

SECTION V.

STATE OF THE EARLY SCOTTISH CHURCH.

IN reference to any efforts for the religious instruction or improvement of the people, the Scottish Church was equally cold, idle, and useless, as the rest of the Catholic churches in Europe. Her services were performed, and the Bible was shut up, in an unknown tongue, whilst a system of masses and homilies, sometimes not understood even by the priests who performed them, and a blind adoration of relics, saints, and images, usurped the place of that holy and spiritual worship which can alone be acceptable to God. So far, therefore, as regards these paramount objects, there is nothing in our ecclesiastical annals at this period but a dark void ; yet another subject remains upon which it will be necessary to say a few words ; I mean the civil influence which the church exerted upon the character of the government and of the people. And here I cannot help observing, that the history of her early relations with Rome, is calculated to place our clergy in a very favourable light as the friends of liberty. The obedience which, in common with the other churches in Christendom, they were disposed to pay to the great head of the Catholic religion, was certainly far from partaking of that obsequious servility, which it was the main object of the Papal throne to impose upon its subjects ; and it is singular that the same fervid national spirit,

the same genuine love of independence, which marks the civil, distinguishes also the ecclesiastical annals of the country. The first struggles of our infant church were directed, however, not against the encroachments of the Papal power, but against the attacks of the metropolitan sees of York and Canterbury. It was, at an early period, the ambition of one or other of these potent spiritual principalities to subject the Scottish primate, the Bishop of St Andrews, to the dominion of the English church, by insisting upon his receiving the rite of consecration from the hands of one of the archbishops of England; and nearly the whole reign of Alexander the First was spent in a determined resistance against such an encroachment, which concluded in the complete establishment of the independence of the Scottish church.

To introduce civilisation and improvement amongst his subjects, and to soften the ferocity of manners and cruelty of disposition, which characterised the different races over whom he ruled, was the great object of Alexander's successor, David the First; and he early found that the clergy, undoubtedly the most enlightened and learned class in the community, were his most useful instruments in the prosecution of this great design. Hence sprung those munificent endowments in favour of the church, and that generous liberality to the ecclesiastical orders, which has been too rashly condemned, and which was, perhaps, necessary, in another point of view, in providing something like a counterpoise to the extravagant power of the greater nobles. Under this monarch, the individual freedom of the Scottish church was rigidly

maintained; while, at the same time, it declared itself a willing subject of the Papal throne, and received the legate of the Supreme Pontiff with much humility and veneration. Individual independence, however, was esteemed in no degree incompatible with a general acknowledgment of subjection to the Chair of St Peter; and it is remarkable, that, at this remote period, there are traces of a freedom of discussion, and a tincture of heretical opinions, which, if we may believe an ancient historian, had, for a long time, infected the faith of the Scottish clergy.¹

After a feeble and ineffectual attempt, under the reign of Malcolm the Fourth, to renew the attack upon the freedom of the church, which passed over without any important result, the captivity of William the Lion was ungenerously employed by Henry, to extort an acknowledgment of spiritual, as well as feudal subjection; but on this memorable occasion, the dexterous diplomacy of the Scottish commissioners, the Bishops of St Andrews and Dunkeld, procured the insertion of a clause in the treaty, which left the question of the independence of the national church open and undecided;² and at a council, soon after held at Northampton, in the presence of the Papal legate, the Scottish bishops asserted their liberty, declaring, that they never had yielded any subjection to the English church; and opposing, with a zeal and boldness which, in this instance, proved successful, the absurd pretensions of the rival sees of York and Canterbury.³

¹ J. Hagulstad. p. 325.

² *Fœdera*, vol. i. p. 39.

³ *Fordun a Goodal*, vol. i. p. 474.

