

**CLANS, SEPTS, AND  
REGIMENTS  
OF  
THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS**

by

Frank Adam and Sir Innes of Learley, p. 14

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*Ancient Alba and the rise of the Highland Clan System.*

Under Malcolm II, whose reign lasted thirty years, the kingdom made material progress. The Danes, who had made a raid on the coast of Moray, were so severely defeated that they abandoned all further attempts to effect a settlement in Scotland. In 1018 Malcolm, along with his tributary, Eugenius the Bald, King of Strathclyde, invaded Northumbria, and inflicted a crushing defeat on Eadulf Cudel, the Earl of that province, at Carham on the Tweed. The result was the cession to the Scottish king of the rich district of Lodoneia, of Lothian. This included not only the territory comprised by the three Lothians, but Berwickshire and lower Teviotdale, as high as Melrose on the Tweed. It was about this time, too, that the Caledonian kingdom began to be named *Scotia* by chroniclers. By the Gaelic inhabitants, however, their land was, as it still is, designated *Alba*.

Eugenius, King of the Strathclyde Britons, died in the year the Battle of Carham was fought. With him expired the direct MacAlpin line of the kings of Strathclyde. Duncan, grandson and eventual successor to King Malcolm of Scotland, was selected, evidently by nomination of the *Ard-righ*, in order to effect the union of the kingdom, to fill the vacant British throne.

On the death in 1034 of Malcolm II, without male issue, he was succeeded, under the law, by his grandson, Duncan, son of his daughter the Princess Bethoc, or Beatrice, and her husband Crinan, Hereditary Abbot of Dunkeld and Dull, who as stated above was already King of the Britons of Strathclyde. Duncan was a young man and had the reputation of being a good king, and his reign lasted until 1040, when after a defeat at the hands of the Norsemen, he was slain near Elgin by Macbeth, Mormaer of Moray.

Macbeth thereupon ascended the Scottish throne in right of his wife *Gruoch nighean Bode*, who under the older alternating order of succession would have, apparently, had a claim to the throne, and tradition probably does not err in attributing to her influence Macbeth's action in disposing of the young Duncan who was apparently not a very effective military leader. Macbeth appears to have made an excellent sovereign, but, from the circumstances of his succession, naturally found himself in opposition to the Church, and consequently was given a bad reputation. He was eventually, in 1057, defeated and slain at Lumphanan, in Mar, by Malcolm, son of Duncan I. The victorious prince was crowned at Scone as Malcolm III. Malcolm is, however, better known to history as Malcolm *Ceann-mór* (or big-head), so named owing to the peculiar shape of his head.

The reign of Malcolm Ceann-mór was remarkable for a variety of circumstances, which tended towards the drifting of the monarch from his Gaelic to his Lowland

subjects, but which contributed indirectly to the development of the Highland land system.

Malcolm contributed to the organisation and development of Scotland as a united and organised kingdom, and moreover, to the high degree of tribal development in Scotland, which we recognise in the clan system. About 1066 Malcolm selected for his settled capital, Dunfermline, the picturesque little city in the old Pictish province of Fife, and so much did the Royal house become attached to the cathedral city founded there in his reign that Dunfermline Abbey became the place of sepulture of many Scottish monarchs in place of Scone, which however, with its historic moot hill, still remained the official centre and constitutional seat of the Scottish sovereigns and the spot where their coronations took place. About the very time at which Malcolm settled at Dunfermline occurred the Norman Conquest of England, as a result of which a number of noble Saxon families fled to Scotland, where they were well received by the king, who assigned them grants of land. What actually happened was, as Professor Rait explains,<sup>1</sup> that the kings "did not interfere with the ownership of land as it existed before these grants; the result of his intervention was ultimately to confirm it. What the king gave his friends consisted rather of rights over land than of land itself." The *dominium utile*, as it is called, remained with the Celtic chieftains and their dependents, and by the new tenure they got a legal security of ownership; new lords only got their castle, the demesne, and right of a following, whilst they also got the *dominium directum*, namely, presiding in the new Baron Court as a local Parliament. Among the refugees were Edgar the Atheling, the rightful heir to the English Saxon throne, who was accompanied by his mother and sister Margaret. While later the Norman barons merely consolidated existing Celtic land usages, Margaret, on the other hand, made social innovations. The Princess Margaret was espoused by King Malcolm in 1070, and as she obtained a great influence over the husband, the queen was instrumental in introducing many Saxon innovations at the Scottish Court. Among these was the supersession of Gaelic as the court language by Saxon. Queen Margaret used all her influence to replace the rites of the Celtic Church by those of Rome. She had frequent discussions on the subject with the Scottish clergy whose language was Gaelic. On those occasions, we are told, King Malcolm, who spoke both the Gaelic and Saxon languages, acted as interpreter.

These events we have narrated led to the introduction into Scotland of many new names. Indeed, the introduction of surnames into Scotland is attributed to this reign. The *Chronicles of Scotland* relate that "He (Malcolm) was a religious and valiant king; he rewarded his nobles with great lands and offices, and commanded that the lands and offices should be called after their names." It is not to be supposed that he did this specifically, but he did bring about a state of progress wherein the chiefs of tribes came to be named from, or gave names to, their *duthus*, and began to use such names.

Malcolm Ceann-mór, after a prosperous reign, was killed at the siege of Alnwick, in Northumberland, in 1093. The king's family were then all under age, and his brother Donald (known as "Donald Bane") succeeded to the Scottish throne, as Donald III. During the short reign of this sovereign he acquired a considerable measure of popularity among his Gaelic subjects by the expulsion from Scotland of many of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Making of Scotland*, p. 27.

Saxon immigrants, who had been settled in the kingdom by his brother and predecessor. Donald Bane thus reigned along with Eadmund, eldest surviving son of Malcolm and Margaret. This is usually represented as a usurpation, or assertion by Donald of a supposed earlier system of collateral succession. It is overlooked that under one of the old Scoto-Celtic laws which long survived, and to which attention is drawn by Skene<sup>1</sup> and Fordun, if the heir either male or female, was under fourteen, the nearest agnate (heir-male), became chief or king for life, but when the heir attained majority he also reigned jointly with his - if we may so describe it - "trustee for life," and a situation arose in which there was a "joint reign." In primitive days it was no doubt difficult for the heir, on coming of age, completely to dispose a man who had during the minority taken all the effect give threads of power into his own hands, and a joint reign was perhaps in these days the expedient least likely to lead to civil war or domestic tragedy. However, in 1097, this joint form of monarchy was brought to an end through intervention of Edgar Atheling (brother-in-law of Malcolm Ceann-mór), who succeeded in dethroning both Donald Bane and Eadmund and displaced Eadgar, next brother of Eadmund, on the throne. His reign was an unfortunate one, for during it the Norwegian king, Magnus, surnamed Barefoot, succeeded in obtaining possession of the Western Isles and Kintyre.

Eadgar died in 1107 and was succeeded by his next brother, who became king under the style of Alexander I. King Alexander probably ruled over a still smaller territory than his brother and predecessor, as what remained of the Scottish territory was divided between himself and his younger brother David. Alexander ruled over the territory north of the Forth and Clyde as well as the debatable land, including Edinburgh, with the title of king. His brother, on the other hand, became ruler of the rest of Lothian and Cumbria with the title of Prince of Cumbria. Through his wife, Matilda, daughter of Waltheof, Earl of Northumberland, David became Earl of Northampton and Lord of Huntingdon, in England. These English honours were retained by the Scottish Royal Family until the War of Independence.

On the death of Alexander I, in 1124, he was succeeded by David Prince of Cumbria, his brother, and the Scottish territories became once more united. During Alexander's reign a serious rebellion broke out in the ancient province of Moray. This was subdued by the king in 1116, when a large tract of territory was confiscated.

A further influx of foreigners into Scotland took place in the reign of King David, this time of Normans as well as of Saxons, made by the king to his new subjects Saxons and Normans, were in what are now known as the Lowlands of Scotland, and were feudal ones, namely a written grant by knight-service, in which the older Celtic system of land holding was gradually placed on record and incorporated in the great new and businesslike system of feudal tenure, under which, in Scotland, as in early medieval France, the family, as an organised unit, was given permanent recognition in law, and in connection with the fief *mesnie*, or in Gaelic, *duthus*. The Normans were by far the greatest business-men of the Middle Ages; they were quick to perceive the immense social value and practical advantage of the organised family which we recognise pre-eminently in the clan system, and the machinery which they had adopted in France, although somewhat unpopular in England where it had to be imposed after the Conquest and the national defeat of Hastings, nevertheless instantly appealed to the Scottish king and his Celtic nobles as a highly popular institution for effective co-ordination and perpetuation of the Celtic family system.

<sup>1</sup> *Highlanders*, p. 105.

At a later period some of these non-Celtic families (of whom the Frasers and the Gordons may be cited as notable examples) obtained a footing in the Highlands, where they soon became *Hiberniori quam ipsi Hiberni*, more Highland than the Highlanders. Indeed, the latter of the above-named families (the Gordons) attained such power in the Highlands that their chiefs came to be known as "the Cocks of the North."

Moray, however, was not long at rest; for in 1130, during the absence of King David in England, Angus Earl of Moray, along with Malcolm his brother, sons of Heth, Earl of Moray, raised another rebellion. The revolt, however, was not only completely quelled by the king, but the Celtic Earldom of Moray was forfeited. It was not revived until after the Battle of Bannockburn, when the Earldom of Moray was conferred by King Robert the Bruce on his nephew, Sir Thomas Randolph.

In 1139, Stephen, King of England, ceded to David's son the whole Earldom of Northumberland, with the exception of the castles of Newcastle and Bamborough, and to David, Cumberland.

David's reign lasted till 1153. He was remarkable for the liberal donations made by him to the Church. Indeed, of such a munificent description were these benefactions, that they drew from King James VI, the regretful complaint that David was "an sair sanct for the crown."

David's eldest son, Henry I, having predeceased him, his successor was his grandson, Malcolm IV, who was only twelve years of age at the time of his accession. Young as the king was he soon showed an aptitude for government, though he had a short reign of twelve years only, as he died in 1165. He had to deal with several insurrections, one of the most serious being that of the "Maister Men," namely, several of the great earls who objected to the king's continental expedition to the siege of Toulouse, and it is likely an attempt was made to dethrone him, which would apparently have been successful had good generalship not resented the development of an anticipated rebellion in Moray, as well as others in Ross and Galloway. During this reign the latter - which had hitherto been ruled by its own princes - was brought into immediate subjection to the Scottish Crown. In Moray, which had proved the most recalcitrant of the Scottish provinces, apparently on account of the tradition of the Macbeth claim, King Malcolm instituted a mass-readjustment of population, many of the troublesome Morays being given lands in Ross-shire and in the south of Scotland, whilst the swampy tracts in the Laigh of Moray were feued by knight-service to men competent to drain the marshes and become loyal vassals of the king. The most striking feature of the reign is that all these improvements were effected by amicable arrangement, for in 1160 King Malcolm affected a treaty with Somerled, Lord of the Isles, who had been supporting the MacHeth party in Moray, and which presumably related to these arrangements. Nevertheless they quarrelled four years later in 1164, when their opposing armies having met at Renfrew, Somerled was either killed in battle or, as some say murdered in his tent. Whilst Malcolm thus succeeded by firmness and diplomacy in materially consolidating his realm, he was nevertheless obliged in 1157 to cede the Scottish possessions in Northumberland and Cumberland to Henry II, of England.

The proceedings in Moray connected with the MacHeth rebellion also bear on the history of the Can Murray (whose centre was the Castle of Duffus) and the Clan Mackay, which claims descent from *MacHeth*. If so, their seat as *Ri Moreb* was presumably the Castle Hill of Elgin, whilst possibly their territory comprehended the "dominium" of Kilmalemnock, with the "thaneages therein" as one charter express it. If so, there was evidently rivalry between the race of MacHeth and the race of Freskin for the "representation" - indicated by the title "de Moravia." The Crown and

Somerled seem to have agreed that the MacHeth line be transferred to the remotest corner of Scotland - Strathnaver, the Crown thus securing the main fortress of Moray whereupon the House of Freskin took the style "de Moravia," as the principal house of the race left in Moray. Freskin, in this view, had an interest to concur in the expulsion of the line which claimed the "kinship" of Moray and the Castle Hill of Elgin.

Malcolm IV, was succeeded by his brother William I, surnamed the Lion, who occupied the throne until 1214, and is famous in history as the king who first adopted the lion rampant as his heraldic device. During the expedition in 1174 into England with the view of recovering the possessions ceded by his predecessors to Henry II, King William was taken prisoner by the English. He was released at the end of the year; not, however, until as a condition of his release, the Scottish king had agreed to give, as pledges for this, the castle of Roxburgh, Berwick, Jedburgh, Edinburgh and Stirling. During the reign this disgraceful treaty was, however, abrogated by Richard Cœur-de-Lion in 1189 in consideration for the payment by Scotland of 10,000 merks, equal to over £20,000 in silver weight. Of course the purchasing power was immensely greater. Whilst all claims on the Scottish monarchs for homage for Scotland were expressly abrogated, it was stipulated that homage by the Scottish to the English sovereigns should continue for the fiefs and titles held by the former in England.

In 1187 at an important battle - Mamgarvie - Donald MacWilliam, the great-grandson of Malcolm Canmore by Ingibjorg, his first wife, and thus Canmore's lineal heir, was slain, and the position of the line of William the Lion thus firmly established upon the throne. William's successor, Alexander II, did a good deal to consolidate the kingdom, and in 1230 finally crushed the claims of the House of MacWilliam to the throne of Scotland, Gillescop MacWilliam being slain, and his little daughter cruelly put to death at the cross of the burgh of Forfar to extinguish the line.

In 1234, during the reign of King Alexander II, son of William the Lion (1214-1249), occurred the death of Alan, last Prince of Galloway. This Prince left no male issue. King Alexander, therefore, despite the opposition of the inhabitants of the principality (who naturally held that, in any event the heir of line should, by the custom of the country, have succeeded), overcame all resistance and annexed the principality of Galloway to the kingdom of Scotland, dividing it into three feudal districts.

During the Royal campaign in Galloway material aid was rendered to the king by Farquhar Macintagart, second Earl of Ross. In recognition of the Earl's services he received a grant of land in Galloway, of which his successors retained possession for the best part of two centuries. This grant to one of the chiefs of the northern Highlands may be one of the reasons for finding in that province surnames, which in several cases are identical with those borne by families in the Highlands of Scotland. Alexander II, was sympathetic to the ideals of the Highland chiefs and paid several visits to the western coasts, on the last of which he died on the Isle of Kerrera near Oban, may be one of the reasons for finding in that province surnames, which in several cases are identical with those borne by families in the Highlands of Scotland.

Alexander III, son of Alexander II, who occupied the throne between the years 1249 and 1286, had the distinction of commanding the Scottish army at the decisive Battle of Largs in 1263, when the Norwegians, under Haco, their king, were completely defeated and finally driven from Scotland. It was not, however, until the reign of King James VI, on that monarch's marriage to Anne, Princess of Denmark, that the Orkney and the Shetland Isles were by treaty, added to the kingdom of Scotland.

King Alexander III was killed in 1286 at Kinghorn, in Fife, owing to the fall of his horse over a cliff. His sole heir was his grand-daughter, Margaret, Princess of Norway. After a "reign" of four years the young heiress to the Scottish Crown died, however, on the voyage to Scotland, and the whole of Scotland was, as a consequence of this untimely death, suddenly plunged into confusion and woe. This period of trouble did not come to an end till, at the beginning of the following century, the kingdom emerged triumphantly from her troubles after the Battle of Bannockburn. The close of the thirteenth century, however, while inaugurating a disastrous period for Scotland, was also noteworthy in that it also heralded the commencement of the Highland clan system, and the War of Independence really had the effect of establishing Scotland as the model tribal kingdom which has become so famous in world history. Indeed, but for the accession of the heroic Bruce, and his accurate conception of the proper model for a free feudal realm in which liberty could really flourish under the wholesome clan-family organisation, Scotland would, under a continuance of the line of Alexander III, probably have sunk into an Anglian province crushed under centralised governance.<sup>1</sup>

The end of the Celtic-Atholl dynasty has been said to mark also the decline of the old Celtic Church, but notices of the Culdees are found at least down to 1332 - the year of Dupplin - but its formal influence had virtually ceased before the end of Alexander's reign. Had this not been so, it would almost certainly have also recovered its position under the Bruce. Its influence, however, continued, as we shall see, to modify Roman practice, and to receive Papal sympathy down to the Reformation; the enemies of the Culdees appear rather to have been fanatic minor proselytes and their sin-conscious patrons, than the princes of the Holy See and the Scottish Episcopate.

Queen Margaret was a narrow-minded and ill-tempered virago,<sup>2</sup> completely under the dominance of her confessor, Turgot, who had inspired her with an intense dislike of the Celtic Church. She exerted such influence upon her husband, so impressed her religious views upon her sons that a campaign for "conversion" of the Celtic Church to the more recently evolved Roman doctrines was embarked upon. The Celtic Church defended itself vigorously, so its ultimate absorption was achieved not by persecution but by a gradual process of filling Culdee benefices, as they fell vacant, by priests qualified according to the later Roman tenets. The most active of the successors of Malcolm Ceann-mór in this course was King David, who partly from ecclesiastical influence and partly from a belief that the founding of abbeys would assist in developing the resources, and facilitating the government of the country, made immense grants to the now fashionable monastic orders which were spreading through Christendom, but which were moved by motives quite different (the saving of their own monkish souls) from the tribo-religious functions of the Celtic Abbacies - or indeed the episcopates of the Church of Rome. The latter existed to propagate religion internationally in a beautiful form, that same religion, consonantly with the local art and tradition of each Celto-tribal realm. The lesser clans which did not, like the Righ and Mormaers, have abbeys, also continued each to venerate the local *co-arb* (heir) of the primitive saint by whom the tribe had been led from paganism into the fold of Christianity.

The Celtic Church was thus essentially a clan-church,<sup>3</sup> though it was later merged in the Roman system. So incidentally with the development of this we find the

<sup>1</sup> Professor Rait, *The Making of Scotland*. p. 62.    <sup>2</sup> J.R.N. Macphail K.C.

<sup>3</sup> The "Culdees" (*Cèle Dè*, servants of God) do not seem to have been co-extensive with the whole Celtic Church, but one of the branches of its monastic element.

English archbishops endeavouring to assert their supremacy over the Scottish clergy. These English pretensions were strenuously and successfully resisted by the Scottish sovereigns; for, in 1188, Pope Clement III, in a Bull addressed to King William the Lion, recognised the independence of the Scottish Church, and declared "the Church of Scotland to be the daughter of Rome by special grace, and immediately subject to her." However, the Culdee star continued to pale before the rising sun of continental monasticism, and a century and a half later the name of Culdee disappears from the annals of Scotland.

The Celtic Church, like every other institution in Scotland, was tribal and hereditary. It was monachistic rather than episcopal, more analogous to the hereditary priesthood of early civilisations (cf. the Levites of the Old Testament), and the tendency was evidently for each provincial kingship or tribe to have its own saints and hereditary, but uncelibate monastic organisation. "The soul of Celtic monarchism was Christianity, but its body was the tribe or family," as Dr. G. G. Coulton says,<sup>1</sup> continuing:

Celtic monasticism, then, was founded on the tribal or family principle as was the society around it. The monastery with its endowments were the possessions of a particular family, and as a natural consequence they became something still more unusual in monastic history - they became hereditary. Columba named his own cousin as his successor<sup>2</sup> and 120 years passed before there was any free election of an abbot of Iona. Out of the first eleven abbots nine were certainly of Columba's family. The common Celtic title for the successors of saints like Patrick or Columba<sup>3</sup> in their abbacies was *co-arb*, which literally means "heir," and throws the emphasis upon inheritance rather than upon choice or appointment.<sup>4</sup>

Six centuries later, when a few representatives of the Celtic Church survived under the name of Culdees, we find that the Abbot of Abernethy is also lord of the lordship of Abernethy, and that he not only grants tithes out of his property there, but asserts that property to be the inheritance of himself and his heirs.

This seems really an instance of the identity of chief and high priest, a doctrine refurbished at the Reformation in the Crown as Head of the Church; but in the Celtic form this, I think applied only to certain families, those of the hereditary abbots, who thus formed an hereditary tribal priesthood. The organisation of the Celtic Church thus differed fundamentally from that of the "regular" monastic orders of the Roman Church, and also in important aspects from the - later - regulations adopted by the Church of Rome.

<sup>1</sup> G. G. Coulton, *Scottish Abbeys and Social Life*, 1933, pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Here we have an instance of what I might call "ecclesiastical tanistry." It illustrates exactly what was the corresponding practice in the tribe itself; tanistic testate succession was the rule - "election," and later intestacy, was an expedient to cover an unusual emergency.

<sup>3</sup> I feel great doubt about the identity of perambulating saints, as described in G. A. F. Knight's *Archæological Light on the Early Christianising of Scotland*. Travelling conditions, and the span of life, would surely have made it impossible for them to impress their personality on so many districts, and looking to the long period involved and the tribal character of religion, I feel many are different, and strictly local "saints" - who may, of course, have been named after, and derived Christianity from, "the original saint" of the name.

<sup>4</sup> This would be absolutely true of the period subsequent to Malcolm McKenneth, but as elsewhere indicated I think in the earlier tribal period the concept of heir was primarily tanist - nominee - the member whom the chief had selected for his re-embodiment, and who thus got his *universitas*, or heirship. I, of course agree with Dr Coulton that the emphasis was on Inheritance.



In accordance with tribal principles the old Celtic priesthood was traditionally a married one - in that respect like the Greek Orthodox Church, but with a different significance - and this subsisted even in the Scoto-Roman Church where, of course, the custom of the priests perpetuating the old Celtic practice of a married clergy, was frowned on by the officials of the Roman Church - and later seized on as a handle for opprobrious propaganda by Calvinist reformers - who were as opposed to the Celtic as to the Roman Church.

The Celtic abbeys were thus the seats of lines of hereditary abbots whom the Roman chroniclers chose inaccurately to describe as "lay abbots," and it was this tribal priesthood of these abbacies which evolved, and for centuries developed, the beautiful series of carved monuments which are found all over the Highlands including Pictland. Each of the great tribal districts had some peculiar variety of the Cross or other ornaments indicating the high degree of local individuality which has ever continued throughout the old local divisions of Scotland in matter alike lay and ecclesiastical.

The beautiful Celtic Church was anathema to the imported monastics (then obsessed with asceticism) and St Bernard denounced the hereditary monasteries of Scotland and Ireland as "an abominable custom" but gives the interesting information that "men suffered no bishop to be appointed but from men of their own tribe and family, and this execrable succession was of no recent date, for some fifteen generations had now gone by in this wickedness. . . Before Celsus (Primate of Ireland) there had been eight generations (or primates) of married<sup>1</sup> men not in orders<sup>2</sup> yet imbued with letters."<sup>3</sup>

That these hereditary prelates, and their monks, were "imbued with letters" (which the Bernardine ascetics were not!) and exponents of fascinatingly beautiful art (which the early Bernardine foreswore), the magnificent Celtic missals and other "ancient books" of Celtic monasticism amply testify. Moreover, they were nobles - and proud of it. Indeed, it was a dispute with St Finbar regarding the coping of one of these volumes that led to the princely St Columba settling at Iona.

It is only necessary to examine what the Viking raids have left of the beautiful workmanship and carving to realise that this tribal priesthood had raised religion to a far far higher standard than contemporary continental clergy, and that the religious arts and culture which were being handed down by these clan abbots from father to son were an entrancing contrast to the "save-my-own-soul" rules of early continental monasticism before it blossomed into the "custom of Cluny," the great Burgundian abbey which, under the especial approbation of the Papacy, developed the tradition of "splendour in the worship of God," and which - like its daughter-house of Paisley in Scotland - was moe in accord with the traditions of the Celtic Church.

Coulton points out that the medieval monks themselves achieved but little in art and scrivening, but both as regards building, and the scriptorium expects "the really vigorous days of the Celtic Church."<sup>4</sup> Such being the effects of hereditary ecclesiasticism - as with other hereditary effort<sup>5</sup> - it is interesting to find he observes, even in the mid-fifteenth century, that "St Columba's monastery of Iona had, naturally kept some of the colour of its original Christianity . . . (and) . . . a remarkable

<sup>1</sup> Married priests are still licensed by the Pope (Sunday Mail, 4th November 1951, p. 10.) So Celtic practice was not *fundamentally* incompatible.

<sup>2</sup> Presumably Celtic orders.

<sup>3</sup> *Scottish Abbeys and Social Life*, 1933, p.44.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 159,189.

<sup>5</sup> F.F. Brentano, *Old Regime in France*, pp. 61-71.

survival from those days of tribal monasticism,"<sup>1</sup> but extraordinarily inconsequent to describe it as "the bad old tribal tradition," this being the tradition of the only Church and period, in which he admits there was vigorous monastic activity in art and learning!

At Iona, St Margaret had endeavoured to introduce the non-Celtic monastical practices, and after the Norse desecrations, Reginald Mac Somerled, by 1203, installed Benedictine monks, regarding whom there was a dispute with the *co-arb* of St Columba, and the Celtic Church apparently retained an office of "Prior of Iona" and still influenced the whole charter of the settlement. Consequently, the position was that until the fifteenth century Iona was continuing the grand traditions of its Celtic past, and its abbots were of princely and noble rank, until the death of Abbot MacFingon. Then an ignoble appointee, Abbot Dominic, resolved to break with Celtic tradition and decided that in future no one of noble rank should be admitted, when, of course, the whole standard of culture and religious splendour would have declined<sup>2</sup>

The low-born monks introduced by the unworthy Dominic based their plot for destroying the ancient Celtic character of the monastery of Icolmkill on the ground that the then deceased Abbot Fingon, had, by a formal contract, openly made the usual and proper provision for the Lady Moire - in Celtic rule, his wife, and under Scoto-Roman terminology "honourably as concubine" - to whom, in Celtic law he was proving as Dr Warrack expresses it of the Parson of Stobo<sup>3</sup> an "exemplary husband."

The terminology employed in the deed to comply with the ruling Canon Law principles of St Andrews, was none too flattering, but it was a compromise, and the fact is that the Popes did endeavour to find, and apply, a compromise with Celtic tradition, and granted successive appointments to the issue of these unions between "a priest and an unmarried woman" (for which there are many Scottish petitions); and this "ancient Celtic priestly marriage" - not "monastic abuse," as Coulton calls it - was duly "supported by the head of the Church"<sup>4</sup> the low-born monks snubbed, and Lachlan, *duine-uasail* of Clan Maclean, a meet successor the noble Columban monks, duly admitted; whilst towards the end of the century, another Mackinnon Abbot was amongst those who beautified the Cathedral. The Church of Scotland seems fortunately to be steadily finding its way back to the early principles and beautiful ideas and architecture of the Celtic Church.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Abbeys and Social Life*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> The Celtic system was based on the family pyramid, in which the best of taste in craftsmanship or other attainments was fostered in hereditary families. It was by the gradual and continued spreading of these liberal attainments, from a purely preserved stock of each, that the high level of tribe-attainments, from a purely preserved stock of each, that the high level of tribe-attainment was achieved. Similarly, hereditary craftsmen were noble-like, or "masters" of their own work; and the co-ordinating of these - very noble - efforts lay with the chieftainly and abbatial *derbhfinnes* of *daoine-uasal*. Cutting out this capacity for applying, or functions, of a nation's "nobility" has invariably led to cultural in the case of the Inca civilisation in Peru, when their noblesse was all but extinguished by the Spaniards.

<sup>3</sup> *J. Warrack, Domestic Life in Scotland*, pp. 40, 61.    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 226.

<sup>5</sup> *Scotland the Ancient Kingdom*, p 169.

There is still much evidence of the principles of the Celtic Church in Scottish religious sentiment, and these were, of course present even in the time of Roman Catholic hierarchy, for the Scottish prelates were ever vigorously patriotic, and whilst adopting many of the Catholic ways the older Celtic traditions persisted beneath. The "Scottish Sabbath" is directly derived from that observed in the Celtic Church, and just as that Church was abbatial, the earl bishops were in Scotland subsidiary to the tribal abbots.<sup>1</sup> Since abbasies were an indigenous form of religious institution in Scotland, it is significant that, whilst bishops were abolished, Abbot and Prior, as ecclesiastical titles, were not, and continued to be used and applied long after the Reformation.

The ministers who officiate in our many abbey churches (such as Iona, Paisley, Dunkeld, Dunfermline, Glenluce), and priories - such as that of the Culdees at Monymusk - are actually entitled to the old Scottish terms of Abbot and Prior. Moreover, since it is now recognised that the Cross may, in a Scottish kirk, be depicted in a panel behind, though apparently not on, the Communion table, there is again scope for displaying the symbol of the Christian religion in the Church of Scotland. The Cross in a panel above and behind the Communion table - as erected in the Thistle Chapel, St Giles' Cathedral, and unveiled by King George VI, 29th July 1943 - is exactly in accordance with the arrangement still seen in St Columba's cave at Loch Coalisport, an arrangement which, it has been surmised, was fashioned by the saint himself.<sup>2</sup> Reinstatement of the holy symbol in this manner so indentified with St Columba himself developed in the beautiful coloured and jewelled Celtic and square-ended Pictish crosses seen on the old Sculptured stones, and glowing with gold and enamel, would make Scottish churches again worthy of comparison with those of other branches of the Christian faith, and re-emphasise what our Celtic and Pictish art has to offer to the service of God and the identification of reverent beauty with the National Church.



In Dunfermline Abbey Nave.

<sup>1</sup> In 1925, however, the Church of Scotland made a profound mistake in abolishing, or consenting to abolition of, the territorial character of kirks and the heritable character of the family pew, which until then, had been related to the ownership and occupancy of land. That is, the Church of Scotland had throughout (even after the Reformation) been related to the family and the land - that is to tribality. The chief's or laird's pew, complete with arms and banner (cf. G. Scott Moncrieff, *Stones of Scotland*, p. 69), still survives, wisely, by "custom" - no doubt a faint sense of its basic significance surviving for it is really the symbol of "the family" as an institution, and, as will be seen, an aspect which traced the National Church back to the earliest and most characteristic feature of Scotland's ecclesiastical and secular civilisation.

<sup>2</sup> I. F. Grant, *Lordship of the Isles*, p. 79.