

# **A ROYAL ABBEY**

BEING A

## **SERMON**

**Preached at the Re-opening of the Abbey  
Church, Dunfermline.,**

**On Saturday, 21st October 1905,**

BY

**THE REV. JAMES COOPER, D.D.**

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PRINTED BY REQUEST OF THE ABBEY KIRK SESSION, DUNFERMLINE

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DUNFERMLINE:

PRINTED AT THE JOURNAL PRINTING WORKS.

1905.

**PRINTED ON DISC**

**ISBN 978-1-909634-01-5**

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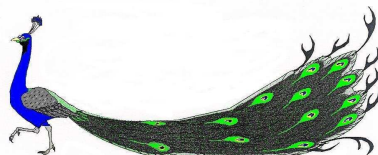
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Text - "And Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their Queens thy nursing Mothers." - Isaiah XLIX., 23.

If there is a spot, I will not say in Scotland but in Europe, that bears witness to the abundant fulfilling of this ancient promise, it is the church within those walls, adorned anew by your munificence and piety, we are again permitted this day to offer unto God, the Holy and Undivided Trinity, the tribute to our prayers and thanksgiving. The Abbey Church of Dunfermline had Kings, and their Queens, for its founders and its benefactors. It was, emphatically, what Pope Innocent the Fourth pronounced it, "your Royal Abbey."

And if ever there were kings and queens who were entitled to the praise of being nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the Church of God – whose benefactions to her sanctuaries had their source in a genuine belief in, and a religious affection for, the Church herself – we shall find them among those who built, enlarged, adorned this holy house, who worshipped before its altars, were laid to rest within its pale, or saw the light in the adjoining palace. Such assuredly were St. Margaret and St. David, both of whom were buried here. Such, no less assuredly, were James the First of Scotland and Charles the First, both of whom were born here. Such, no less assuredly, were James the First of Scotland and Charles the First, both of whom were born here. Such also, though we think of them rather as our National Deliverers, the one from Norwegian, the other from 'English domination, were the two here-kings, Alexander the Third and Robert Bruce, at whose funerals Dunfermline Abbey resounded with only too well-grounded lamentations. Both of these princes were deeply interested in the well - being of the National Church; both bestowed upon it large and splendid gifts.

Moreover, it is not Royalty, or even Royal piety alone, that confront us at Dunfermline; but that which has proved so often the special power of monarchical government, the Humanness of Royalty. It has been remarked on the Historical Plays of Shakespeare that what in them the poet makes to pass before us is not so much the sovereign as the man.

Shakespeare's kings of course, are eminently kingly; but what he delights to show us is something deeper than their trappings, deeper than their power of statesmanship-their sharing pings, deeper than their power of statesmanship- their sharing in our common lot, in the joys, the sorrows, the temptations, the sins, the mercies, which make up the life of man. The Prince of Dramatists knew what he was doing. It is this humanness of kings that is the strength of Kingship; that enlists the emotions no less than the reason in the upholding of the Trone. It was this which gave the Stuarts, in particular, their unrivalled empire over human hearts. It has been this in our day – the warm womanly sympathy of Queen Victoria, the tactful graciousness of our present King – which has contributed so powerfully to establish our ancient Monarchy in the love and devotion of our people. Well, we have this at Dunfermline, the humanness of our kings and of their queens. The associations of the spot are with their births, their marriages, their deaths, with their loves, their joys, their sorrows, their triumphs, their humours, their misfortunes, their faith in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, their waiting in their graves for Christ's second and glorious appearing.

The real story of the place begins with a Marriage – the holiest, certainly, the perhaps the most suspicious in the annals of British Royalty – that of King Malcolm Canmore, “the best that ever possessed Alban,”\* with the English Margaret, the inheritrix of the blood and of the virtues of the great Alfred. Their union, solemnised at Dunfermline, was the beginning of a new era in the history of our Church and nation. It led to the erection by the grateful queen of the noble nave, at any rate, of this stately temple, the first large church to be reared in Scotland. The record of their wedded life remains a lesson to all time-and very needful to our time-as to the spirit in which marriage should be entered on; the way in which its duties ought to be discharged; and the rewards attending the personal solicitude of parents, in whatever rank, to bring up their children, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Her confessor and biographer records how St. Margaret “frequently called her children to her, and carefully instructed them about Christ and the things of Christ, as far as their age would permit, and admonished them to love Him always.”\*\* The happy results were seen in her daughter, “the good Queen Maud,” the one sweet figure that stands beside the terrible Norman kings, of England; and throughout the whole length of that “noble dynasty,”\*\*\* which adorned our Scottish Throne from Edgar to Alexander Third.

\* So Malcolm III is described in the “Pictish Chronicle.

\*\* Turgot, “Vita Sanctæ Margaretæ” cap.xi.

\*\*\* Joseph Robertson.

Three of these kings were St. Margaret's sons. David the First, the youngest of the three, though not above thirteen at the time of his mother's death, was in character, and force, and wisdom pre-eminently his mother's child. He wrought out in practice his mother's principles. "He was the creator," says a competent authority, "of Scotland as we know it."\* at a time when England was convulsed with the factions of Stephen's reign, an abode of peace, good government, and progress.

St. Margaret died at Edinburgh, in the Castle. But her body was borne by her sons to Dunfermline "to the Church of the Holy Trinity which she had built,\*\* and deposited in all humility outside the entrance of the choir, before the Altar of the Holy Rood. Hitherto the Scottish kings had been laid to rest at Iona:

"Carried to Colmes-kill,  
The sacred storehouse of their predecessors,  
And guardian of their bones"\*\*\*

But the grave of their sainted mother exercised, naturally, a more powerful fascination for her children. Edgar, Alexander the First, David the First, chose their last resting place beside her. Thither, too, from Tynemouth, where after his fall at Alnwick he had been hastily interred, were brought the bones to her husband Malcolm, and those of Edward her eldest son, from Jedburgh. Dunfermline thus became for Feudal Scotland what Iona had been in the Celtic period, the Royal Sepulchre.

Our kings from Edgar to Robert Bruce, with many of their queens and children, were buried here—all these kings save two, William the Lion, whose broken effigy may still be seen amid the ruins of his magnificent foundation at Arbroath, and Alexander the Second, whose body, "as he himself had willed in his lifetime, \*\*\*\* "was committed to the dust in "fair Melrose."

It was with Scottish monks, apparently of some native order, that Canmore and St. Margaret first filled Dunfermline. David the First remodeled the original foundation, placing in it a Benedictine Abbot and twelve monks from Canterbury. By him, too, the fabric was completed or restored. Under him, in 1150, it was dedicated. Before its High Altar, three years later he was buried. "He was a glorious king," says Fordun, "fed and clad with everyday thrift; and for holiness, integrity, and disciplined behaviour on a level with the best votaries of the monastic

\* Robertson, "Scotland under her Early Kings." He made it, says another, Cosmo Innes, Introduction to the "Exchequer Rolls of Scotland."

\*\* Vit. St. Margaretæ.

\*\*\* Macbeth," Act II., Sc.4.

\*\*\*\* Fordun..

life. His life, ever to be wondered at, was followed by a precious death"; so tranquil that "he seemed not to have died," so devout, that his hands were found clasped for prayer, and raised, as if in that prayer he had breathed forth his soul to heaven.

Under Alexander the Second the Norman style of architecture gave place to the First Pointed. At Dunfermline, as elsewhere, it found favour; and while St. Margaret's nave - designed, there is reason to think, by the same great master who gave England Durham-was happily preserved, St David's choir was "restored" in the newer fashion. There was a question, indeed, whether it ought not to be re-consecrated. Pope Innocent the Fourth thought not, "in respect that the original walls remained"\* but the occasion of the re-opening then was taken to express the nation's veneration of St. Margaret by the solemn Translation of hr remains from her lowly resting-place in the nave, in front of the Rood Altar, to the chapel (of which only the remains alas! Survive) at the back of the High Altar. The ceremony was fulfilled in the presence of the youthful king:-

"The third Alexander bodily  
There was with a great company  
Of Earls, Bishops and Baronys  
And many famous great personys."

But an unexpected difficulty presented itself. The dead Queen seemed unwilling to be moved:-

"With all their power and all their slicht  
To raise her body they had na micht  
Till first they took up the body  
Of hr lord that lay thereby,  
And bare it ben into the quier;  
Lastly syne on fair manere  
Her corse they took up and bare ben  
And them interred together then."

Wynton, who tells the story, saw in it the sign of her wifely obedience to her husband:-

"So trowed they al then gathered there  
What honour to hr lord she bare" \*

\* "Registrum de Dunfermline."

May we not add that the translation itself is an illustration of that reward of humility which our Lord speaks of in the Gospel for this week?

“When thou art bidden to a wedding, go and sit down in the lowest room; that, when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.” \*

The Translation of St. Margaret took place soon after Alexander’s coronation. How different were the strains that filled the church thirty-six years later when his dead body-mangled by its fall from the cliff at Kinghorn- was born thither for its burial!

“Quhen Alysandyr our Kyng was dede,  
That Scotland led in luv and le,  
Away was sons of ale and brede,  
Of wyn and wax, of game and glee.

Our gold was changed into lead!  
Christ, born into Virginitie,  
Succor Scotland and remede,  
That placed is in perplexitie.”

The perplexity increased. Dunfermline, like the rest of Scotland, had experience of the cruel wrongs which the great Plantagenet poured out over the Northern Kingdom. Edward the First resided at Dunf’ling for a whole month in 1303. At his departure his soldiers leveled to the ground the sumptuous palaces, wherein, as an English eye-witness\*\* declares, “three kings with their trains might be accommodated” which then stood within the ample precinct of the monastery, “and left only the church and a few dwellings of the monks.”

But the nation’s prayer was not unanswered. Christ pitied us, and succored us, through Sir William Wallace and King Robert Bruce; and when Bruce had fought his fight, and finished his earthly course, his body, like Malcolm’s like David’s like Alexander’s was brought here for burial. There can be no doubt that the Independence-priceless in itself- which King Robert so gloriously won for us, cost us much more than blood-as incredible impoverishment and exhaustion of the country, a sad

\* St. Luke xiv, 8-10.

\*\* William of Malmesbury.

lowering of morals both in Church and State\* But the records of his later days yield ample evidence of the Liberator's study to nurse into some measure of their old prosperity the charities, the culture, and the commerce of his realm. The accounts of his Exchequer evince his interest in Shipbuilding on the Clyde, in Nursing-he gives pensions to two nurses, Christina Joniston and Evota, and in Education; while the hare at his funeral, for a tomb from Paris, a temporary chapel of Baltic timber that was erected over it, for vestments for the priests and the altar, for lawn and crape, and black persic for the mourners-among whom we discern the figures of the Steward of Scotland-bear witness to reviving trade. The "offering| at the funeral service, it may profit us to note, was a liberal one; it amounted to £86. King Robert Bruce was much more than a mighty warrior. He had his faults, indeed, like another hero whose glorious achievements, and still more glorious incentives, the British nation is recalling with pride and thankfulness today, I men Lord Nelson." In the case of neither is it lawful for us to palliate, much less to justify, their sins, which were not only of one kind. But shall none who have sinned as they did be allowed the praise of genuine religion? I think of Bruce and his army kneeling down on their knees to pray before the fight at Bannockburn. I read in our old historian how "King Robert, putting his trust not in a host of people, but in the Lord God, came against the King of England, and fought against him and put him and his to flight, through the help of Him to whom it belongeth to give the victory." I think of that Thanksgiving day at St Andrews in 1318, when our Metropolitan Cathedral was consecrated in the presence of the grateful king. And so when I think of Nelson, I recall not alone the insight and the fearlessness which, on the 21st of October 1805, conducted him to triumph and to death, not only the all-inspiring signal, "England expects every man to do his duty." I remember his fervent thanksgiving when he recovered from the would that deprived him of his

\* There is the best evidence for believing that the moral and religious character of the nation was altered for the worse . . . The Clergy zealous as the laity in the national quarrel forgot their proper duties and . . . sometimes appeared in arms. . . Worse than even this was the readiness with which they took and broke the oaths of fealty which they swore to Edward. The relaxed discipline and loose morality which prevailed in consequence, were never corrected, but rather tended to increase." – Grub. – Ecclesiastical History of Scotland II., p.343. The Prime Minister, Mr Balfour, said the same at Edinburgh (19th October, 1905). "If you look with unshrinking eyes at the history of our country we shall be forced to admit that nowhere was feudalism more brutal that nowhere did Western Christianity require a more drastic reformation, and that nowhere did that reformation come in a sterner guise."

\*\* Fordun "Annals," cxxxii.

arm.\* and the prayer which he wrote in his private cabin in the “Victory” before the battle joined off the “Cape of Laurels”:- May the great God, whom I worship, grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe, a great and glorious victory; and may no misconduct of any one tarnish it; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature of the British fleet! For myself individually, I commit my life to Him that made me; and may His blessing light on my endeavours for serving my country faithfully! To Him I resign myself, and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen! Amen! Amen!”\*\*

Where are those, my brethren, who tell us that prayer is weak, or that prayer is useless? Let Bannockburn and Trafalgar answer them; and an older hero than either Bruce or Nelson-“Some trusts in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God.”\*\*\* King David the Second was born at Dunfermline. So also, as I have said, was the first of the Scottish Jameses- “the best of poets that was a king, the best of kings that was a poet.” After the long exile which gave him the advantage of an English education, but under which he seems to have contracted also, perhaps from the iron Bolingbroke (Henry IV.), the taint of that cruelty which is the only stain on an otherwise noble character, James revisited Dunfermline, perhaps to pray at his mother’s grave. One in attendance directed his notice to the tomb of his ancestor, St. David. His reply is the first recorded flash of the Stuarts’ humour: - “He was a sair saint for the Crown.” But the remark, however natural, was neither just nor deep. David’s liberality to the Church was the outcome of wisdom no less than piety. It served at once for the defence of the Kingdom and the education of the people; and James himself was hardly less jealous for the true interest of the Church than David had been. He curbed, indeed, its extravagant claims. But he restored its discipline. He reinforced its ministry by the introduction of the Reformed (or Observantine) Franciscans, and he founded at Perth a noble monastery for the austere Carthusians. Alas! His enlightened policy was soon departed from! His grandson, King James the Third, in 1473, “established a most pernicious precedent” in the case of this very Abbey, by quashing an election by the monks and procuring from a venal Papacy the confirmation of a creature of his own. “Henceforth,” says a thoughtful historian, “the court and not the chapter or the cloister was the true centre in Scotland of ecclesiastical life.”\*\*\*\*

\* “As soon as he thought his health was established he sent the following form of thanksgiving to the minister of St George’s, Hanover Square:- An officer desires to return thanks to Almighty God for his perfect recovery from a severe wound, and also for the many mercies bestowed on him.” – Southey. “Life of Nelson.” Chap. IV.

\*\* Abid,” chapter ix.

\*\*\* Psalm xx. 7. \*\*\*\* Mathieson, “Politics and Religion in Scotland,” I., p. 26.

If the leaves of corruption spread, its chastisement was swift. In less than ninety years thereafter we read how on the 28th of March 1561, “the Lords of the Congregation past to Stirling, and on their way kest down confirmation of a creature of his own. “Henceforth,” says a thoughtful historian, “the court and not the chapter or the cloister was the true centre in Scotland of ecclesiastical life.”\*

the Abbey of Dunfermline.” It as but one outcome (and not the worst) of a state of things which throughout the whole country had turned reverent affection into disgust and hatred.

Robert Pitcairn, your last Abbot, “joined the party of the Regent Moray and was much trusted and employed in man of the negotiations of that distracted period.” He knew where his bread was buttered; but what his own view were he was careful not to tell; and on the house which he built he engrave for the benefit of others the unworthy motto he had followed in his own career:-

“Since word is thral, and thought is free,  
Keep well thy tongue I counsel thee.”

In 1593 an Act of Parliament annexed the Abbey perpetually t the Crown and ratified a previous gift of it to Anne of Denmark, the Queen of James the Sixth. A separate house ws built for her reception, and he city became gain a frequent abode of Royalty. Both King and Queen were frequent worshippers in the Abbey Church; as their pew with their joint initials is there to testify. The Stuart humour, which had flashed in James the First, blazed rather too broadly in his descendant, and may as encounter in it, as well as in deeper things, took place in those long silent halls between “the British Solomon” and the grim but “amusing”\*\* preacher, David Ferguson, whose name stands first on the roll of your Reformed ministers.

Ere James left Scotland in 1603 to take up our great inheritance of England, there was born to him at Dunfermline two children destined to play important parts in the future of British Royalty. The elder of these, Elizabeth, afterwards Countess Palatine of the Rhine, Queen of Bohemia, the mother of Prince Rupert and of the Electress Sophia, was born here in 1596. She possessed in an eminent degree the spirit of her race, which brought her through many a vicissitude. Amid all these she remained true to Reformation principles; and it was his attachment to these principles,

\* Mathieson, “Politics and Religion in Scotland,” I., p. 26.

\*\* Professor Blaikie, “The Preachers of Scotland.” P.89

inherited from her, which ultimately raised her grandson, King George the First to her father's throne. Through her, accordingly, there flows in the veins of His present Majesty, the blood alike of St Margaret, of Robert Bruce, and of Mary Queen of Scots.

The Princess Elizabeth, though born here, was baptized at Holyrood. Her younger brother, afterwards King Charles the First, was both born and baptized at Dunfermline; but, owing perhaps to his delicate health, the christening -by David Lindsay, Bishop of Brechin-seems to have been solemnized not in the Abbey Church but in a private chapel at the Palace. The politician mistakes of Charles - for which he paid so dearly - ought not to blind us to his personal piety, or to the great services he rendered-and the greater services he wished to render as well to the Church of his baptism as to her southern sister, then in communion with her, the Church o England. His troubles, in fact, in both Kingdoms, were largely due to his devoted Churchmanship. They began in Scotland when in the face of most unworthy opposition, he carried that great and beneficent Act (as Professor Hume Brown has called it) which, for the first time since the Reformation, secured a permanent provision for the national celery.\* Among the historic treasures at Dalmeny there is none more precious than a copy of the English Prayer Book of 1637, into which King Charles wrote with his own hand the alterations he desire for the Liturgy of Scotland. These alterations, indeed, were largely suggested by two Scottish bishops; but the King considered every one of them. A candid study of the book will shew that almost every one of them was improvement; while not a few were concessions to Scottish feeling. We must deplore, of course, and condemn the method in which this Liturgy was introduced; where by what was meant to improve our service became a potent cause of its grievous marring. But the King's intention was good, and the personal trouble he bestowed upon the book was unexampled.\*\* Then as to England - (and here I quote from one who desired for epitaph, "He tried to write true history") - "Charles the First saved the Church of England by his death, when life was offered at the price of abandoning it."\*\*\* And who can read unmoved the story of that death? "No act of his life became him like the leaving of it." It was owing wholly to something in himself," says Burnet, "that he went through so many indignities with so much true greatness without any

\* Hume Brown, "History of Scotland," ii. 291.

\*\* See the Author's edition of "The Scottish Liturgy of 1637." (Blackwood 1904.) Introduction and Notes. King Charles the First revisited his birth-place in 1633, shortly after his Scottish coronation.

\*\*\* Bishop Creighton.

disorder or any sort of affection.” “I bless my God,” he said, “I am prepared.” It is believed, adds Burnet, that he was “sustained by supernatural assistance” – the grace of God.

The merits of this King, one is glad to see, are, after a temporary obscurity, again receiving recognition. This very month, the chapel at Carisbrooke, in which, till deprived of attendance of his chaplains, the suffering monarch was comforted by the rites he so dearly loved, was reopened after restoration (or rebuilding) in his honour. Among King Edward’s gifts on the occasion were a walnut Altar, and an altar-cross which Queen Victoria – like St Margaret – was in the habit of taking with her on her journeys.

With all his weakness, therefore, the last princely descendant of St Margaret to be born at Dunfermline is one whose name may well be cherished along with those of his greater predecessors. Him, too, among the Kings who have been their nursing fathers, and Church shall own.

I do not know, my brethren, whether Dunfermline Abbey Church will ever bask again in the sunshine of Royal patronage. But I am sure that our kings and their queens to latest generations may well take example from the love and zeal to Christ and to His Church which glowed at Dunfermline in the bosoms of their sainted or heroic ancestors. I believe, for my part, in National Religion; in the obedient owning by the country and its rulers of Christ and Christianity. I hold, with our “Confession of Faith,”\* that “it is the duty of the Civil Magistrate to take order . . . that all the ordinances of God be duly settled, administered and observed” in the dominions under them. I see no beauty and no wisdom in a Christian nation, honoured with the knowledge of His Name, “taking counsel against the Lord and against His Christ, breaking His bands asunder or casting away His holy cords. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry . . . Blessed are all they that trust in Him.” \*\*

And if this be the duty of our rulers, how much closer does it lie, my Reverend brethren, to you and me whom God hath put into His Holy Ministry, to see to it that nothing is wanting upon our part which may lead our people to reverence, to love, to us the House of God, and prize its various ordinances of worship, of instruction, and of Sacramental grace. This church has been splendidly, even lavishly, redecored. I hardly thought it possible that it could have been made so beautiful as it is. I wish I saw it open always for private prayer, daily for united worship, filled Sunday after Sunday with believing multitudes: the people

\* “Confession of Faith,” chapter xxiii., 6.

\*\* Psalm ii.

of Dunfermline resorting to it regularly to ask God's blessing on their marriage, and to seek His baptism for their children; to hear His holy Word, to compass His Altar with the voice of thanksgiving, to take the Cup of Salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord. The glory of a sanctuary is not its decorations, however beautiful, or its associations, however touching. The tourist indeed has abundant reason to come hither. But his House is for God and for His worshippers; that here, drawn hither by need and gratitude, they may seek and find the fulfillment of His promise, "There will I meet with the Children of Israel and commune with them from above the mercy sea."\* Amen.

And now to God the Father, the son,  
And the Holy Ghost, be all praise and glory.  
Amen.

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\* Exodus xxv. 22.