notice of the tourist. Sir Walter's adoption of it and the town, as the St. Mary's and the Kennaquhair of his tales of "The Monastery" and "The Abbot," brought it boldly before the gaze of the myriad admirers of the national novels of Scotland; and his well-known personal enthusiasm in making it his chief and favourite retreat from study, and in passing successive hours in scanning over, for the five hundredth time, its labyrinth of graces, drew towards it the wondering eye of the judiciously imitative crowds who looked to him as a master of taste. But what first roused attention to it, and kept up the vibration in every subsequent thrill of interest in its attractions,

was the masterly description of it which corruscated upon the world in the publication of "the Lay of the Last Minstrel." Two extracts, though already familiar to many a reader, may be acceptable as vivid pictures of the most remarkable parts of the pile, and fine specimens of the enchanting power of the painter. The one describes the beautifully fretted and sculptured stone-roof of the east end of the chancel:

"The darkened roof rose high aloof
On pillars lofty and light and small;
The keystone that locked each ribbed aisle
Was a fleur-de-lys or a quatre-feuille;
The corbells were carved grotesque and grim;
And the pillars, with cluster'd shafts so trim,
With base and with capital flourish'd around,
Seem'd bundles of lances which garlands had bound.'

The other passage describes the surpassingly elegant and beautiful eastern window:—

'The moon, on the east oriel shone,
Through slender shafts of shapely stone
By foliaged tracery combined:
Thou would'st have thought some fairy's hand
'Twixt poplars straight the osier wand
In many a freakish knot had twin'd;
Then framed a spell, when the work was done,
And changed the willow-wreaths to stone."

The monks whom David I. placed in the original abbey were Cistertians from Rievalle, the first of their order who obtained footing in Scotland; and, according to general Cistertian usage, they dedicated the establishment to their patron-saint, the Virgin Mary. David, that "sair saunt for the croon o' Scotland," made them the chief of their class, or

the mother-establishment of the kingdom, and bestowed on them the church of the parish, extensive lands, and numerous privileges. Their original gift from him consisted of the lands of Melrose, Eildon, and Dernock, the lands and wood of Gattonside, the fishings of the Tweed along the whole extent of these lands, and the rights of pasturage, of pannage, and of cutting wood for fuel and building, in the forests of Selkirk and Traquair, and in that lying between the Gala and the Leader. Other possessions in the form of lands, churches, and privileges, were afterwards so rapidly heaped on them by David, and by his successors and subjects, that, against the close of the 13th century, they had vast property and various immunities in the counties of Roxburgh Berwick, Selkirk, Peebles, Dumfries, Ayr, Haddington, and Edinburgh. In 1192, Hassendean, in its church, tithes, lands, and other emoluments, was given by Jocelin, bishop of Glasgow, to the monks, on condition of their establishing at it a house of hospitality, "ad susceptionem pauperum et peregrinorum ad domum de Melros venientum;" and it now became the seat of a cell, where several of their number resided, to execute the trust of relieving the poor, and entertaining the pilgrim. In some year between 1181 and 1185, a bull of Pope Lucius exempted the monks from paying tithes for any of their possessions.

The monks were now large proprietors, with numerous tenants; great husbandmen, with many granges and numerous herds; lordly churchmen, with uncommon privileges, high powers, and extensive influence. But a pertinacious controversy had long existed between them and the men of Stow, or the vale of Gala-water—then called Wedale—respecting two objects of great importance in that age,—pannage and pasturage, under the several proprietors; and, in 1184, a formal settlement of the controversy, emphatically known in history as "the peace of Wedale," was made by William the Lion, assisted by his bishops and barons. Yet,

during such times, disputes among cattle-drivers and swineherds could hardly be prevented, and, when adopted by their superiors, were sometimes carried up to tumult and homicide. In 1269, John of Edenham, the abbot, and many of his conventual brethren, for the crimes of violating the peace of Wedale, attacking some houses of the bishop of St. Andrew's, and slaying one ecclesiastic, and wounding many others, were excommunicated by a provincial council which sat in Perth.

As Melrose stood near the hostile border, it was usually involved in the rancorous events of Border feud and international war. In 1285, the Yorkshire barons, who had confederated against King John, swore fealty to Alexander II. in Melrose chapter-house. In 1295, Edward I. granted the monks a protection; and in August of next year, while he rested at Berwick after the general submission of Scotland to his usurping and dominating interference, he issued a writ commanding a restitution to the monks of all the property which they had lost in the preceding melée. In 1322, at the burning and desolating of the Abbey by Edward II., William de Peebles the abbot and several of the monks were slain. In 1326, Robert Bruce made a most munificent grant for the re-edification of the abbey, amounting to £2,000 sterling—a vast sum at that period—from his revenue of wards, reliefs, marriages, escheats and fines within Roxburghshire; and he seems to have afterwards made other grants, and to have been followed in his money-giving patronage by David II. In 1328, writs were issued to the abbot by Edward III. for the restitution of pensions and lands which they had held in England, and which had been taken from them, during the war, by the King's father. In 1334, the same monarch granted a protection to Melrose, in common with the other abbeys of the Scottish border; in 1341, he came from Newcastle to keep his Christmas festival in Melrose abbey; and in 1348, he issued a writ "de terris liberandis abbati de Meaurose," to deliver to the abbot his lands.

Richard II., in 1378, followed the example of Edward in giving a protection to the monks; yet in 1385, when he made his expedition into Scotland, he set fire to the abbey, in common with other religious houses on the Border. But, four years afterwards, the monks were indemnified for the damage he did them, by the grant of two shillings on each of 2,000 sacks of Scotish wool, and of a portion of the King's customs on hides and woolfels, exported at Berwick; and, in 1390, they received from Richard a formal renewal of protection.

During the period of rude waste and rancorous warfare which intervened between the rebuilding of the edifice under Robert Bruce, and the commencement or precurrent events of the Reformation, the abbey must have sustained many more shocks than are recorded; yet it seems to have rebounded from each blow with undiminished or even increased vigour, and, in spite of temporary demolitions, made steady progress in financial greatness and architectural grandeur. But during the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., and Elizabeth, it suffered collisions and dilapidations, chiefly from the English and partly from the Scotch, too severe and in too troublous times to issue otherwise than in its ruin. In 1544, the English penetrated to Melrose, and destroyed great part of the abbey; in 1545, led by Lords Evers and Latoun, they again pillaged it, and were pursued and beaten on Ancrum-moor; and, in the same year, they recrossed the Border under the Earl of Hertford, and a third time laid the abbey waste. "The English commanders," says George Chalmers, whom, with a collateral reference to other authorities, we are chiefly following, "were studious to leave details of the destruction that they committed, which only perpetuates their own disgrace." At length, in 1569, the nobility of Scotland and their military retainers, under the sacred name of the Reformation, and with an unjust reflection of the odium they incurred on John Knox and his fellow-reformers,

completed by pillage, defacement, and dilapidation, what the English had left to be done in order to the conversion of the pile into an unroofed, gutted, partially overthrown, and altogether yawning ruin.

Though the monks of Melrose were exempted by charters and custom from rendering military service to the Crown; yet they fought under James the Steward of Scotland, during the war of the succession; and again they fought under Walter the Steward, in strenuous support of the infant-prince, David Bruce. Declarations were afterwards made by both stewards, and subsequently confirmed by the Duke of Albany, on the day of the feast of James the Apostle, in 1403, that the military service of the monks having been rendered by the special grace of the abbot and convent, and not in terms of any duty they owed to the Crown, should not be regarded as any precedent for their future conduct. Owing to mutual benefits, a very intimate connexion seems to have existed, from the days of Bruce, or from the foundation of the monastery, between the abbots of Melrose and the Stewarts of Scotland. In 1541, James V., by a sacrifice of his public policy to his private feelings, solicited and obtained from the Pope, the abbey of Melrose, in addition to that of Kelso, to be held, in commendam, by his natural son James.

At the Reformation, when the lands, rights, and privileges of religious houses were annexed to the Crown, those belonging to Melrose abbey were granted by Queen Mary to James, Earl of Bothwell. Becoming lost to him by forfeiture in 1568, they were next, through the influence of the well-known Earl of Morton, bestowed on James Douglas, the second son of William Douglas of Lochleven. Some years later, they again sought an owner, and, with some exceptions, were erected into a temporal lordship in favour of Sir John Ramsay, who had protected James VI. from the rapier of Gowry, who was created Viscount of Haddington, and Earl

of Holderness in 1606, and who, in 1625, died without issue, leaving the estates to fall back to the Crown. Sir Thomas Hamilton, who, from his eminence as a lawyer, rose to high rank and great opulence, who was created Earl of Melrose in 1619, and who afterwards exchanged this title for the vacant one of Earl of Haddington, eventually obtained the abbey and the greater part of its domains; and, in more recent times, he has been succeeded in the splendid heritage, by the family of Buccleuch.

"From Ala's banks to fair Melrose's fane,
How bright the sabre flash'd o'er hills of slain—
I see the combat through the mist of years—
When Scott and Douglas led the Border spears!
The mountain streams were bridged with English dead;
Dark Ancrum's heath was dyed with deeper red;
The ravaged abbey rung the funeral knell,
When fierce Latoun and savage Evers fell;
Fair bloomed the laurel-wreath, by Douglas placed
Above the sacred tombs, by war defaced.

Farewell, ye moss-clad spires! ye turrets grey,
Where science first effused her orient ray!
Ye mossy sculptures, on the roof embossed,
Like wreathing icicles congealed by frost!
Each branching window, and each fretted shrine,
Which peasants still to fairy hands assign!
May no rude hand your solemn grandeur mar,
Nor waste the structure, long revered by war!"

Leyden's Scenes of Infancy.