

SECTION IV.

EARLY COMMERCE AND NAVIGATION.

IN the course of these observations upon the condition of the country during this remote period of our history, its commercial wealth, and the state of its early manufactures, are subjects of high national interest, upon which it will be necessary to offer some remarks ; and both points are so intimately connected with the navigation of the country, that it will be impossible to advert to the one without attending to the other. The high prosperity of the kingdom under the reign of Alexander the Third has already been noticed ; and there is even reason to believe that, at an infinitely more remote period, the Scots had established a commercial intercourse with the Continent, and, in the end of the sixth century, imported fine linen from foreign parts.¹ Under the reign of Macbeth, a monarch whom the patient research of our antiquaries has rescued from the region of fable, and the immortal libels of Shakspeare, the kingdom was wealthy ; and, from the discovery of large quantities of money, coined by Canute, the almost contemporary king of England, we may infer the existence of some foreign commerce. It is certain that, in a pilgrimage to Rome, this king exhibit-

¹ Macpherson's Notes on Winton, vol. ii. p. 479.

ed a liberality, in distributing money to the poor, which was considered remarkable even in that rich resort of opulent pilgrims.¹ The rich dresses which were imported by Malcolm the Third; the Asiatic luxuries of Alexander the First; and the grant by Edgar, to the church of Durham, of the duties on ships which entered the ports of a certain district in his dominions; all denote the existence of a trade with foreign countries.

Under the subsequent prosperous and able reign of David the First, the evidence of the cartularies, and the minute and interesting details of his friend and faithful biographer, Ethelred, enable us to form some idea of the commercial wealth of the nation. Scotland was, at this period, visited by many foreign ships; and the merchants of distant countries traded and exchanged their commodities with the opulent burghers and merchants. It was the praise of this monarch, to use the language of Fordun, "that he enriched the ports of his kingdom with foreign merchandise, and to the wealth of his own land added the riches and the luxuries of foreign nations; that he changed its coarse stuffs for precious vestments, and covered its ancient nakedness with purple and fine linen."² In his reign the ports of Perth, Stirling, and Aberdeen were the resort of foreign merchant ships, which paid certain duties to government before they were permitted to trade; and out of the sums thus

¹ A. D. ML. "Rex Scotiæ Machetad Rome argentum seminando pauperibus distribuit." Marianus Scotus. Macpherson's Notes on Winton, vol. ii. pp. 469, 479.

² Fordun a Goodal, vol. i. p. 305.

collected, the king, who greatly favoured the church, gave frequent grants to the monasteries and religious houses.¹

One great cause of the wealth and prosperity of Scotland during those early times, was the settlement of multitudes of Flemish merchants in the country, who brought with them the knowledge of trade and manufactures, and the habits of application and industry which have so long characterised this remarkable people. These wealthy citizens had been welcomed into England by the wisdom of Henry the First, and had settled upon the district contiguous to the Marches, from which they gradually spread into the sister country during the reign of Alexander the First. In 1155, Henry the Second, with angry and shallow policy, banished all foreigners from his dominions;² and the Flemings, of whom there were then great numbers in England, eagerly flocked into the neighbouring country, which offered them a near and safe asylum. Here, without losing their own particular tendency to make money by trade, and to establish commercial settlements, they accommodated themselves to the warlike habits of the people, and willingly served in the king's army;³ whilst, at the same time, their wealth and industry as traders, fishers, manufacturers, and able and intelligent craftsmen, made them excellent instruments, in the hands of David the First, for humanizing and ameliorating

¹ Dalrymple's Collections, p. 386.

² Brompton, pp. 1043, 52. ³ Gulielmus Neubrigensis, p. 232.

the character of his people, and introducing amongst them habits of regular civil occupation. We can trace the settlement of these industrious citizens, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in almost every part of Scotland; in Berwick, the great mart of our foreign commerce; in the various towns along the east coast; in St Andrews, Perth, Dumbarton, Ayr, Peebles, Lanark, Edinburgh; and in the districts of Renfrewshire, Clydesdale, and Annandale. There is ample evidence of their industrious progress in Fife, in Angus, in Aberdeenshire, and as far north as Inverness and Urquhart. It would even appear, from a record of the reign of David the Second, that the Flemings had procured from the Scottish monarchs a right to the protection and exercise of their own laws.¹ It has been ingeniously conjectured, that the story of Malcolm the Fourth having dispossessed the ancient inhabitants of Moray, and of his planting a new colony in their stead, may have originated in the settlement of the Flemings in that remote and rebellious district.² The early domestic manufactures of our country, the woollen fabrics which are mentioned by the statutes of David,² and the dyed and shorn cloths which appear in the charter of William the Lion to the burgh of Inverness,³ must have been greatly improved by the superior dexterity and knowledge of the Flemings; and the constant commercial inter-

¹ Robertson's Index, p. 61.

² Chalmers's Caledonia, vol. i. p. 628.

³ See the charter of William the Lion to the royal burgh of Perth, in Cant's Muse's Threnodie, vol. ii. p. 6.

