

Scottish Ecclesiastical Ruins.

No. I.

RESTENNETH PRIORY.

O, did you not glow when they told you the Lord
Had dwelt in that this-le-grown pile,
And the bones of old Christians were under its sward
That once knelt down in its aisle ;
And had you no tear-drops your blushes to steep,
When you thought--O'er your country so broad
Ye seek almost in vain for a mouldering heap
Save only these churches of God.



THE ruin of Restenneth Priory, both on account of the style of its architecture and the associations connected with it, is worthy of more note than it has hitherto possessed. The traveller by rail from the south to Aberdeen, if he be observant, and especially if he be of an antiquarian or ecclesiological turn of mind, may have noticed about a mile and a half beyond a town—which he generally pronounces “very dismal-looking,” but which he would find to present a very different appearance if he only had an opportunity of looking at it from a right point of view, that point being on the other side of the town from that on which the railway passes. About a mile and a half beyond this town, then—which is no other than the ancient royal burgh of Forfar—he may have observed, standing in the midst of a bog on the south side of the line, an old spire, which reminds him more of the objects in the scenery which meet the view in merry England than the hideous barns with belfries which have generally displaced the ancient churches of Scotland. He looks at it a little more inquiringly, and he finds that it stands at the west end of a building, whose narrow lancet windows, visible even though built up, pronounce it to be an erection in the First Pointed style.

The absence of any roof, and the appearance of some old, broken-down walls amidst a clump of trees, which add much pic-

turesqueness to the view of the ruins, tell him the same tale, which, alas! is told by so many ruined and desecrated shrines in Scotland—a tale of ruin, revolution, and desolation. Nothing strikes a Scotchman so much, on his first visit to England, as the sight of the ancient churches and the grand old cathedrals—objects which in his own country he has been accustomed to see only as ruins—still standing in their beauty and symmetry, and used for the purpose for which they were built. He feels at once that he is in a new region, and amongst a people whose history has been entirely different from that of the northern nation. He feels, not in a more advanced, but in an older, country. At first it seems as if he were taken back a couple of centuries, as well as transported a couple of hundred miles. But the sight of the innumerable buildings devoted to industrial purposes—factories, foundries, and buildings in connection with collieries, often in close proximity to some ancient Gothic pile—remind him that he is in the midst of a flourishing and progressive country, and that his lot is still cast in the Nineteenth Century. The idea of the permanence of the order of things in the country gradually replaces the notion of its antiquity with which the sight of its well-cared-for ancient buildings at first filled him; and he begins to ask himself the question if his own country would not, after all, have been better if its cathedrals had been like that of Glasgow; if all its parish churches were like that of St. Monance, near the East Neuk of Fife; if the Abbey of Arbroath had still towered in its unruined beauty in the midst of that busy town; if Elgin and Melrose had risen with all their spires and pinnacles, complete, as they came from the builders' hands to grace the vales of the Lossie and of the Tweed.

To return to Restenneth. The building to which we have supposed our traveller's eyes to be directed—a mile and a half beyond Forfar—is the ruin of Restenneth Priory. Mr. Jervise, in his "Memorials of Angus," states that it is the burial place of a son of King Robert Bruce, named John. Mr. Jervise notices the fact of Bruce having had two sons which has hitherto been overlooked by historians.

The evidence brought forward by Mr. Jervise is of a nature which cannot be gainsaid, being no other than a charter by King David II., dated 10th June, 1344, confirming the ancient grants to the Priory by Kings David I., Malcolm, and Alexander, and "for the special regard which he had to the Priory as the place where

the bones of his brother-german, John, were buried." He further granted it twenty marks sterling from the customs of Dundee.

The Chapel of the Priory is by far the most interesting portion of the ruins. Its buttresses have, unfortunately, all been removed, no doubt for buildings in the neighbourhood. It must have been long since this took place, however, for a picture of the Priory in "Grose" represents it much in the same condition as it exists at present. The Piscina, the Ambry, and the Sedile are all in a good state of preservation. The basin of the old font is in existence, near its proper place at the west end of the Chapel, and it was wont to be made use of in the last century by the Churchmen of the district for the baptism of their children. They had, of course, no consecrated building in which to assemble, and, indeed, it was often dangerous to assemble at all. But their children were often carried to Restenneth, and baptised there by stealth. A venerable member of the congregation of St. John's, Forfar, can cite the case of his father as one who was baptised there.

Restenneth is generally supposed to have been the burial place of Feredit, King of the Picts, killed in the great battle fought in its neighbourhood between the Picts and Scots in 830. The chronicles record that Alpine, King of the Scots, buried his slain rival with Christian burial. Some people throw doubts on all such records. The present writer can only say that the district for miles round is studded with tumuli and standing stones sculptured and unsculptured; that urns with calcined bones, as well as interments of human bones unclaimed, have been discovered in great plenty. Flint and bronze weapons have also been discovered, and very recently a bead of Anglo-Saxon manufacture, all which of course serve to confirm the records of the chronicles.

In 1139 the Priory was conveyed by King Malcolm to the Abbey of Jedburgh. The charter effecting the union is dated at Roxburgh, and bears the signatures of William and David, the King's brothers; Nicholas the Chamberlain, and Arnold Bishop of St. Andrews as witnesses.

In 1242 the Chapel of Forfar, then an appendage of Restenneth, was also assigned by David, Bishop of St. Andrews, to the Abbey of Jedburgh.

In the report of an inquest appointed in the reign of Robert Bruce, to inquire into the ancient rights and privileges of the house, the jurors *inter alia*, found that the canons were in posses-

sion of the curious privilege of uplifting, on each coming of the King to Forfar, for each day he abides there, two loaves of the lord's bread; four loaves of the second bread, and six loaves called *hugmans*.

What was *hugmans*? What is the origin of the name? Is *hugman* connected in any way with that word whose origin is such a *cruz* to philologists and antiquarians—*hogmanay*?

In 1333 a charter was granted in favour of the Priory by Sir Alexander Lindsay of Glenesk; and three years afterwards, James, Bishop of St. Andrews, made over to it his whole lands of Rescobie.

The last charter in favour of the priory was granted in 1360 by the ancestor of the present proprietor (into whose family the property came 300 years afterwards) Andrew Dempster of Careston.

At the Reformation the Priory passed from sacred into secular hands. In 1562, it was first held by Mariot, Lady Haliburton, mother of the last Commendator, and next by Lady Margaret Erskine of Gogar, her daughter, in 1586. It was held by Sir Thomas Erskine, afterwards Earl of Kelly, 1606.

In 1552, the property was in the hands of the Fletchers of Ballinshoe; and in 1693, in those of the Hunters of the Dod, now of Burnside, who still retain a right of sepulture within its walls. In 1700 it was bought by George Dempster, Merchant in Dundee, son of the last Episcopal minister of Monifieth, descendant of the Dempsters of Carraldstone or Careston, and grandfather of the well-known George Dempster, celebrated by Burns in his line:—

“Dempster a true-blue Scot I'll warrant.”

The Priory in the olden time was occupied by Canons of the order of St. Augustine, introduced in Scotland by Alexander I.

The Chapel is 66 feet long by 21 wide. The tower with its spire is about 70 feet high. The tower appears to be the oldest part of the building, having a plain Saxon doorway.

The late proprietor, George Hawkins Dempster, Esq., of Dunnichen, took a great interest in the ruin, and commenced to put it into such a state as would prevent it from going further to decay. After repairing the walls of the church, he found that the repairs which would require to be made on the tower would be of too costly a nature to authorise him in proceeding with the work. To give a practical conclusion to this article, will any ecclesiological or antiquarian reader come forward

to help in repairing this old tower and spire? It would not take a very large sum to roof and restore the church. The lancet windows are exceedingly narrow, and it would not cost much, therefore, to fill them with stained glass. Would not such a restoration be a graceful memorial of the love with which Scotsmen, even after the lapse of so many hundred years, regard King Robert Bruce?

W. J. S.

The most of our old ecclesiastical buildings have been, at some period, the scene of many touching episodes and romantic incidents in connection with the events of our National History. We purpose from time to time giving illustrations of, and descriptive articles on, the Abbeys of Aberbrothock, Dryburgh, Inchcolm, Jedburgh, Kelso, Pluscarden, and Melrose, and also the Cathedrals of Dunkeld, Dornoch, Kirkwall, Icolmkill, and Elgin. We ask our contributors to send us Photos or Drawings of any of the above named *ruins*, also articles on approval treating in a succinct yet comprehensive style of their History.

ED. CALEDONIA.

