



ST. NINIANS TOWER.

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THE eventful past of the Scottish nation is reflected in the antiquities of St. Ninians. The original church, still popularly termed "the Aisle," stood in the midst of the churchyard, where its ruins, the present burial place of the proprietors of Touch, remain. It must have been a very ancient place of Christian worship, as it is mentioned in some of the earliest charters of Cambuskenneth Abbey, which absorbed the tithes of the parish, and it was termed Eccles, or ecelesia, *the church par excellence*. Round its walls were posted the troops of Randolph, Earl of Moray, by order of King Robert the Bruce, on the eve of the battle of Bannockburn, with the view of intercepting any flank movement of the English towards the relief of the garrison of Stirling. Barbour, writing seventy years after the event, says—

"Therefore to his nephew bade he
The Earl of Moray, with his mengie,
Beside the Kirk to keep the way
That no man pass that gate away."

The movement had been almost executed when the successful skirmish at Newhouse took place which became so auspicious for the decisive conflict next day. St. Ninians being exposed by its situation to frequent visits from military forces in times of warfare, the armies usually rested in the neighbourhood of the church. In 1585, as Calderwood relates, the Lords opposed to the Earl of Arran "marching to Stirling, put themselves to order of battle at the church called St. Ninians, half-a-mile or so distant, till nightfall, when they entered Stirling by a back way without resistance." The local ecclesiastical records contain abundant reference to the ongoings of soldiers belonging to one or the other of the many armed bands which either passed through or remained for a time in the village. The end of the church came on the 1st February, 1746. The army of Prince Charles had laid siege to Stirling, and had defeated General Hawley's forces near Falkirk, when it was compelled hastily to retreat before the advance of the Duke of Cumberland. The contemporary register of the Kirk Session refers to the catastrophe that ensued as follows:—"13 Feb., 1746.—Which day the beadle was interrogate what of the utensils were left after the late burning of the Church, which happened on the first of

this month of February by the blowing up of the powder magazine that was lodged in the Church belonging to the Rebel army, and by which the death of a considerable number of the inhabitants and others was occasioned. He replied the trams of the Litter were safe, as also the big mortcloths, but represented that the Highlandmen had carried off one of the little mortcloths and the pulpit-cloth." Curiously enough, the tower appears to have sustained little or no injury. It is a comparatively recent structure, having been built in 1733 contiguous to the church, in room of a former steeple or bellhouse, which occasionally served as a place of confinement for offenders, and the site of which is now occupied by the Auchenbowie burial place. The existing Parish Church was erected after the destruction of the earlier edifice by the heritors, who sold the remaining materials for £10. The minister of the day, Mr. James Mackie, subsequently minister of St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, and Moderator of the General Assembly, was commissioned by the Kirk Session to proceed to London and petition the King for help. He managed with difficulty to collect £400 from "the great folks," but the money was required for the support of an assistant and of the numerous poor, and the parish still awaits a church whose external appearance would correspond with that of its predecessor, lost in the hazards of civil war. The separation of church and tower—like a similar disjunction at Utrecht, in Holland—with the ruined aisle intervening, never fails to excite the tourist's curiosity, and to bring the results of national strife vividly before him. The village of St. Ninians itself—once proudly denominated "the town of St. Ninians," and holding its annual fair at Brock's Brae, beside the Borestone—clustered primarily round the church, and was called the Kirktown, a name surviving in the "Calton," a row of thatched cottages on the roadside. The oldest date still visible on the houses of the present village is 1627.

