

Saint Margaret, Queen and Patroness of Scotland



by A Secular Priest

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"The queen that bore thee, oftener upon her knees than on her feet, died every day she lived."

Chapter 1 - Birth of the Princess Margaret - She spends her childhood in Hungary, at the Court of Saint Stephen

Eight hundred years ago, the court of Saint Edward the Confessor was the residence of a young princess, named Margaret, of whom few, beyond that court, knew anything. Her life, up to that time, had been a chequered one; if, indeed, we can properly call a life chequered which had been almost entirely passed in the dark shadow of misfortune. Long before she was born, her grandfather, Edmund Ironside, had been murdered, and his share of the kingdom of England seized by Canute the Dane. Her father and her uncle, the sons of the murdered king, were sent by the usurper to a powerful friend of his in Sweden, together with secret instructions that the unhappy boys should be put safely out of the way. Canute's friend seems to have had more conscience than Canute himself; and, instead of putting the poor children to death, he privately sent them away to the court of Stephen, king of Hungary, probably the same Stephen as we find honoured as a saint, with a festival, in September, every year. Indeed, before we have done with the life of this young princess, Margaret, we shall probably discover a strong family likeness between her mode of life and what passed every day at the court of Saint Stephen.

Margaret's father and uncle, then, still mere boys, and thus rudely driven about the world, were kindly received by the

king of Hungary. Edwin, the elder of the two, and the uncle of our young princess, did not live to be a man; but his brother Edward became so popular at the Hungarian court as to marry the queen's niece, Agatha, a daughter of Bruno, brother of the emperor Saint Henry. Their union was blessed with three children: - Edgar, afterwards surnamed the Etheling; Christina, who lived to become Abbess of Wilton; and Margaret, the future queen of Scotland. From what is known of later events in her life, the date of her birth must have been somewhere between November 17th, 1046, and November 16th, 1047. By the time that she had become eminent enough to make people anxious to know its exact date, no one survived to give the information.

But, before Margaret was born, several changes had happened at the Court of England. Canute, at his death, had been succeeded first by one of his sons, and then by another; and when the second died, (1042), the English drove the Danes out of the kingdom, and looked about once more for a king of their own. If they had known anything of the young grandson of Edmund Ironside, or if Hungary had not been so far from England, Margaret's father might now have recovered his rights, she might have been born in more prosperous circumstances, and the whole course of her future life might have been very different from what it actually became.

To understand what took place at this crisis in the affairs of England, we must remember that the father of Edmund Ironside was twice married. When Edmund's mother died, Ethelred, his father, married Emma, the Flower and the Pearl of Normandy, and the aunt of William, afterwards the conqueror. Her eldest son, Edward, became a favourite with the English; from his retreat in Normandy he had, for many years, watched the stormy course of events in his own country; and now that the Danes were gone, and the English

in want of a king of their own, he stepped in, and secured the crown without difficulty. According to the laws of feudal succession, there can be no doubt that it belonged to Margaret's father, Edward, the son of Edmund Ironside's eldest son. Yet even our interest in all belonging to this young princess will hardly dispose us to regret an arrangement that gave St Edward the Confessor to the throne of England; although that arrangement excluded the family of the younger Edward from its inheritance.

All those events happened before Margaret was born. Saint Edward did not invite his nephew from Hungary, as might have been expected, to reside in England. So it was that Margaret was born, and that she spent all her childhood at the Court of Saint Stephen. A royal princess in exile, even although she may have kind friends about her, is a notable instance of human weakness. Possessing only the name of rank, without its independence, and its other substantial attributes, excluded by the accident of her "birth from those avenues to wealth, and influence, and station which are open to the inferior ranks of her countrywomen, a poor and homeless princess might advantageously change places with the humblest lady in her kingdom. At the same time it must be remembered that, even in a worldly point of view, high position, and commanding influence are not generally good for the mind. There are few persons whom they do not more or less spoil; few characters which are not sensibly deteriorated by them. The direct tendency of an influential position is to foster habits of imperiousness and selfishness; many a gentle mind has been irremediably vulgarised by high elevation. Not that misfortune is without its peculiar and kindred dangers; but, on the whole, it is a better school for the character than the precincts of a reigning sovereign's court.

Our young princess was fortunate in her opportunities of mixing in a court where earthly rank was made more attractive by the practice of the loveliest virtues. The king himself taught his courtiers, by his example, the duties of generosity towards the poor, and of tender sympathy with the sick; he was remarkable for the practice of prayer, and is said to have gained some of his temporal successes over his enemies on his knees. More especially he prayed that he might be permitted to see Hungary completely Christianised before his death. His exertions with a view to that end were such as to earn for him the title of the Apostle of Hungary, and the permission of the Holy See, for himself and his successors, to have a cross carried before them in processions. Out of his tender devotion to the Mother of Jesus, he dedicated his kingdom to her; he took leave of this world on the day of her assumption, which he had taught his people to call Great Lady-day, Such a man could not fail to create an influence around him, of which even children like Margaret must have been sensible. Long after she had bidden adieu to Hungary and the home of her youth, and when she had entered on her own arduous Apostolate, she could not fail to remember the engaging lessons which, as a child, she had learnt from her father's royal friend and benefactor.

Chapter 2 - Saint Edward invites the Princess Margaret and her family to England - At the Conquest they retire from England, and are driven by a storm into Scotland, where the Princess Margaret is married to King Malcolm III

As time went on, and Saint Edward felt himself growing old, without a child to whom he could transmit his crown, he resolved to invite his nephew, Edward, to come with his family to England, probably intending to receive him and entertain him as the future heir of the kingdom. The bishop

of Worcester carried this invitation into Hungary, and the younger Edward acceded without difficulty to the wishes of his uncle. Margaret must have been about ten or eleven years old when her father returned, with all his family, to his native land. He did not long survive the change; and thus his only son, Edgar, the Etheling, became the heir presumptive of Saint Edward. Now, it seemed as if fortune were at last about to favour our young princess; she was now more nearly in the position to which her royal descent entitled her; she seemed destined at no remote day to become the sister of the reigning monarch, with the bright future incident to her position opening before her. In other respects, too, she had lost nothing by her change of residence from Hungary to England. She had left the Court of Saint Stephen only to enter the Court of Saint Edward, in which the bright example of the beautiful queen, Edith, was only surpassed by the life of her holy husband. The company of saints does not always, indeed, make saints; but where the disposition towards what was good was so decided as in the case of young Margaret, the society first of her uncle Stephen, and next of her granduncle Edward, must have powerfully assisted the tendency of her own mind to the practice of perfection.

During his early days of adversity, Saint Edward had made a vow of pilgrimage to Rome. Afterwards, when he proposed to redeem his pledge, his counsellors strongly opposed it, representing to him the extreme danger of leaving his kingdom in those critical times, when several neighbouring states were watching their opportunity to snatch the crown of England from his head. He, therefore, solicited and obtained leave from Pope Leo IX to compound for the remission of his vow, on certain conditions. One of these was that he should enlarge the Benedictine Monastery at Westminster. The work approached its close in the year 1065; and, on Holy Innocent's-day, the Abbey-church was

dedicated with great ceremony to the service of God, in honour of his blessed apostle Saint Peter. Saint Edward had been declining in health for some time before, and was unable to be present at this great ceremony, Queen Edith, therefore, represented her husband on the occasion. Our young Margaret, now nineteen years of age, was one of the ornaments of the court on that day. Within a few weeks she took part in the second pageant which that venerable abbey has witnessed; within a few weeks she accompanied Queen Edith, as the holy remains of Saint Edward were carried to their last resting place.

Edgar, the Etheling, was now by right king of England. But he was no match for the rough and unscrupulous soldiers who coveted his crown. Harold, son of the late Godwin, Earl of Kent, and brother of Queen Edith, at once laid claim to it, on the pretence that it had been bequeathed to him by Saint Edward. Wilham, Duke of Normandy, also made a similar claim, on a similar pretence; and, soon after, landing in England with an army, in support of his pretensions, he defeated and killed Harold in the memorable battle of Hastings, and thus at one blow became master of the kingdom. A faint but unavailing attempt was made to support the claims of Edgar; but it was soon abandoned as hopeless, and the dark clouds of misfortune again gathered round the princess Margaret and her family. Her brother, finding nothing but humiliations in store for him if he remained in England, prepared to return to Hungary with his mother and his sister Margaret. Christina, it seems, had by this time left her family to follow the life of a nun. Margaret, then, with her mother and brother sailed from England, a few months after the battle of Hastings, intending again to claim the hospitality of the Hungarian court. Providence, however, had very different designs for the refugees. A storm overtook them on their short sea-voyage; they were blown out of their course into the Frith of Forth, in Scotland,

and found a harbour of refuge on the coast of Fifeshire, a good many miles from the mouth of the Frith, at a place which was afterwards called Saint Margaret's Bay, or Saint Margaret's Hope.

A few years before this event, the crown of Scotland had been recovered by Malcolm, the third sovereign of the name, called also Cean-more, or Great-head. The tragical end of his father Duncan has obtained a wide celebrity from the genius of our immortal Shakspeare. Young Malcolm fled from the usurper, Macbeth, and found an honourable retreat in England, with Saint Edward, who further assisted him with an army, under the command of Siward, Earl of Northumberland. The treacherous Macbeth was killed in battle, and the young king regained his rights the same year that Margaret and her family were invited to come and reside in England. He was living with his court at Dunfermline, in Fifeshire, when news was brought to him that the royal English exiles were wrecked upon his coast, and within a very few miles of his residence. With characteristic generosity, he made haste to repay the debt that he owed to Saint Edward, by conducting the refugees to Dunfermline, where he made them welcome to his best hospitality. His goodness of heart was in no long time amply overpaid, by his obtaining possession of the heart and the hand of the princess Margaret, then in the flower of her youth and beauty.

Chapter 3 - Barbarous condition of the Scotch - Queen Margaret's prayers, charities, and love of mortification - She obtains justice for the poor, and redeems many English captives taken in war - Pilgrimage to Saint Andrews

Scotland at that time must be considered as having scarcely begun to emerge from a state of barbarism. We speak of it as

a kingdom, because its crown was independent; but its population probably did not equal half the modern population of Glasgow. Whole districts were occupied by morasses, by swamps, and by unproductive forests. The work of Ninian, of Palladius, and of Columba, to which it owed its Christianity, was not indeed wholly destroyed; but it had suffered cruelly from the incursions of Danish and Norwegian pirates, and from the fierce passions of rival races within the country itself.

An improvement had followed the union of its northern and southern inhabitants, under Kenneth Macalpine, in the previous century; yet is impossible to doubt that, when young Malcolm returned from exile to take possession of his inheritance, he arrived among a people who had nearly everything to learn of the humanising arts of peace. War, and the chase, and a rude kind of husbandry were too probably the extent of their attainments. Many of the older monasteries had perished by foreign invasion; the voice of religion could only make itself feebly heard amidst the bloody feuds of the clans, and the more terrible assaults of their English neighbours. Indeed, it is hardly a matter of doubt whether Malcolm himself was much superior in cultivation to the rude serfs and barons who looked up to him as their sovereign. The arrival of the princess Margaret with her retinue, and his choice of her for his queen, were events of the very highest importance in their results on the late history of the Scottish nation. Its civilisation may be assumed to date from the occurrence of those fortunate events. If polished manners were anywhere to be found at that day, Margaret must have acquired them at the court of Stephen, and her mother could not fail to have been familiar with them at the court of the emperor. Several of the Hungarian and of the Norman nobility also became domesticated in Scotland, in the retinue of the princess Margaret and of her mother; and it is probable that their

cultivation must have been a little in advance of the native Scotch.

But the civilisation which took its rise in Scotland in the reign of Queen Margaret was eminently of a Christian kind. It differed essentially from the artificial refinement of pagan nations in this, that religion was acknowledged as its foundation. The queen herself was a model of every virtue. Her first care was to purify her own conscience, and secure the Divine blessing on her plans for the improvement of her people, by living a holy life. She made choice of a prudent counsellor in matters relating to her soul, in a Benedictine monk of the name of Turgot, who was afterwards prior of Durham, and finally bishop of Saint Andrews. With him she concerted her plans for making her high position advantageous to the people of Scotland. It was he who directed her in the exercises of piety and devotion in which she spent a great portion of her time. There are numbers of good people in the world, who have no conception of the pleasure it gives holy persons to pass a long time in prayer, and in the praises of God. Hence it is a common mistake to suppose that this shew of devotion is made for a purpose, or that historians and panegyrists have made much more of it than is at all consistent with the truth. But it generally happens that some proof of the reality of a saint's devotion is furnished by other and more active parts of his life. In the case of Saint Margaret, although her daily prayers were long, her works of charity and of self-denial were arduous; and such works are accomplished only by hands that are every day stretched to heaven, for strength greater than belongs to our feeble nature. Prayer was so sweet to her, that she grudged spending all the night in sleep. She often rose ere it was day, to unite her praise with the worship of those heavenly choirs where there is no night. The Psalter was an especial favourite with her; she recited the whole of it, with many tears, every day. There are few days, indeed, in the life

of any one, in which the changing moods of the human spirit are not reflected in the language of these inspired poems. Saint Margaret never omitted being present, every morning, at the holy sacrifice of the mass. She generally found time to hear several masses, before engaging in the business of the day. Although books were a rare and expensive luxury in those days, the queen contrived to procure a few of them for her spiritual reading. We are told, in particular, of a beautiful copy of the Gospels, which she valued very highly, and carried with her wherever she went. It was ornamented with gold and colours, and the capital letters were exquisitely illuminated. The king, her husband, was unable to read; but she inspired him with so much interest in all her pursuits, that he often looked into her prayer-books, and the rest of her little library; the rough man would even kiss a book of which he perceived the queen to be very fond; and sometimes he would give an order to have it bound handsomely for her use. As a consequence of the queen's love of pious reading, she enjoyed conversing on religious subjects with some of her clergy, proposing questions for their solution, and often astonishing them with the depth and originality of her own thoughts.

To this extraordinary love of prayer and of pious reading, she united a penitential tone of mind, which prompted her to afflict her body with fasting, even beyond the rule imposed by the Church. For example, she prepared for the festival of our Lord's Nativity by a fast of forty days, just as the Church prepares for the festival of his Resurrection by the fast of Lent. The constant feebleness of her health might very well have excused her from duties of this kind, even from such as were of obligation; but her resolute will carried her through the performance of more than was required. Her repasts, too, were strictly in accordance with the same spirit of penitence. They were poor and spare, and barely sufficient to sustain nature, without gratifying her appetite.

Unhappily, the experience of daily life goes to shew that the practice of the severer virtues, such as these, does not necessarily promote among ordinary Christians the growth of the gentler and more amiable features of character. Human nature is so imperfect, among good people even, that we find every day censorious habits, suspicious tempers, irritable feelings, combined with a rigid performance of the severest duties of religion. But Saint Margaret, like all the saints, kept her heart soft and tender by acts of mercy to the poor members of Jesus Christ. To wait on poor persons at table, to wash their feet, and to send them away with a liberal alms, was a part of her daily occupation. During Lent and Advent, their numbers were very considerably increased. Her charity especially overflowed towards widows and poor orphan children; and she provided places where the indigent sick might be taken care of, and where she waited on them in person, as if in them she saw her Divine Lord and Master visibly represented. The expense incurred by all this daily outlay sometimes exceeded the means at her command; when that happened, she thought nothing of selling her own jewels and ornaments, and, with the king's permission, she now and then drew on the public treasury for sums of money which drained it of every farthing.

In that rude age, it was often impossible for the poor to obtain justice in their disputes between man and man. Their hardships in this respect did not escape the attention of the tender-hearted queen. She made herself the channel of appeal for them to the royal ear; she sat in public places to hear their grievances and inform herself about the merits of their cause. In a field about a mile from Dunfermline, on the road to Queensferry, the county maps of last century used to shew the position of a stone called Saint Margaret's stone, on which she was alleged by a constant tradition to have sat, while she held those rude courts of appeal. The poorest

could always obtain readier access to her there, than in the interior of her palace. The stone itself was still to be seen, sixty years ago, and probably more recently still. We do not know whether it may not remain to this day.

Another form of mercy, to which the charity of the queen disposed her, belonged especially to the circumstances of that age. Wars between the English and the Scottish nations were very frequent. The hospitable welcome given by Malcolm to the refugees from the English court, provoked the hostility of the Conqueror, and brought an army across the border of the kingdoms. From time to time, hostilities were renewed with varying success on either side; and, as a consequence of this disturbed state of the country, Scotland contained many English prisoners of war, who became virtually the slaves of their captors. The queen employed commissioners to travel over the country, and observe which of those unhappy captives were subjected to the severest treatment. When her commissioners had made their report, she sent them down again with money, to purchase the freedom of her suffering countrymen.

Saint Andrew's was then a place of great resort for pilgrims; and many of them were poor people, who suffered great hardships, both in their passage across the Frith of Forth and when they reached the shore, either in going or in returning. The queen, in consequence, erected houses for their reception on the shores of the Frith, where they were provided, at her expense, with everything that they required. She also maintained a service of ferry-boats, for the gratuitous transport of poor pilgrims to the shrine of the apostle, and back again to their own homes.

Chapter 4 - Queen Margaret's munificence to churches - Her influence over her husband - She

encourages ceremony at court - She reforms public manners - She promotes industry and commerce

Munificence to the house of God is very nearly allied to the charity which cares for the living temples of his body. Apart, altogether, from the pious desire to lodge him, in his sacramental presence, in a manner not at least inferior to the palaces in which earthly sovereignty resides - a desire symbolised by the lavish act of Mary, when she anointed Jesus for his burial, and which the censorious traitor interpreted as a waste of precious materials - the poor are not robbed of the wealth which builds and adorns the temples of God. The poor, in the short intervals of their rest from toil, love to exchange their close and squalid abodes for the free air and the liberty of spacious churches; the poor feel the exchange more agreeable than the rich, who return to homes more luxuriously furnished than the church. The poor also feel as if they had a kind of property in their churches; they seem almost to belong to them. The church is at least common ground, above the ordinary level of the world, on which they can meet their richer neighbours with something of an equality. All that a noble church expresses, all that is done there and foreshadowed there, is common to rich and poor; and the poor feel that, and in their hearts bless the founders of noble churches, as among their truest benefactors.

Such was doubtless the double motive of this holy queen, in her large contributions to the beauty of God's house. On the site of the humbler temple at Dunfermline, where she had been married and crowned, she erected a fine church, in honour of the blessed Trinity. The best decorations that the age afforded were bestowed upon it; the vessels used in the service of the altar were of solid gold. Mention is made, also, of a cross of exquisite workmanship, and profusely ornamented with jewels and the precious metals, with an

image of our crucified Lord attached to it, which excited the devotion of every one who entered the queen's new church at Dunfermline. We must not confound with this crucifix another cross to which Queen Margaret had much devotion, and which, as we shall see by and by, she carried about with her on her journeys. This was long afterwards known as the Black Cross of Scotland; it was to lodge it worthily that King David, the youngest son of Queen Margaret, built and endowed the abbey of Holy Rood, or Holy Cross, at Edinburgh.

The queen was also a great benefactor to the church of Saint Andrew's, afterwards the metropolitan see of Scotland. There, too, she erected a cross which was long regarded with peculiar veneration. Her chamber was always filled with materials for church decoration and for the divine service; with censers, and copes, with chasubles, and stoles, and altar-cloths, and priests' vestments. Some of these were in the process of manufacture, others of them, when finished, were kept there for a while, to be looked at and admired; in short, the queen's workroom resembled the warehouse of a dealer in church ornaments.

Saint Margaret also erected a small chapel near Roslin, three miles to the south of Edinburgh, in honour of Saint Catherine of Egypt, whose body is related to have been buried on Mount Sinai. The ruins of this chapel, which were still visible late in the last century, gave their name to the neighbouring mansion-house, which is still called Saint Catherine's.

Before Queen Margaret could effect so much for the honour of religion, it is clear that she must have gained very considerable influence over her husband. Although at first rude and illiterate, he was very tractable, and easily came into the views of his amiable queen. Her first success seems to have been in persuading him to reform his life. The duties

of justice, of purity, of charity, and of mercy, are precisely those in which a man raised only a few degrees above a savage would be most wanting; and in those duties he had before his eyes a daily model in Queen Margaret. She managed him so prudently as not to make her religion offensive to him, as too often happens from the indiscretion of pious people. Before Queen Margaret had done with her apt scholar, she had taught him both how to keep his conscience free from great sin, and also how to imitate her exercise of the works of mercy. She had taught him the value of prayer; so much so, that he was often induced to join his holy queen in the exercise of public devotion, for which she stole time from the hours of the night.

Margaret brought to her great task of civilising Scotland and its sovereign a larger worldly experience than his, which she had gained during long and familiar residence at courts considerably further advanced in civilisation. Knowing the value of a certain ceremoniousness in preserving the subordination of one rank to another, without which society falls into serious disorder, Margaret introduced greater state into her husband's court; she persuaded him to command the attendance of a guard of honour, when he appeared in public. State ceremonies were conducted with more decorum; when the king entertained his nobles, greater attention was paid to external propriety, both in dress and in behaviour; and the sovereign and his guests were, for the first time, served in gold and silver. The whole tenour of the holy queen's life will plead for her, against any suspicion of ostentation in these new arrangements; they were designed with excellent tact, for the purpose of teaching her rude people, in a way which they could easily comprehend, the natural distinctions of rank, and the reciprocal duties of one order in society to another.

Her reforms at court went deeper than this. She chose only women of noble birth, and of unimpeachable character, for her attendants; she permitted no levity of manners among the young courtiers, in her presence. Her own manners were marked by a union of sweetness with reserve, which both attracted every one who approached her, and at the same time checked familiarity. Even when she was gayest, she never indulged in empty laughter; and when she was compelled to find fault, she never failed in dignity, even in the most provoking circumstances. Her influence, as may be imagined from this description, which we owe to one who knew her well, was very great. It repressed the licence of a half-civilised court, and maintained a high tone of propriety, probably new to her courtiers.

From the reign of this illustrious lady may be dated the earliest efforts of Scotland in commercial industry. She encouraged merchants to import, both by sea and from England, many and various kinds of goods, such as Scotland had never before known, more particularly in wearing-apparel of an ornamental kind; and this no doubt with a view to elevating the taste and the tone of her people; for, excepting the savage pomp of war, they were strangers to anything better than the squalid habits of their barbarian homes. We shall not attempt to decide the question, whether the invention of the Scottish tartan owes its origin to these efforts of Queen Margaret. Historians have said so; and the thing is very possible.

Chapter 5 - The Queen's family - Their later history - The queen persuades the bishops to reform some abuses in religion - She addresses them in council - The Grace-Drink

The family of Queen Margaret consisted of six sons and two daughters. Their education naturally occupied much of the

thoughts of their holy mother. Her active endeavours to train them up piously and usefully were sanctified by many secret prayers for success, and by many tears. Little or nothing of her method has come down to us, but this one significant fact, that, as in her lessons to her whole kingdom, the queen made subordination a constant rule in her family; she not only claimed deference and obedience from her children, for herself and for their father, but, in addition to this, she insisted on the younger giving precedence, on every occasion, to the elder. Thus, for example, when they went up to make their offering at mass, according to the custom of that day, she bade them go in the order of their ages, first the elder, and then the younger.

A very brief sketch of the later history of Saint Margaret's children, will very well compensate for the scantiness of our knowledge as to her method of training them. Edward, the eldest son, was killed prematurely in battle; but not before he had lived long enough to win the affection and esteem of the whole nation. His death was regarded as the too early extinction of the brightest promise.

Ethelred, his next brother, died also in his youth. He had become a monk, died abbot of Dunkeld, and is mentioned in a monastic record as a man of venerable memory. His body is supposed to have been accidentally discovered in the church of Dunfermline, four centuries later, wrapped in silk, and in good preservation.

Regarding Edmund, the queen's third son, history varies considerably. According to one version of his story, he lived and died in a pious manner, in England, as a recluse; according to another, he failed in his duty for a time, but in the end expiated his fault by sincere repentance. In either case, the lessons of his mother were not lost upon him. Their

influence would appear stronger, if we adopt the supposition of his becoming a great penitent.

His fourth brother, Edgar, after an interval of a few years of anarchy in the kingdom, succeeded his father, Malcolm, and reigned happily nine years. His highest praise must be that, in his mild government, his equity, and his beneficence, nay, in the sweetness of his disposition, he reminded all men of Edward the Confessor. Alexander, his next brother, became King of Scotland at his death, and maintained the family character for justice, charity, and religion. He made munificent gifts to the Church. Among other benefactions, he founded a monastery on the Island of Inchcolm, in the Frith of Forth, out of gratitude for his preservation in a violent tempest, which had driven him on the little island, and had kept him there for three days, as the guest of a lonely hermit.

On his death, after a reign of seventeen years, David, the sixth and youngest son of the queen, began his long and prosperous reign of nearly thirty years. Circumstances enabled him, more perfectly than his brothers, to carry on the humanising and civilising policy of his mother: in her son David, the holy queen may be said still to have presided over the destinies of Scotland. The churchmen, and especially the monastic orders of that day, were much in advance of the rough fighting-men and the still rougher peasantry, in the arts of civilisation. David, therefore, by the munificent encouragement which he gave to churchmen, largely promoted the objects so near his mother's heart in regard to Scotland. He died as he had lived, in a holy manner, and long enjoyed the local reputation of a saint, though he was never canonised by the Holy See.

Matilda, or Maude, the elder of Saint Margaret's daughters, reflected her mother's virtues at the court of Henry I of

England, to whom she was married. Her love to the poor, and her devotion to the sick, resembled her mother's; she founded the hospitals of Christchurch in Aldgate, and of Saint Giles', for their relief. Her subjects surnamed her The Good; and local English calendars mentioned her, too, as a saint. Her dust lies in Westminster Abbey, not far from Saint Edward's. Her only daughter, Maude, was married first to the Emperor Henry V, and afterwards to Geoffrey, Count of Anjou; and by her second marriage she became the mother of Henry II of England. Through her, our present gracious Queen, and many private English families, are lineally descended from Saint Margaret.

The second daughter of the holy Queen of Scotland was named Mary, and became the wife of Eustace, Count of Boulogne, brother of the famous Godfrey, King of Jerusalem. She, too, left behind her a name for great piety and charity. If the proverb be true, that the end puts a crown on the work, Queen Margaret's education of her children was abundantly crowned in its successful issue.

An undertaking, more arduous than all of these, still lay before our holy queen, before she could say that she had finished the task assigned to her. That was nothing less than a reformation of abuses in religion. If we consider the lawlessness of the times, and the demoralising effect of the frequent wars that wasted the country, it will not appear surprising that something had to be corrected in religious observances. The general neglect of Sundays, and of the great festivals, seems to have been one of the most crying evils; as was also the frequent disuse even of the Easter Communion. Marriage with a step-mother and with a brother's widow had become not uncommon. Among lesser evils, the irregular time of commencing Lent appeared to Saint Margaret a matter which called for reform; instead of commencing from Ash-Wednesday, or even earlier, as was

the practice formerly in certain places, it had become the custom in Scotland to defer the beginning of the fast till after the first Sunday in Lent. To these and other matters of discipline, our holy queen could not be altogether indifferent. It is true, indeed, that she could not be regarded as responsible for them; but it seemed to her at least worth an effort to bring her own influence and her husband's to bear upon the persons whose peculiar province it was to correct such abuses. With this view she promoted the meeting of provincial councils of the clergy on several occasions. One of those was more than ordinarily remarkable, for the active part which Margaret herself took in its deliberations. The Gaelic language was then the dialect of Scotland, but Margaret was ignorant of it; the king, therefore, who thoroughly understood both his own language and the Anglo-Saxon, which Margaret spoke, undertook to be the interpreter between the bishops and the queen. Margaret made a short speech to the assembled clergy, setting forth the abuses which called for amendment, with so much persuasiveness, as to engage her august audience at once to promote the reforms which she had so deeply at heart. The council, indeed, was not a large one; the number of sees in Scotland then amounted to no more than four; and it was part of the queen's scheme for the advancement of religion, to add two more sees for the northern part of her kingdom.

The neglect of saying grace at meals suggested to the holy queen a popular way of encouraging this act of natural piety. She introduced the custom, at the end of meals, of drinking to the health of those persons who had thanked God for his temporal mercies. This custom long survived her, under the name of the Grace-Drink, or Saint Margaret's blessing.

Chapter 6 - Queen Margaret feels a presentiment of her death - Malcolm goes to war with England, and

perishes - The Queen expires in Edinburgh Castle, and is buried at Dunfermline

For nearly a quarter of a century Scotland had enjoyed the benefit of Queen Margaret's example. It was a period of some prosperity for the country, occasionally dashed by reverses in war with the overwhelming force of England. Yet when compared with the sorrowful youth of the queen, passed in a foreign land, and in a state of dependence on the goodwill of others, Margaret's married life may be accounted on the whole a fortunate time for her, in a worldly sense. But the scene once more changes, and the close of this holy lady's residence on earth is surrounded, like her youth, with gloom and storm. Her biographer has left us an affecting history of a conversation which she had with him, some time before the end, and in which she spoke openly to him of her presentiment of an early death. It was on an occasion when he was about to leave her to return to his monastery. She talked to him of all that had befallen her in life; and as she spoke, her tears flowed freely. It was impossible to take part in such an interview, without being moved to tears. They both of them wept; and for a time, neither spoke. Then the queen resumed, bidding her spiritual adviser farewell, - "I shall not be long in this world," she said, "and you will survive me many years. Two requests I have to make; I beg you never to forget my soul in your masses and your prayers; and that you will love and care for my children, and will teach them to fear and to love God. If hereafter you should observe any of them too much elated with their high position, you will advise them, and, if necessary, reprove them, as a father and a teacher, dissuading them from offending their God by a love of money, and from the neglect of eternal happiness for the sake of earthly prosperity. These things I beg you will promise me to do, as in the presence of God, who is listening, as a third person, to our conversation." The good

monk gave her his promise, through his tears; and they parted for ever in this world.

The son of the conqueror now reigned in England, and Malcolm took advantage of what seemed a favourable moment to renew the war on the border. A short interval of peace ensued; but a presumed invasion of Scottish rights in Cumberland again brought Malcolm into the field, in opposition to the express wish of Saint Margaret, who, it seems, had a foresight of coming disasters. The queen, meanwhile, removed for security to the Castle of Edinburgh, a fortified stronghold, owing its origin to Edwin, the consort of Saint Paulinus. A severe attack of illness left behind it a chronic weakness, from which she never rallied. At first she was compelled to forego her favourite exercise of riding on horseback; later, she could seldom leave her bed. This state of languor continued for rather more than six months.

Four days before she breathed her last, she appeared sadder than usual, and remarked to her attendants that perhaps that day a greater calamity had befallen Scotland, than at any former period. They paid no particular attention to what she said, until, a day or two later, news arrived that the king had perished; then they remembered, too, how she had laboured to dissuade her husband from this fatal expedition.

On the fourth day after she had made this remark, she revived a little, and was able to attend mass in her oratory, where she received for the last time the most sacred body of our Lord. Scarcely was the service over, when she became much worse, and was put to bed. It was evident that her end was very near. Her face was deadly pale, and while the ministers of religion stood around, she entreated them to commend her soul to Christ. She sent for the black Cross, which she had always especially venerated; it was placed in her hands; and she kept looking at it, kissing it, and signing

her face with it. Her hands and feet had become quite cold; still she prayed audibly, repeating the psalm Miserere, from beginning to end, holding the cross in both her hands.

At this critical moment, her son Edgar arrived from the seat of war, with the first intelligence of disaster. Entering his mother's chamber, he found a scene even more heartrending than he had left behind him. The queen, who seemed as if every moment might be her last, suddenly collected her strength, and asked her son for his father and his brother Edward. He feared to tell her the whole dreadful truth, and tried to evade her inquiries by answering that they were well. With a deep sigh she replied, "I know it all, my son; I know it all. I adjure you by this holy cross, by our near relationship, to tell me the whole truth." It was impossible for him to resist such an appeal; the young prince informed his mother that his father and his brother Edward had fallen in the neighbourhood of Alnwick, four days ago, and had been carried to Tynemouth, for interment.

The dying queen's reply was a memorable one. Raising her eyes and her hands to heaven, she exclaimed, "I return thee praise and thanks, Almighty God, for inflicting on me so grievous a calamity in my last moments; it is the effect of thy will to purify me, by bearing it, from some sinful imperfections."

Death was now rapidly advancing. The thoughts of the saint reverted to the sacred mysteries of religion, with which the habits of her life-time had made her familiar. Her last thoughts were expressed in the words of the prayer in the liturgy, immediately before the communion. "Lord Jesus Christ, who by the will of thy Father, and the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, hast given life to the world by thy death, deliver me" - her prayer was not finished on earth; with the words, Deliver me, on her lips, the weary pilgrim passed to

her everlasting communion with the Author and the Finisher of her faith. Her spirit returned to God, so peacefully and so serenely, as to leave no doubt in the minds of her attendants that she had exchanged labour for rest, her exile on earth for her heavenly home. The excessive paleness of her countenance was succeeded by a rosy flush, such as those who loved her had sometimes seen there, while she was asleep; and even now they could hardly think that she was dead. The day was the 16th of November, 1093; and the number of her years was only forty-six.

A few days after the queen's holy departure, her precious body was carried to Dunfermline, amidst the tears and lamentations of her family and of the whole nation, and was interred near the altar of the Holy Cross, in the Abbey church which she had founded. "And there," to use the language in which her biographer, with much pathos, concludes her beautiful story, "there she rested, in the place which had so long witnessed her painful watchings, her prayers and her tears."

Chapter 7 - Beginning of devotion to Queen Margaret as a Saint - Her Canonisation - And Translation - Her tomb a place of Pilgrimage - Cross Hill - What became of her body, after the Reformation - Her head preserved, and sent to the Low Countries - Her office inserted in the Roman breviary - Changes in the day set apart for her festival

Our account of this holy queen's life would be manifestly incomplete, without at least a short sketch of the rise and progress of the veneration in which her memory is now held, not only in Scotland, but wherever the Catholic faith is professed. We shall do our best to make it as brief and as exact as possible, premising, however, that the inquiry is beset with unusual difficulties as regards the dates of

particular events. This is the first occasion on which a tolerably correct account of the subject has been gathered into one popular view.

As long as we find that the soul of the holy queen was publicly prayed for, we may presume that the opinion of her sanctity had not yet gained ground sufficiently to warrant her being regarded as a saint, in the strictest sense of the word. Now, five years after her death, we find her son Edgar founding an Abbey at Coldingham "for the souls of his father, and of his mother," and of others. Fifteen years later than that, her son David founded another abbey, also for the souls of his father and mother. Hence, whatever private and even growing opinion there may have been about her sanctity, nothing had been determined, up to the date of 1113, that could authorise the omission of her name from such pious commemorations.

About thirty years after her death, however, we discover the first trace of the rising feeling towards Saint Margaret, as a glorified Saint, in a grant of land to Coldingham, by a nobleman who made it "for the soul of King Malcolm, and his deceased sons." From that time, that is, a year or two after the accession of her son David to the throne, and onwards through succeeding reigns, we have tacit proofs of the same kind, to show that public opinion pointed to the lamented queen as to a holy soul for whom it were henceforth superfluous to pray, and for whom the honours of canonisation were probably in store.

All through the century succeeding her death, this opinion prevailed and gathered strength; other fifty years passed, and the time was come when Rome was to be requested to set its seal on the result of public opinion. William III, a descendant of the Saint, entered warmly into the cause; the abbot of Dunfermline was deputed to promote it, before the

holy See. The bishops of Scotland added their unanimous testimony, and the earnest prayers of both clergy and people expressed the universal desire to see their blessed queen raised to her place among the canonised. The cause was remitted to a commission of the bishops, to take evidence, and to report upon it. Their hearty co-operation made this part of the process a short and an easy one; and Innocent IV, in no long time, pronounced the decree of the queen's canonisation.

All eyes were now turned from Rome to the stone tomb in the abbey church of Dunfermline, where the holy remains had lain for a hundred and fifty-eight years. The king was there, and his mother the dowager queen Joan, sister of the English Henry III; the bishops and abbots of the kingdom were in attendance, together with the great nobility, and a numerous deputation of the clergy and of the laity. The whole of the summer night, before the great day of Translation, was spent by the assembled multitude in prayer for the Divine blessing on the event of the next day. The 19th of June, 1251, dawned on Scotland, and an august procession passed into the abbey church. Bishops, and clergy, and mitred abbots were preceded by the Cross, and the waving censer, and were followed by the king and his court, and by a joyful multitude; bells without, and organs within the church accompanied the chanting of psalms and hymns, as the holy rite proceeded, and the bishops approached the tomb of the royal saint. It was opened, and her holy body was placed with great ceremony in a chest of silver, ornamented with gold and with precious stones. The church resounded with the invocation which has never since that day altogether ceased in Scotland, Saint Margaret pray for us. It was the first public canonisation that Scotland had for many previous centuries witnessed; and, strange to say, it was the last.

The honoured tomb of the saint now became an object of frequent pilgrimage. As devout persons approached Dunfermline from the south, they reached a rising ground about a mile from the ferry which they had to cross, whence they gained their first view of the abbey church, the goal of their journey. It became a custom among them to pause here for a few minutes' prayer; a cross was erected on the spot, and gave the little knoll the name of Cross Hill, which it has retained even till our time. The steps of the cross might have been seen a very few years ago; perhaps they are still visible.

From the day of her Translation, previously to the era of the Reformation, two days were set apart every year to the memory of Saint Margaret; one, the day of her decease, November 16th, and the other, at an early period, June 19th, the day of her translation. This second day, however, was changed to June 10th; at what time, or for what reason, historians are at a loss to say. One competent authority, indeed, suggests that it may have been in consequence of a second translation of the saint's head, which we know was at one time separated from her body, as was done with the relics of many saints.

When the storm of the Reformation swept away so much of what the "ancient Christianity" had taught men to revere, the body of Saint Margaret disappeared from the church at Dunfermline, and the church itself became a ruin. From this time, we must regard the relic of the saint's head as entirely separated from her body. On the unsupported authority of the Scotch historian, Conn, it has been alleged that the holy body of the queen, together with the body of her husband, was removed, at the request of Philip II of Spain, to the royal chapel in his new palace of the Escorial, near Madrid. It is added that they were enclosed in the same chest, with suitable paintings, and an inscription containing their

names. It is sufficient to say that the late bishop Geddes, who spent ten years of his life in Spain, and was on terms of intimacy with many of the Spanish court, could never find any evidence of this translation of the royal bodies.

The head of Saint Margaret we are able to trace with more certainty. It was removed from Dunfermline, in the first instance, to the Castle of Edinburgh, where the unfortunate Queen Mary thought herself happy to possess it. At the period of her flight into England, the sacred head was concealed in the Castle of Dury, by a Benedictine monk of that family. After thirty years it passed into the possession of the Scotch fathers of the Society of Jesus, who deputed one of their number, F. Robb, to carry it over to Antwerp for greater safety. Its public veneration was sanctioned by the bishop in 1620. Three years afterwards, it was removed from Antwerp to the Scotch College at Douay, at that time under the charge of the Scotch Jesuits. The bishop of Arras, in the same year, publicly authorised its being treated as a true relic of the saint.

Meanwhile the Scottish refugees at Rome were not idle in promoting the honour of Saint Margaret, especially among their Catholic countrymen. Innocent X (1645), first granted a plenary indulgence to the faithful on Saint Margaret's day, which was then kept on the 10th of June. The office and mass of Saint Margaret had been confined, up to this time, to the limits of her own kingdom. In 1673, her office was inserted by Clement X in the Roman Breviary, June 10th, as a semi-double festival, with the option to all clergymen not Scotchmen to say the ferial office on the day, if they preferred it. The saint was at the same time declared to be Patroness of Scotland, second in order to Saint Andrew the Apostle; and her festival was appointed to be kept in Scotland as a double of the second class. The Pope granted this extension of the saint's office to the petition of F.

Aloysius Leslie, the Jesuit rector of the Scotch College in Rome, in conjunction with the agent of the Scotch Missionaries, and with the Baron Menzies of Pitfodels, who at that time represented the Duke of Muscovy at the court of Rome.

Soon afterwards, and probably with a view to making the virtues of the holy queen better and more generally known, F. Leslie published a short history of her life, in the Italian language.

The experience of a few years was sufficient to shew that some inconvenience attached to the celebration of Saint Margaret's day on the 10th of June, owing to the frequent concurrence of some of the later movable festivals on the same day. Innocent XI therefore transferred it to the 8th of July, (1678).

Another, and a final change in the day was made by Innocent XII (1693), at the instance of the unhappy James II of England and his consort, who petitioned his Holiness to restore the saint's day to the 10th of June, the birthday of their no less unfortunate son, afterwards called by his adherents James III of England. The pope at the same time renewed a decree of 1691, which had made the festival of Saint Margaret no longer optional to the whole Church, but as henceforth of precept. Thus the final crown was placed on the devotion which for nearly six centuries had been gradually gathering round the Scottish queen.

Chapter 8 - Memorials of Saint Margaret in Scotland - Her chapel in Edinburgh Castle - Her well - Queensferry - Her altar in Rome - Conclusion

It still remains to describe, in few words, some of the principal memorials of this admirable lady, still lingering in

the country which she once adorned by her virtues.

The picturesque old city of Edinburgh possesses nothing more deeply interesting than the Chapel of Saint Margaret, in the Castle. Even if its style does not altogether warrant the opinion entertained by some persons, that it is the very same oratory as that in which Saint Margaret made her last communion, the morning of her death, it was certainly erected within a short time of that event, while the memory of the saint was still fresh in the country. This little treasure of architecture - for it is no less - had lain for years forgotten, until the intelligent research of Dr. Daniel Wilson, now professor at Toronto, laid open to the public as perfect an example of a Norman building as an antiquary could desire. It has been restored in very good taste; and no Catholic tourist should visit the capital of the north, without refreshing his devotion to Saint Margaret by a visit to this little monument. It stands close to the spot whence her blessed spirit passed, so long ago, to the enjoyment of God.

A little to the eastward of Edinburgh there remains a holy well, still called Saint Margaret's. The tradition which connects it with the saint has been lost; but it must evidently have been a place of popular resort in former times. The stone shrine in which it is enclosed is exquisitely designed and carved. It stands almost under the station of the North British Railway, called, from the well, Saint Margaret's station.

The great north road, which, before the invention of the railway, connected the capital of Scotland with Perth and the Highlands, conducts the traveller to the margin of the Frith of Forth, nine miles from Edinburgh. A little town lies here, called Queensferry, from the circumstance of Saint Margaret's constantly crossing the ferry at this place, on her journeys between Edinburgh and Dunfermline. On a modern

cast-iron well, which supplies the public with water, the tourist may see the coat of arms belonging to the queen's family, and generally known as the arms of Saint Edward.

As the Catholic tourist has come so far, he may now cross the ferry, as Saint Margaret used to do, and a drive of a very few miles further will bring him to Dunfermline, where she was married, where she worked out the task of her life, and where her remains rested in honour for nearly six hundred years. The abbey, as enlarged by her son David, is a noble ruin. The nave of the church stands, and the roofless frater-hall, or refectory of the monks. A visit to this place will suggest many reflections to any one who has learnt to know and value the memory of our blessed queen.

Her name is found attached to other places, all over the country: to a well in Lanarkshire, for example; to a bay on the coast of Fifeshire, and to a village in the Orkney Islands, called Saint Margaret's Hope.

The beautiful little church of Saint Andrew, belonging to the Scotch college in Rome, has three altars. The high altar is dedicated to the Apostle; the altar on the Gospel side of the church belongs to the Virgin-mother of Jesus; and opposite to it is the altar of Saint Margaret. The picture above it, attributed to the pencil of a Polish artist, represents the saint in her sorrowful suspense during the last absence of her husband. She kneels in her oratory, praying and weeping; her crown is laid aside; and far away we may discern the fatal issue of the day at Alnwick.

On reviewing the life of Saint Margaret, one cannot fail to be struck with one pregnant fact. Her life was nearly equally divided between inactive suffering, and arduous and repulsive labour. Exile, comparative poverty, and vicissitude, occupied the first half of her life; the task of civilising a race

of barbarians provided her with ample occupation of no easy kind, during the second. All was finished in her forty-seventh year. Whether in her earlier noviciate of humiliation, or in her maturer task, as Queen of Scotland, by redeeming the time, she made haste to enter into eternal rest. While we admire, let us learn to imitate. Let our tribute to her memory be the fruitful desire of an affection prompting us to follow the object of its regard.

Notes

The relic of Saint Margaret's head at Douay has a singular history attached to it. A Scotch Lady, of the name of Mowbray, presented the College with a rich silver bust, larger than life, and profusely ornamented with jewels, as a reliquary to contain the head of the saint. During the Commonwealth in England, the sons of Charles I in their exile visited Douay, and asked to be shewn the relic of their illustrious ancestress.

Nearly a century later, when the Jesuits were driven from France (1765), the reliquary disappeared from the Scotch College at Douay, and has never since been traced. The sacred relic, however, was not removed. It still adorned the College under the government of Scotch secular priests, until the great revolution laid the religion of France in ruins, (1793). The superiors, before their hurried departure from Douay, buried the head in their garden, hoping at some future day to return and claim it. But when the College was again visited by the Scotch, no trace of their valued relic could be found.

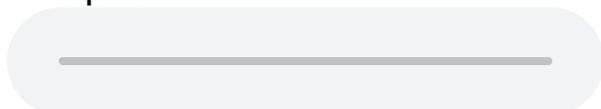
The author feels it to be due to his readers, not to take leave of them until he has very briefly indicated the sources of his information about Saint Margaret; more especially as, in a

work of this popular kind, foot-notes are out of place. In the first place, he has largely drawn upon the Life, written by Theodoric, the queen's confessor, afterwards a monk at Durham. Much of what this writer relates, he saw with his own eyes; the rest he obtained from other eye-witnesses. His story will be found in the Bollandist Lives (June 10). Besides this, the author acknowledges his obligation to a scarce tract, written by the late incomparable bishop Geddes, of whom this generation knows too little. Lastly, the author feels bound in justice to record, even in this inadequate manner, his debt to a learned Scottish priest who has devoted the unrequited labour of many years to Saint Margaret's life, and who, it is sincerely to be wished, may be sufficiently encouraged ere long to give his learned collection to the world. For a full account of Saint Margaret's Well, at Edinburgh, and of the recent disinterment of her chapel in the Castle, the reader is referred to Dr. D. Wilson's Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time.

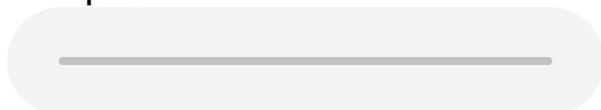
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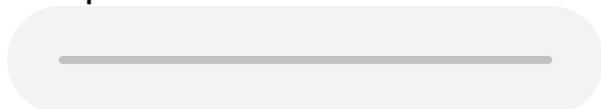
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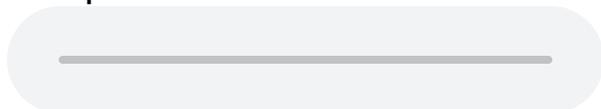
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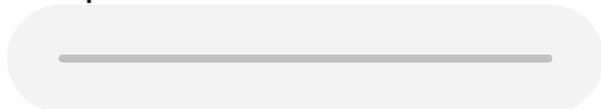
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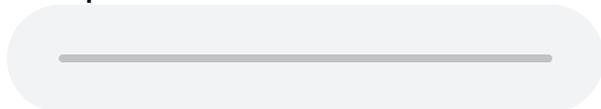
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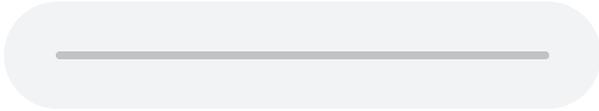
Chapter 6



Chapter 7



Chapter 8



About This EBook

The text of this ebook is taken from the short book *The Life and Times of Saint Margaret, Queen and Patroness of Scotland*, by "A Secular Priest", published in London, England in 1900, which was later published as part of the book *The Sainted Queens*.

The cover image is a statue of Queen Margaret at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland, date and artist unknown. It was photographed on 29 December 2018 by Stephencdickson, and the image was swiped from Wikimedia Commons

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