The Franco-Scottish League in the Fourteenth Century [1]

THE Franco-Scottish League was not a mere alliance between two kings, as was usual in the case of medieval alliances. It was an alliance between two nations whose interest drew them together, and it accordingly lasted as long as this common interest prevailed. Its root was the common hostility of France and Scotland to England; and as the common hostility endured for nearly three hundred years, the League endured for an equally long period.

The *raison d'être* of this League is patent on both geographical and political grounds. Geographically, it was inevitable that, in the case of enmity between Scotland or France, on the one hand, and England on the other, they should be eager to ally their forces. France was separated from England by the Channel, and direct attack against its English enemy was therefore difficult; but with Scotland as its ally, it could, by means of a Scottish army, directly assail England on its northern border. On the other hand, Scotland was a smaller and weaker nation than England; but by allying itself with France, it was enabled to counteract its relative inequality in territory and resources. Politically, the *raison d'être* of the League is equally patent. On historic grounds, both France and Scotland became the enemy of England, and it was inevitable that the two enemies of a common enemy should combine against this common enemy. In the case of Scotland, it was the claim of Edward I. to the overlordship of the Scots, and the consequent attempt to conquer them at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, that provoked an antagonism lasting for several hundred years. In the case of France, the fact that the English king held a large portion of western France as the vassal of the French

king could not fail to beget friction between them. Moreover, the friction on this score was ultimately aggravated by the claim of a series of English kings to the throne of France itself, and by the long-protracted attempt on the part of these kings to unite the English and French crowns.

Both nations were thus exposed to English aggression, and both were accordingly led by political considerations, as well as geographical position, to offer a common resistance, which served a mutual object. On the other hand, we can see how for England the counter League with the Netherlands and the Empire, was equally natural. From the thirteenth century onwards it was an essential of French foreign policy to incorporate, if possible, Flanders and Brabant, the modern Belgium, with its resultant historic drama of friction and war. For centuries, too, there was, on various grounds, friction between France and the Empire. What more natural, then, than that an English king like Edward III. should seek to ally himself against France with Flanders and the Empire, and thus provide a counterfoil, in an Anglo-Imperial alliance, to the Franco-Scottish League? Both Leagues, in fact, exercised for centuries a powerful influence on the international history of Europe, though the former was more or less spasmodic, whilst the latter might be described as permanent from 1295 to 1559, when the Reformation changed the political relations as well as the religion of both Scotland and England.

Its historic beginning dates from the end of the thirteenth century. Tradition, indeed, removes its genesis as far back as the days of Charlemagne, who is supposed by imaginative Scottish chroniclers to have sent ambassadors in the year 789 to a Scottish king, whom they call Achaius, requesting assistance against his Saxon enemies, with whom the English Saxons are said to have been allied. Such is the story gravely related by a Scottish refugee in France, David Chambre, who wrote a work entitled *Histoire Abbregée de tous les Roys de France, Angleterre, et Escosse*, which he dedicated to Henry III. of France in 1579. He even reproduces the speeches which Hector Boece puts into the mouths of the counsellors of Achaius on the occasion.[1] Moreover, he adduces—

[1] See *Histoire Abbregée*, p. 95. David Chambre, or David Chambre d'Ormont, as he amplifies his name in the dedication to Henry III., had been 'conseiller en la cour de Parlement à Edinbourg,' which means that he had been a lord or judge of the Court of Session. In the *Historical Account of the Senators of the College of Justice*, by Brunton and Haig, his name is given as David Chalmers, of Ormond. He tells us in this dedication that he was a refugee Scot who had been forced to leave his native land in 1567. He was evidently a Roman Catholic and an

KING JAMES IV.

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also on the authority mainly of Boece—a series of treaties of alliances[1] between a series of Scottish and French kings from Malcolm III. and Philip I. onwards. The story reappears about three-quarters of a century later in a decree of the Council of State of Louis XIV.,[2] to which it was evidently transferred from Chambre's *Abregée*. 'Des l'année sept cent quatre vingts neuf, Charlemagne, regnant en France, et Achaius en Ecosse, l'alliance et confederation ayant esté faite entre les deux royaumes, offensive et defensive, de couronne à couronne, de roy à roy, et de peuple à peuple, ainsy qui'l est porté par la charte ditte la Bulle d'or, elle auroit jusqu'à present continué sans aucune interruption, et esté ratifiée par tous les successeurs du dict Charlemagne,' etc.[3] Unfortunately for this sanguine statement, there was neither a France nor a Scotland in the national sense to enter into a treaty with each other at the end of the eighth century, even if there had been a Scottish King Achaius[4] who was willing to do so. At this period the term 'Scotia' was applied to Ireland, and what afterwards became Scotland was then designated Alban or Albania[5]; whilst what constitutes the France of a later time

adherent of Queen Mary—was, in fact, one of three persons officially accused of being privy to the murder of Darnley; and was in straitened circumstances when he bethought him of turning historian and writing this laboriously compiled historical compendium. It shows not even a pretence to the critical spirit, and the dedication is a thinly-disguised begging letter. Besides Boece's *History*, he made use of a chronicle supposed to be written by a Spaniard, named Veremund, in the time of Malcolm Canmore, from which Boece also professes to have borrowed. This compilation, if it really existed, has disappeared, and was evidently a late forgery by some patriotic Scottish scribe, and Innes thinks that it was invented in the fifteenth century (*Critical Essay*, p. 173, vol. viii. of *Historians of Scotland*, edited by Grub; 1879). Both Boece and Chambre seem to have used it in good faith, but their good faith is a striking evidence of their credulity. M. Michel seems to give the usual credence to Chambre, whom he quotes as an authority for the medieval treaties between the kings of Scotland and France (*Les Ecossais en France et les Français en Ecosse*, i. 30-31).

[1] *Ibid.* pp. 128, 141, 144, 149.   [2] Of date 19th September, 1646.

[3] *Memoirs Concerning The Ancient Alliance Between the French and the Scots*, pp. 58-59 (1751).

[4] There are some names in *The Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, edited by Skene, that might possibly be Latinised into Achaius. We find, for instance, a Mac Eachach, pp. 215-16; a Heochgain, p. 287; an Eogheche, p. 198; but even if we could identify any one of these with the Achaius of the story, the assumption that any petty chief of Dalriaða entered into alliance with the mighty Charles can only evoke a smile. The portrait of Achaius forms one of the series of artistic fabrications that disfigure the walls of Holyrood Palace.

[5] For the evidence, see Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, i. pp. 3, 6 (1876).

was a part of the vast empire of Charlemagne. There were, indeed, agreements of a kind between Scottish and French kings in the middle ages,[1] though not, of course, until there were such kings. But the fact is that the Franco-Scottish League, in its historic sense, did not emerge until historic conditions at the end of the thirteenth century made both Scotland and France for long the common enemies of England.

These historic conditions were, at the close of the thirteenth century, the assumption by Edward I. of overlordship over Scotland, on the one hand, and, on the other, the contemporaneous quarrel between him and his overlord Philip IV. over the English possessions in France. From these causes the Scottish king, John Baliol, entered into the offensive and defensive alliance with Philip, which was renewed at intervals by their successors during the next two centuries and a half, and is known as the Franco-Scottish League. Its chief stipulations from the outset were, firstly, that in case of war between England and France the Scots should intervene on behalf of their ally by an invasion of England, and in case of war between Scotland and England the French should render active assistance to the Scots; secondly, that neither, in concluding peace or truce with the English king, should ignore the interests of the other.[2]

The war which ensued on this alliance of 1295 proved for Scotland the beginning of a heroic struggle in defence of its independence, and the struggle lasted, with little interruption,

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[1] In the treaty between Charles IV. and Robert Bruce, Charles does not mention any formal league of long standing, but merely the 'amytie et la bienvoillance qu'a esté *de long tems entre* nos prédécesseurs roys de France et notre royaume, et entre les roys d'Ecosse et le dit royaume d'Ecosse.'

[2] The treaty is given by Hemingburgh or Hemingford, ii. 78-85 (edited by Hamilton), and by Knighton, who transcribes Hemingburgh, i. 292-300. Cf. *Foedera*, i. 680-82 and 696 (July and October, 1295), and *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, i. 95, 97 (Dunfermline, 23rd February, 1295). King Philip undertakes 'quod si praelibatum regem Angliae coadunatis viribus suis regnum Scotiae per se vel per alium invadere contigerit post guerram ad requisitionem nostram per dictum regem Scotiae coeptam vel post confederationem praesentem vel affinitatem inter nos initam occasione earundem, nos . . . sibi subsidium faciemus, ipsum regem Angliae per partes alias occupando ut sic ab incepta invasione praedicta ad alia distrahatur, vel ei in Scotiam conveniens adjutorium sumptibus nostris quousque in Scotiam venerit transmittendo.' On his side Baliol undertakes, '(inter alia) cum toto posse suo terram Angliae quanto latuis sive profundius intrare curabit, faciendo guerram bellumque campestre, obsidendo, vastando, ac regem Angliae et terram ejus praedictis omnibus modis suis ut supra dicitur sumptibus impugando.' Then follows the stipulation about peace or truce (Hemingburgh, ii. 83-4).

KING JAMES V.

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throughout the reigns of Robert Bruce and his son David II., that is, till far into the fourteenth century. During the first period of it, which was rendered immortal by the victories of Wallace and Bruce, the League was largely inactive ; for, though Philip IV. espoused the cause of the Scots for several years, he was compelled to abandon it in the treaty which he concluded with Edward I. in 1303. It was by their own brave efforts, directed by the genius of Robert Bruce, that they gloriously vindicated that cause against Edward II. The English claim to the over-lordship of Scotland remained, however, and Bruce took the precaution, three years before his death in 1329, of renewing the League with Charles IV. of France [1] (1325-6).

The immediate sequel proved the foresight of this transaction ; for, with the advent of Edward III. to the English throne in 1327, English aggression again became active in the renewed and protracted attempt to wrest the Scottish crown from Bruce's young son, David II., in favour of the son of John Baliol, who was ready to wear it as Edward's vassal. In this emergency the Scots turned to Philip VI., Charles the IV.'s successor, and they did not appeal in vain. For Edward's aggressive policy embraced France as well as Scotland. In virtue of his near descent, through his mother Isabella, from Philip IV., he regarded himself as the rightful heir to the French throne, on the extinction of the direct line of Capet by the death of Charles IV. in 1328, in preference to Philip of Valois, whose claim was recognised by the French barons. [2] He did, indeed, at first acknowledge Philip's title by doing homage to him for his French possessions. But ten years later, in 1337, as the result of increasing friction with his French overlord on the score of Scotland and his domains in Aquitaine, particularly in Agennois, he determined to assume the title of King of France, [3] and to enforce it with the sword. Philip, it must be admitted, gave him considerable provocation for this unconscionable proceeding. He had not only responded by diplomatic representations [4] to Edward to the appeal of the Scots,

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[1] The treaty will be found in *Memoirs Concerning The Ancient Alliance Between the French and the Scots*, 4, 10. See also Fordun's *Chronicle*, edited by Skene, i. 350, and Wyntoun's *Chronicle*, edited by Laing, ii. 372.

[2] See *Continuator of G. de Nangis*, edited by Guerand, ii. 82, 84 ; Froissart, *Chroniques*, edited by Lettenhove, ii. 20-21, 213-15.

[3] *Foedera*, ii. 1000-1001.

[4] For these negotiations, see Fordun, i. 358-59 ; *Foedera*, ii. 903 *et seq.*; Knighton, i. 472, 476 ; *Chronicle of Bridlington Author*, edited by Stubbs, 121-126 ; *Murimuth, Chronica*, edited by Thompson, 75.

who from 1331 onwards were exposed to repeated English invasions, for assistance, but welcomed the fugitive David II. after the terrible defeat inflicted on them at Halidon Hill in 1332. He had, in view of the futility of these negotiations, without actually declaring war, allowed French ships to bring munitions of war to Scottish harbours and to join Scottish squadrons in attacking English ports and merchant vessels.[1] He permitted, too, French mercenaries to serve in the ranks of the Scottish patriots.[2]

Thus, even before the beginning of what is known as the Hundred Years' War between England and France, the League stood the Scots in good stead. Its actual outbreak in 1338, by weakening Edward's power of aggression against Scotland, contributed materially to frustrate his attempt to deprive them of their heroically-won independence; and by the year 1341, when David II. returned from France, the English invader had been practically cleared out of the country. At the same time it gave them the opportunity of repaying their obligations to Philip, who, in spite of the pressure of the conflict with Edward, had sent a French squadron to assist in the capture of Perth from the English in 1339,[3] and with whom David had renewed the League before his departure from France.[4] David had not been three months at home before he mustered and led a large army across the Border, with much slaughter and pillage southwards as far as Durham,[5] to oblige Philip as well as pay back old scores against Edward.

On two subsequent occasions, at critical conjunctures in the Anglo-French struggle in the reign of Edward III.,—in 1346, the year of the battle of Creçy, and in 1355, the year before the battle of Poitiers,—the Scots repeated the invasion at the summons of the French king. The result on both occasions was disastrous to David. David, in his chivalrous attempt to give effect to Philip's urgent entreaties[6] for Scottish co-operation, was defeated and captured at Neville's Cross in October, 1346; and the Scottish inva-

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[1] *Chron. de Lanercost*, p. 283 ; *Foedera*, ii. 915, 944-46, 953.

[2] Knighton, i. 477. Rex Franciae . . . multos de Francia in Scotiam contra regem Angliae praemisisse.

[3] Wyntoun, ii. 452.

[4] Froissart, iii. 432 ; et le renouvella les convenenches qu'il avoient entr'iaux doi.

[5] Froissart, iii. 437 ; Knighton, ii. 23 ; Wyntoun, ii. 470.

[6] Hemingburgh, ii. 421-23, who gives Philip's letters.

sion of England in 1355, in response to the summons of King
John, backed as it was by a contribution of 40,000 moutons d'or,[1]
exposed Scotland in return to the terrible visitation of a formidable
English invasion, led by Edward in person.[2] On neither occasion,
too, did this intervention avail to avert disaster from France.
King Philip hazarded and lost the battle of Creçy against King
Edward in 1346, and ten years later Edward's son, the Black
Prince, repeated his father's exploit against King John at Poitiers,
where two hundred Scots, under William and Archibald Douglas,[3]
heroically maintained the honour of the League.

Nevertheless, on both occasions the fact of this Scottish inter-
vention, by compelling Edward to keep part of his forces employed
in the defence of the northern English border, may be said to
have lessened the effects of the blows which these great English
victories inflicted on France. The patent fact is that, in the face
of this Franco-Scottish League, Edward had undertaken a task
beyond his powers. He might win victories against the Scots;
he might win victories against the French; but he could not
succeed in a policy that involved him in the attempt simulta-
neously to conquer France and Scotland, and steeled against
him the enmity of both. Moreover, both nations evolved, during
this period of resistance to English aggression, the qualities that
defeat tends to nurture in peoples who prove themselves worthy
of victory, if they may fail for a time to achieve it. We might
almost say, paradox though it seems, that defeat contributed to
the success of the defeated side. In the case of Scotland, victory
on the grand scale during this period went to the English. The
English won three pitched battles against the Scots within the
fifteen years from 1331 to 1346—Dupplin Moor, Halidon Hill,
and Neville's Cross. Yet they did not conquer Scotland, because
the Scots were invincible in defensive warfare, and deprived these
victories of any permanent fruit by their stubbornness, and by
their resourcefulness in wearing out their enemy. In the case of
France, victory on the grand scale during this period likewise
went to the English. The battles of Sluys, Creçy, and Poitiers—also
fought within about a decade and a half, 1340 to 1356—ended in
crushing defeat for Scotland's French ally; and yet they did not end

[1] Knighton, ii. 79 ; Fordun, i. 371.

[2] Avesbury, *de Gestis Edwardi III.*, edited by Thompson, 450-56 ; Fordun, i.
373-75 ; Knighton, ii. 85-86 ; Wyntoun, ii. 485 ; Froissart, v. 332-39.

[3] *Chronique des Quatre premiers Valois*, edited by Luce, pp. 51-52 ; Baker de
Swinbroke, 253.

in the conquest of France, though the treaty of Bretigny[1] in 1360, which was the result of them, witnessed for a time its partial dismemberment. With the advent of Charles V. to the throne in 1364, the French evinced those staying qualities which had preserved the independence of Scotland intact in spite of repeated invasion and defeat, and which rolled back the tide of English aggression against France before the reign of Edward came to an end in 1377.

In this desperate struggle of the closing years of Edward's reign, Charles V. and Du Guesclin won back nearly all that Philip and John had lost. 'La France,' says Michelet, 'a de nobles reveilles,' and this saying was gloriously exemplified under the auspices of Charles and Du Guesclin. In this achievement the Scots had no share, for though Robert II., who succeeded David II. on the throne of Scotland in 1371, renewed the League,[2] he did not intervene actively in the Anglo-French war during the remainder of Edward's reign. Yet both directly and indirectly Franco-Scottish co-operation undoubtedly contributed materially to the preservation of the independence of both Scotland and France throughout this long period of resistance to English aggression. Edward III. would almost certainly have conquered Scotland, for the time being at least, but for the hostility of France, involving him, as it did, in difficulties which greatly reduced his power of aggression against his Scottish enemies. He would, likewise, have stood a much better chance of conquering France, but for the hostility of Scotland, which weakened his striking power against its French ally. It is thus that the Franco-Scottish League performed such an important service in the preservation of the independence of both nations, and from this point of view its rôle in history was a most decisive one. The measure in which the independence of France and Scotland has influenced the history of Europe is the real measure of its importance. Had Edward III. conquered Scotland and France the history of Europe would have been vastly different. Europe would, for a time at least, have passed under an English hegemony and its world empire would have been anticipated in a medieval domination which, in view of the weakness of the medieval empire, would have made it practically invincible against all possible rivals.

[1] *Foedera*, iii. 487 *et seq.*

[2] *Foedera*, iii. 925. Cf. Isambert, *Recueil Général des anciennes Lois Françaises*, v. 359-363; *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, i. 196-97.

With the death of Edward III. in 1377 the importance of the League, from both the national and the international points of view, was by no means at an end. Suffice to say that there were three intervals in the history of France and Scotland during which its potent activity might be further conclusively proved. The first of these extended from 1415 to 1451, when the French were again called on to maintain their national rights against the attempt of the English kings Henry V. and Henry VI. to unite the crowns of France and England, and during which Scotland sent many of her bravest and best, under such leaders as the earls of Buchan and Douglas, to help to win victory for their allies at Beaugé in 1421 and to make defeat heroic at Verneuil in 1424. 'Je ne puis aller nulle part,' said the dying Henry V. bitterly, 'sans trouver devant ma barbe des Ecossais morts ou vifs.' Again, in the second decade of the sixteenth century James IV. suffered crushing disaster and laid down his life on Flodden Field in the chivalrous effort to assist his ally, Louis XII., against his English enemy, Henry VIII., who had forcibly revived the English claim to the French crown in 1513. Thirty-five years later France paid back the debt, which was sealed by the blood of so many thousands of valorous Scots at Flodden, by offering a refuge to the girl queen Mary after the equally crushing defeat at Pinkie in 1547, and by sending a French army to help in vindicating Scottish independence against the attempt of the Protector Somerset to forcibly unite the English and Scottish crowns.

Thereafter supervened the danger to that independence which the League became when the marriage of Queen Mary to the Dauphin threatened to lead to the union of the crowns, not of England and Scotland, but of Scotland and France. This danger had the effect of drawing Scotland and England together in an opposition League, and coalescing with the growing potency of the Reformation movement, which brought the two countries into line in 1560 on religious as well as political grounds, practically put and end to the old alliance.

Nevertheless, it had not the effect of materially diminishing the old sympathy between the two peoples, which has outlived all political and ecclesiastical changes. On the side of France, these expressions of sympathy took the form of conferring again and again substantial privileges on Scotsmen, such as the privilege of naturalisation, of committing the person of the king of France to the care of a Scottish guard, of exempting Scottish merchants

from duties levied on foreigners in France, of conferring high honours and extensive lands as well as high ecclesiastical office on Scotsmen who had gained their right to these distinctions by the services rendered by them to the French king and people. The memory of these things is preserved in official documents,[1] and the following is an example of the generous spirit of amity so long prevailing between the two peoples.

‘ Lettres de naturalité générale pour toute la nation d'Escosse par le roi Louis XII. en 1513. Louis par la grace de Dieu, roi de France. Sçavoir faisons à tous presens et avenir, que, comme, de tous temps et ancienneté, entre les rois de France et d'Escosse, et les princes et subjects des royaumes, y ait eu très estroite amitié, confederation, et alliance perpetuelle, . . . et dernierement du temps du vivant de feu nostre très cher seigneur et cousin le roi Charles VII., pleusieurs princes du dict royaume d'Ecosse, avec grande nombre de gens de la dicte nation, vinrent par deça pour aider a jetter et expulser hors du royaume les Anglois, qui detenoient et occupoient la plus part du royaume ; lesquels exposerent leurs personnes si vertueusement contre les dicts Anglois, qu'ils furent chassés, et le dict royaume reduit en son obedience, depuis laquelle reduction, et pour le service que lui firent en cette matière, la grande loyaute et vertu qu'il trouva en eux, il en prit deux cents à la garde de sa personne . . . Parquoy nous . . . ayant regard aux grands services que les dicts roys d'Ecosse ont par cy-devant faits à nos dicts predecesseurs, à l'expulsion de nos dicts ennemies, à la grande loyaulté et fidelité que toujours & sans jamais avoir varié a esté trouvé en eux, et ceux de leur dicte nation, envers nous, et singulierement au très grand, louable et recommandable service que nostre dict bon frere, couzin, et allié, le roi d'Ecosse moderne nous fait presentement . . . avons resolu declarer et ordonner . . . tous ceux du dict royaume d'Ecosse qui demeureront et decederont ci-apres en nos dicts royaumes . . . de quelque etat qu'ils soient . . . pourront acquerrir en icelui tous biens, seigneuries, et possessions qu'ils y pouront licitement acquerir etc. comme s'ils etoient natifs de nostre dict royaume.’

The League was, of course, due to the factor of self-interest on either side. There is no philanthropy in international politics. International history has been moulded by utility, except at those rare epochs when some ideal sentiment has asserted its power over

[1] A collection of them will be found in *Memoirs Concerning the Ancient Alliance*, pp. 35 *et seq.*

national action.   Scotland became the ally of France because she became the enemy of England.   France became the ally of Scotland for the same reason.   Two and a half centuries later we see the play of the same factor of national self-interest in the alliance which united Scotland and England against France and in the union which made both kingdoms, as Great Britain, one in their attempt to crush or diminish French power.   Alliances, like other things, change with the centuries, and Scotland, as the partner of England, has fought with England against France as manfully as it once fought with France against England.   Nevertheless, the Franco-Scottish League did create for centuries a feeling of kinship, a mutual influence, a unity of effort which left their deep mark on the history of both countries.   No Scotsman, despite subsequent divergent policies, can think of France but with a certain emotion as of the remembrance of the friend of 'auld lang syne,' and with a special admiration of all that France has accomplished in the history of European civilisation.

JAMES MACKINNON.