

SCOTTISH BENEDICTINE HOUSES OF THE PAST

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By Michael Barrett, O.S.B., of Fort Augustus (1848-1924)

To the ordinary English reader the history of the Scottish monasteries of old is a sealed book. Dugdale and his commentators have rendered the English religious houses more or less familiar to most of us, but Scotland, as yet, has produced no Dugdale. To guide him in his researches in this branch of ecclesiastical lore, the would-be student must fain rely upon the few monastic chartularies, which now and again some beneficent antiquarian society may have given to the world, such scattered fragments of information as may be gleaned from the pages of the old historians, and the countless ruins of many a stately building, still beautiful in its decay. Commentators, too, he will find—of a sort; but these are almost invariably of an alien faith—many of them ministers of the established religion. The distorted pictures of monastic life which such writers portray, the result of the warping medium of Presbyterian bigotry through which they view their subject, well-nigh counteract the benefits they are frequently able to offer in the shape of valuable local traditions; while the appalling ignorance of everything pertaining to Catholicity displayed by many would be amusing were it not set forth with such an air of authority as to snare the unwary into many a pitfall. But of such more anon.

In the hope of awakening in some minds an interest in the glories of days that are past, an attempt will be made in these pages to lift the veil of obscurity which still shrouds them, and afford some glimpses, however faint, of these bygone homes of sanctity, prayer, and far-reaching charity. Imperfect though the records be which tell us of their rise and progress, their daily routine, their glory and their fall, we are able to glean enough from them to help us to realise what Scotland lost in losing her religious houses; we lament with more keen regret the sweeping away of so many spiritual strongholds; we must needs glow with indignation at the blind fury which could hack and hew such gems of architecture, at the indifferent worldliness which could leave them to decay, or at the bucolic profanity which could treat them as mere quarries of hewn stone wherewith to patch up homestead, byre, or stable.

The Benedictine monasteries of Scotland naturally divide themselves into three groups. The branches of the old English stock, flourishing at Canterbury or Durham, constitute one; the offshoots from the Abbey of Tiron, in Picardy, another; the Cluniac houses a third. It is with the first group that we now propose to deal; it consists of the royal Abbey of Dunfermline with its sometime dependent priories of Coldingham, Urquhart, and Pluscarden.

Dunfermline, a few miles from the reputed landing-place of the royal exiles, the scene of the marriage between Malcolm III and his saintly queen, Margaret, was a favourite residence of the royal pair. It was but natural that the holy queen should choose it as the site of a church

of more fitting splendour than Scotland yet possessed. That she was the moving spirit in the new foundation we gather from her biographer, Turgot, who thus relates the story:

In the place where her nuptials were celebrated she built an eternal monument of her name and devotion. For she erected the noble church there in honour of the Holy Trinity with a threefold purpose; for the redemption of the king's soul, for the good of her own, and to obtain prosperity in this life and in the life that is to come for her children. This church she adorned with divers kinds of precious gifts, among which, as is well known, were vessels not a few of solid and pure gold, for the holy service of the altar, of which I can speak with the greater certainty since by the queen's command I myself for a long time had them all under my charge there. [Pinkerton's *Ancient Lives of Scottish Saints* (Metcalf's translation).]

It was about the year 1075 that the church was commenced. Whether it was from the beginning a Benedictine foundation is a matter of dispute. Some writers assert that Malcolm and Margaret established there a body of Culdees. As proofs they instance the facts of the Holy Trinity being the invariable dedication for churches belonging to the Culdees; of the signature of Ivo, Abbot of the Culdees, appearing in the foundation charter—an instrument, by the way, of much disputed authenticity; and of a grant made to certain Culdees of some of the lands belonging to the abbey when it became Benedictine. On the other hand, it is maintained that the foundation was Benedictine from the first. As evidence of this we have the fact of Peter, Prior of Dunfermline, forming one of a deputation to England in 1120—after Malcolm's death, it is true, but before the installation of monks from Canterbury. That this Peter was a *monk* is witnessed to by Eadmer, who thus describes him:

Horum unus quidem monachus et Prior Ecclesiae Dunfermelinae, Petrus nomine.* [* *Hist. Novel. lib. v.* (Migne's *Patrol. tom. clix. p. 510 D.*)]

Moreover, Turgot, the Queen's confessor and friend, was a monk of Durham, and was one of the chief instigators of the foundation, as Bishop Leslie shows. Indeed, the monk's words already quoted may be interpreted to mean that he held some official position in the monastery; "by the queen's command I myself for a long time had them all under my charge there."* [* "Cuncta jubente regina ego ipse diutius ibidem servanda susceperam," *Vita Margaritae*, Pinkerton's *Lives*, Vol. II. p. 163.] Bishop Leslie's evidence is explicit:

Cujus (Turgoti) item suasu Malcolmus, templum in civitate Dunfermilingensi magnifice suis impensis extractum Sanctiss. Trinitati dicavit; sanciens ut exinde commune esset Regum sepulchrum, amplissimis quoque redditibus Benedictini ordinis monachos ibidem Deo perpetuo famulaturos donavit.* [* *De rebus gestis Scotorum* (A.D. 1578), lib. vi. c. 86. It may be of interest to some if we quote the quaint translation of the passage from the MS. of Fr. James Dalrymple of Ratisbon (A.D. 1596), still preserved at Fort Augustus:—"Through quhais requeist lykwyse, King Malcolme erected a fair and magnifik kirke in the toune of Dunfermiling, with a clostir, of his awne expenses, and dedicat the samyn to the maist holy Trinitie: Thaireftir he maid this acte; that fra that furth, suide be a commoune buriall to the Kings of Scotland; and that the Mounkis of S. Benedicte's ordour in that monaster perpetuallie sulde serve god, quhome he enduet with ample and ryche rentis."

Although the good Bishop of Ross wrote some five centuries after the event, he was at least three hundred years nearer to the period in question than the writers of our own times, and doubtless had access to many historical records now lost to us. His statement, therefore, must needs be received with all respect. The controversy would be of little moment did it not touch upon the seniority of Dunfermline in point of origin to all other Scottish Benedictine houses—a distinction not lightly to be passed over.

The building erected by Malcolm and Margaret was probably small compared with the later expansion of the abbey. It is doubtful whether any portion of the original fabric remains to us,

as their son, Alexander I, carried on the work after the death of his parents, and the grand Romanesque nave—the only part which survives the wreck of the sixteenth century—was built by him. From the style of its architecture it is evident that Durham was the model followed. Indeed, a competent authority has not hesitated to conjecture that “the same head may have planned, or the same hands hewn”* [* *Jos. Robertson, LL.D., Quarterly Review, Vol. IXXXV. p. 120.*] portions of both churches. This is rendered quite probable by the fact of the association of Turgot as well as of Malcolm and his family with both minsters; for Dunfermline owed much to Turgot’s instigation, and Durham was built under his rule as Prior, Malcolm assisting in 1093 at the foundation; while later on, in 1104, Alexander I was present at the reception of St. Cuthbert’s relics there.

Alexander seems to have brought the conventual buildings to something like completion, since in the very year of his death, 1124, his brother and successor, David I, was able to bring a colony of thirteen monks from Christ Church, Canterbury, to form the community together with any others who might be already in possession. At their head was Godfrey, Prior of Christ Church, who was made superior, though, owing to the long vacancy in the See of St Andrews, he did not receive the abbatial benediction till four years later. Godfrey ruled the monastery for thirty years, dying in 1154, a year after David I had been laid to rest near the tombs of his parents and brothers. The church received consecration in 1150, by which time the great nave seems to have been completed.

The minster was not destined to remain as Godfrey and David had left it. The prestige of the abbey as a royal foundation and the burial place of the Scottish monarchs attracted many subjects to its cloisters. The number of monks had so greatly increased that, less than seventy years after the consecration of the church, it became necessary to enlarge the choir to accommodate them in the carrying out of the daily canonical office. A letter of Pope Honorius III, dated 1226, speaks of the “more noble buildings” which it has been found advisable to erect, and in consideration of the great outlay incurred thereby, and the increased expenses of a larger community and more frequent guests, grants the revenues of certain churches which had been offered as a donation to the abbey.* [* *Registrum, p. 167.*] A few years later, Gregory IX granted the patronage of certain other churches in the diocese of Dunkeld; the monks, according to the Abbot’s statement, having increased from thirty to fifty, and the revenues being insufficient to sustain them fittingly, as well as defray building charges. The letter is addressed to Gilbert, Bishop of Dunkeld.* [* *Registrum, p. 167.*]

The “more noble buildings” alluded to above are those of the magnificent addition to the abbey church, which consisted of transepts, choir, and Lady Chapel in Early English style; as this addition was contemporaneous with the “Nine Altars” of Durham, the eastern end of Westminster and the choir of Glasgow, an approximate idea may be obtained of the beauty and grace which made the newly finished pile a fitting canopy for the shrine of a national saint. It is, indeed, highly probable that, in view of the looked-for canonisation of St Margaret, the arrangements of the new portion of the church were designed to provide for a receptacle for her remains beyond the new choir, at the back of the high altar, in a position similar to St Cuthbert’s shrine at Durham; for it is worthy of note that the buildings were finished only just before the translation of St Margaret’s relics in 1250.

Between the years 1245 and 1249, much correspondence took place between Scotland and Rome with regard to the miracles reputed to have been wrought through the intercession of the saintly queen; for since the decree of Pope Alexander III, in 1170, no person, however holy, or however celebrated for miracles, might receive honour as a saint without the consent of the Roman Pontiff. Innocent IV, after due examination of the evidence submitted by the bishops of St. Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane, at the instigation of King Alexander II, proclaimed Margaret a saint on August 5, 1249. The intimation was made known by a letter of that Pope to the Abbot and community.* [* *In connection with this subject there is a striking instance of ignorance of ecclesiastical terms serving as the basis of a bigoted*

outpouring of abuse against monks and ecclesiastics, in the *Annals of Dunfermline*, by Ebenezer Henderson (1809-1879). The Pope, in one of his letters, says—“Cum corpus clare memorie Margarite regine Scotie coruscet miraculis infinitis” (*Regis Dunf.* p. 181); this the writer in question interprets to mean “brilliant light-flashes coming from her remains up the ground, or from her tomb.” He then proceeds—“Is it likely that the chemist or the necromancer of the years 1243-1249 could have produced on demand the appearances reported to have been seen at the ‘blessed Margaret’s’ tomb? These bright light-flashes were never heard of *before the time of this the first Lord Abbot of Dunfermline*, and no allusion is ever made to them *after he ceased to be Abbot*—perhaps it would become unnecessary to repeat the miracles now, since the object for which they had done duty had been attained: viz., the canonisation of ‘*the haly queene*’; *a splendid new Tomb and Shrine* for the canonised saint; and lastly, the certain prospect, for ages to come, of an *everflowing-in of money* into the Abbey exchequer, from the crowds of devotees who would ever and anon come from far and near to pay their adorations at her shrine” (p. 81). The italics, it is needless to remark, are Mr. Henderson’s. The edge is taken from the sarcasm when one knows, as almost every educated Catholic does, that “coruscet miraculis” is quite a common mode of expression in ecclesiastical documents, and is merely an equivalent for our term “resplendent with miracles.”] In October of the same year Innocent IV granted an annual Indulgence of forty days to all who should visit her tomb on her feast day.

The ceremony of the translation of St Margaret’s remains to the more honourable position prepared for them took place on June 19, 1250, and must have been a scene of great magnificence. It will be better to let one of the old chroniclers tell the story. The *Book of Pluscarden** [* *The Book of Pluscarden* was probably compiled by Maurice Buchanan, a cleric, and possibly a monk, who had been treasurer to the dauphiness, Princess Margaret of Scotland, sister of James II.—*Vide* preface to *Liber Pluscardensis*, edited by K. J. H. Skene, p. XIX.] thus describes the event in more concise form than some of the others:

In the year following the coronation (of Alexander III), namely, in 1250, the king and the queen, his mother, together with the bishops and abbots and other lords of the realm, met at Dunfermline, and there took up the bones and remains of the glorious Queen Margaret, his great-great-great-great-grandmother, from the stone monument wherein they had rested for years and years,* [* *She had been dead 157 years.*] and lifted them up with the utmost devoutness and honour in a silver shrine set with gold and precious stones; and from her earlier tomb was given out a most sweet smell, so that one would have thought the whole place was strewn with flowers and spicy balms. Nor was there lacking a miracle of divine grace; for after that far-famed coffer had first been placed in the outer church, and finally easily lifted by the sacred hands of bishops and abbots, that it might be placed on the top of the high altar in the choir, as had been pre-arranged in order to do it honour, when it was brought in procession, with organs* [* *This is the first mention of the organ in Scotland.*] chanting and voices singing in chorus, up to the wicket in the chancel, near the tomb of her husband King Malcolm, ... lo! suddenly the arms of the bearers became as it were exhausted and powerless, so that, from the weight of the massy burden, they were unable to move the bier with the holy relics away from the spot any further.

The historian goes on to relate that in spite of the added strength of fresh bearers they were still unable to move until it was thought to be revealed by that sign that the holy queen would have the same honour shown to the remains of her husband,

since they were one flesh while they were in the world. ... So after his tomb was opened and his bones were taken up, both biers were solemnly and in state brought to the appointed places without any trouble or effort.* [* *Liber Pluscardensis*, II. *Historians of Scotland*, vol. x. translated by F. J. H. Skene, p. 56.]

We learn from other sources that among this company were no less than eleven bishops. The Abbot, Robert de Keldelecht, had received from Pope Innocent IV the privilege of the *pontificalia* five years before, and could therefore take his place among the prelates in all the insignia of his office.* [* *Registrum*, p. 180. The good abbot seems to have been over zealous in the exercise of his powers. Innocent IV in 1248 forbad him to give the pontifical benediction in presence of any bishop who was unwilling for him to do so, and admonished him not to confer minor orders, as he had twice done already, on any clerics except his own subjects.—*Vide Theiner, Vetera Monumenta*, p. 50.]

The church which was to be known for so many centuries as the shrine of St Margaret, measured at its completion 275 feet in length, from the western entrance to the extremity of its eastern Lady Chapel. The nave, 106 feet long and together with the aisles 55 feet wide, recalled in its somewhat sombre magnificence that of Durham. Its round arches rested on ten massive circular pillars, 20 feet high and 13 feet in circumference. Some of these were plain, others clustered, two were chiselled with zig-zag, and two with spiral-ribbed lines. The aisles were vaulted, but the nave had a wooden roof. The walls were decorated with beautiful arcading in the style of the nave arches. Over the junction of the transepts was a stately Lantern Tower, 36 feet square and rising to the height of 156 feet. The choir contained some very beautiful Decorated Gothic windows which were to be seen as late as 1819, when they were demolished to make way for the execrable building in so-called Modern Gothic, which now occupies the site.

The great object of attraction, the shrine of the holy queen, stood on an erection of stone and marble, the relics enclosed in a costly ark of silver set with gems and encased in an oaken reliquary. It rose behind the high altar at the extremity of the choir and was approached by a procession path, running across the eastern end of the choir, probably resembling what is known as the “New Building” at Peterborough, but of less elaborate architecture because of earlier date. This would serve also for altar space for some of the many smaller altars of the church.

The exterior of the noble minster must have been very striking. Besides the Lantern Tower at the junction of the transepts, there was another tower towards the south-west about 80 feet high, and a third to the north-west. The church was entered at the west through a beautiful Norman doorway, decorated with arcading. There was a north porch 14 feet in length and 12 feet in breadth — a common feature in Scottish churches to which a parish was attached. In many places it bore the name of the “Marriage Porch,” as the first part of the ceremony was commonly performed there. On the south, a door connected the church with the cloister of the monastery.

The conventual buildings stood round a cloister-garth measuring 105 feet square. The great refectory, portions of which still remain, is the only building whose site can be known with certainty. It occupied, as in most instances, the side of the square farthest from the church. The remains of this beautiful hall speak eloquently of the grandeur of the buildings in their complete state. It measured 121 feet in length, 30 feet in height and 34 feet in breadth. Near the east end of the south wall was a reading pulpit in the thickness of the wall, its roof of very beautiful groining in stone. In the west gable was a large Gothic window, 20 feet high and 16 feet wide, its seven lower lights surmounted by elaborate tracery. Outside the south-west wall of the refectory an arched gateway led from the outer street into the monastery precincts; this entrance was known as “The Pends” (from *pendere*, to hang). It was overhung by a solid, tower-like building connecting the monastery with the palace. On the other side of the west gable of the refectory rose a small turret containing a winding staircase, rising to the roof of the building and leading downwards to a door in the street outside.

The whole of the property of the abbey in its immediate vicinity was enclosed by a fine boundary wall which measured some 3,000 feet in length. Matthew of Westminster, who

probably visited it in person, describes the abbey as of such vast extent and sumptuous buildings as to be able to harbour at once three monarchs with their respective trains.* [* *Registrum, praef. p. XXV.*]

By the beginning of the fourteenth century the title of the abbey had become that of the “Holy Trinity and St Margaret.” The change was but to be expected; for the relics of the saint gave to Dunfermline a superiority over other churches which nothing else could have done. The body of one of the queens of Scotland drew to it crowds of devout pilgrims during well-nigh four centuries. It was the pivot upon which the life of the little city itself turned; the object of loving care to the monks who guarded their treasure so devoutly. All this is evidenced in the vestiges of antiquity that remain to us. Queensferry—*Portus Reginae*, as it is called in old records—took its name from the saint, either because it was used by her, as Chalmers supposes,* [* *Caledonia, vol. iv. (ed. 1899), p. 884.*] or from the number of pilgrims who landed there to visit her shrine in later years. The seal of the burgh of South Queensferry bears the representation of the saint in a small boat.* [* *Annals Dunf. p. 62.*] “Pilgrim’s Cross” is a still more evident reference to the shrine. It stood on the south side of the Edinburgh road in the parish of Dalmeny, about a mile from South Queensferry. Before the trees had grown up so as to obscure the view, this would be the first spot whence the pilgrim would catch sight of the minster, and where he would perforce kneel to salute the saint, and thank God with joy that his journey was well-nigh over. The lower part of the cross with the old stone pedestal, between three and four feet square, was renovated to some extent about fifty years ago. The cross and upper part of the shaft disappeared at the Reformation. The eminence upon which the cross stood as well as the neighbouring farm are both known as “Cross Hill.”

The manner in which the inhabitants of the Burgh of Dunfermline identified themselves as the special servants of St Margaret is seen in the many provisions for her honour and the glory of her shrine scattered through the Burgh Records. “St Margaret’s *Lights*” figure frequently. In 1493 an entry notifies that—

John Kellock has a cow quilk giffs to St Margaret’s Altar half ane pund of vax yeirly:* [* *Annals, pp. 88, 119, 172, 173, &c.*]

(*i.e.*, the tax on the cow, as the commentator explains). The seal of the burgh bore the figure of St Margaret under a canopy or *herss* with a lighted candle on either side—probably the *lichts* mentioned in the Records. The magistrates were the patrons of St Margaret’s Altar, which stood to the south of the shrine; hence the following provisions for Masses, &c., thereat:

(1492). Schir Andrew Peirson,* [* *Schir, or Sir, was the ordinary title in the Middle Ages of a chaplain who had no university degree. The monks who did not act in the capacity of chaplain are alluded to in the Records under the title of Dene (i.e. Dom).*] Chaplain of the Service; Schir Thomas Moffat, Chaplain of the Morning Service (*i.e.*, Matins).

(1494). Schir Andrew Peirson, Chaplain; Schir Steven Stirling, Chaplain of the Morning Service. Twenty shillings out of the common purse promised.

Other lights in the abbey church were endowed in like manner, as the same records witness. Thus we come across the following:

(1490). Rentall of Our Lady’s Licht Silver. ... The landis of David Couper, beneith the Tolbuith, paid the annual sum of 7 shillings, or else he must uphald ye little herss of wax.

(1496). The *littil herss* is again mentioned in connection with “Our lady’s *Licht*.”

The *heress* in these cases means an open framework for lights, often placed before or suspended above an altar or image.*

[* “Ane braccine hearse,” a chandelier of brass.—Jamieson’s *Scottish Dict. Suppl.* p. 142.]

In addition to these benefactions the burgh upheld many other altars in the Minster Church. As many as twenty are mentioned in the records between 1488 and 1500. These were:

1. The Great (or High) Altar.
2. Our Lady’s.
3. The Haly Bluid.
4. The Rood.
5. St. John’s.
6. St. Peter’s.
7. St. James’.
8. St. Thomas’.
9. St. Michael’s.
10. St. Salvator’s.
11. St. Lawrence’s.
12. St. Margaret’s.
13. St. Ninian’s.
14. St. Mary’s (perhaps second to Our Lady).
15. St. Nicholas’.
16. St. Cuthbert’s.
17. St. Stephen’s.
18. St. Trunzean’s.
19. St. Catherine’s.
20. The Parish Altar.

Many of these were endowed with lands in or near the town as evidenced by the titles, “The Rhodes,” “St Mary’s Mill,” “St Cuthbert’s Lands,” “Haly Bluid Acres,” and the like, still attaching to those localities.

During the years 1480 and 1500 as many as thirty-five monks and chaplains are mentioned by name in the Burgh records in connection with the abbey and its services. This in itself is sufficient to show the close bonds which subsisted between the town and the monastery.

Not only Dunfermline and its people, but other and greater benefactors had at heart the glory of the saint, her shrine and minster. King Robert the Bruce bestowed in free gift to the abbey, in 1315, the vicarage of Inverkeithing to provide “in honour of God and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the aforesaid Blessed Margaret, in the choir, in front of her shrine, one wax candle, to be solemnly lighted, continually and for ever.”* [* “Unum cereum continue et in perpetuum accensum solemniter” (*Registrum*, p. 233).] With like devotion Randolph, Earl of Moray, grants a charter in 1321 in which he shows his love to St Margaret by expressing his wish to be buried in the minster; but, whether that request be granted or no, bequeaths certain lands to the abbey to provide a priest to say Mass daily for him, both during his life and after his death. Should he be buried in the minster, a candle is to burn at the head of the tomb and another at its foot during each of these Masses. Moreover, he provides for 96 pounds of wax annually to furnish candles which are to burn “solemnly in the accustomed manner ... in honour of St Mary the virgin, in her chapel within the conventual church of Dunfermline,” on Christmas night, the feast of the Purification and that of the Assumption each year, for ever.* [* *Registrum*, p. 244.]

As to the monks themselves we should scarcely expect to find any explicit record of their virtues; indeed, the absence of all record would seem to be their best eulogium. Yet history has not left us without written evidence. William de Lamberton, Bishop of St Andrews, in the grant of a benefice to the abbey in 1300, prefaces the donation with the commendation of the

monks for the perfection of their regular discipline and the fervour of charity which reigned in the community to the glory of God and edification of their neighbour.* [* *Registrum*, p. 72.]

That these virtues subsisted in some, at least, of their number when the evil days of the Reformation dawned, the sequel will show.

The perfection of discipline in a religious house concerns the worship of God, and in a Benedictine house this worship is concentrated in the daily and solemn celebration of the divine office with the Mass as its centre. We possess no direct evidence that the choir services at Dunfermline were carried out on a grander scale than in other Scottish monasteries of the period, except that the community was larger than in other houses of Black Monks, and consequently the resources more ample.* [* *There were thirty-eight monks at the end of the fifteenth century* (*Annals*, p. 183).] We have seen that the abbey possessed an organ as early as 1250, which is evidence of some degree of solemnity in carrying out the offices of the Church.

With regard to their neighbours, the monks were in many respects benefactors in temporal as well as spiritual matters. As early as 1173 there is evidence of their having under their direction schools for youth both in Perth and Stirling; for mention is made of them in more than one charter from that time onwards.* [* *Registrum*, pp. 56, 57, 63, 66, 81, 418.]

Moreover it seems most probable that they had also a school within the abbey precincts. "Maister Robertus Henrison, notarius publicus," appears in connection with the abbey in 1477, and is spoken of by the Earl of Kellie in 1619 as "Robert Henrisoun, scholemaistr of Dunfermline."* [* *Annals*, p. 176.] He was no mean poet, and his works have been collected and published by Dr. Laing.* [* *Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson*, Laing, 1865.] One poem, called the "Abbey walk," seems to refer to the Minster:

Alone as I went up and down,
In ane Abbey was fair to se, &c.

That this schoolmaster was one of the officials of the abbey seems clear from a later document, dated October 13, 1573. In this mention is made of "Johne Henrysoun" having been "Mr of the Grammar Schole within the Abbay of Dunfermling;" the statement continues, "That quhair he and his predecessouris has continewit maisteris and teachearis of the youth in letters and doctrine to thair grit commoditie within the said Schole past memor of man admittit thairto be the Abbottis of Dunfermling for the tyme," &c.* [* *Annals*, p. 729.] It seems certain from these words that John Henrison was a descendant and successor of the poet Robert, and that both directed a school within the abbey precincts.

The care which the monks had for the townsfolk is shown in another way. Mention is made in a charter of Abbot Robert de Carell, dated March 10, 1327, of the Chapel of St Catherine, with its almshouse, and directions given for daily and orderly distribution of alms to the poor at that place. It stood outside the West *Port*, in St Catherine's Wynd.* [* *Annals*, p. 123.] Another name for the West Port was *Almonry Gate*; portions of it still remain.

The monks were benefactors also in another way. They are believed to have set the example of coal mining in Scotland, for the charter of William de Oberwill to the abbey in 1291, granting power to the monks to work the mine at Pittencrieff,* [* *Registrum*, p. 218.] is one of the first documents relating to coal in Scottish history; and though coal is said to have been dug at Tranent in 1285,*

[* *Caledonia*, vol. ii. (ed. 1887), p. 793. For a long time the charter to the monks was considered the first of the kind, but Chalmers here states that he has seen that granted by James the Stewart in 1285 to William de Prestun of the lands of Tranent, with privileges in

petariis et carbonariis.] that is no proof that it was found there before the Dunfermline monks discovered the mine at Pittencrieff. The charter in question is intended to secure the privilege of working the mine to the monks, and exclude all others, and it is possible that it had already been commenced when the deed was drawn up. It gives us an idea of the up-to-date spirit of the abbey, that it was some twenty or thirty years after this that coal came into more general use. In the reign of David II (1329-1346) eighty-four chalders were purchased for the queen's use at a cost of £26, at a period when an ox cost about six shillings and a sheep about one shilling.* [* Tytler, *Hist. of Scot.* vol. I. (new ed.) p. 281.] [No. 32 of Fourth Series.]

It will be well to take a glance now at the part taken by Dunfermline Abbey in the history of Scotland. Malcolm III, according to Bishop Leslie, intended the minster to become the burial place of the Scottish kings. It was probably owing to the fact that his saintly queen was there laid to rest that this desire became to a great extent fulfilled. Malcolm himself, St Margaret, and their three sons and successors in the realm, Edgar, Alexander, and David, as well as Prince Edward, who died young, were all buried before or near the altar of the Holy Rood, which probably, as in most churches of the period, stood outside the Rood Screen, which marked the entrance of the choir. Malcolm and Margaret, as we have seen, were removed to a more eastern position when the new choir had been completed. In 1165 Malcolm IV, grandson and successor to David, was joined to his royal ancestors. In 1179, Godfrey de Melville bestowed upon the abbey the church of Melville, "in free and perpetual alms," to provide a light to burn "for ever" before the sepulchres of these two kings.* [* *Registrum*, p. 91.] William the Lion and Alexander II were interred elsewhere; the former in his favourite foundation of Arbroath, the latter at Melrose. Of succeeding sovereigns, Alexander III and Margaret his queen, with their sons David and Alexander; Robert the Bruce and his queen Elizabeth, with their daughter Mathildis, and Annabella Drummond, queen of Robert III and mother of James I, were all buried there.

Queen Elizabeth, wife of Robert the Bruce, was provided with a daily requiem Mass "for ever" by her husband's generous endowment.* [* *Annals*, p. 124.] King Robert himself was there laid to rest, amid the mourning of the whole nation, his obsequies being attended by a vast concourse of prelates and nobles. His heart, by his own desire, was sent to the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, as the only means of fulfilling a vow he had made to make a pilgrimage thither. An offering of £66 (equivalent to some £700, at least, of our money)* [* "The value and the denomination of money, down to the reign of Robert I., continued the same in Scotland and in England" (Fraser Tytler, *Hist. Scot.* vol. i, p. 280).] was made to the Abbot of Dunfermline for the funeral rites. The king, like most of his predecessors, had already endowed the abbey with various lands. King Robert III provided for the offering of three Masses weekly, for ever, for his queen, who was interred there, and for his own soul.

Besides these royal personages, many nobles sought for sepulchre in this kingly burying place. Constantine and William Ramsay, Earls of Fife; Randolph, Earl of Moray, nephew of the Bruce, and Regent during the minority of David II; Robert, Duke of Albany, Governor of Scotland, who died in 1419: these are some of the illustrious dead sheltered by the vaults of St Margaret's own minster.

Many notable facts of history centre round the abbey. An interesting legend, which all the old historians relate with lingering fondness of detail, witnesses to the popular belief in the constant care of the saintly patroness for the country she had loved so well in life. It is related that when Haco, King of Norway, led a hostile force against Scotland in 1263, Sir John Wemys, then a poor crippled soldier, but eventually restored by St Margaret to robust health, beheld in a vision five figures issue from the porch of Dunfermline Abbey on the night of October 3, the date of the decisive Battle of Largs, in which the Norsemen were routed. The figures are described as those of a tall and stately queen, in the full bloom of matronly beauty and clad in regal robes and diadem; a lordly knight in shining armour, whom she led by the

hand, and three other noble warriors. They were St Margaret and Malcolm and their kingly sons, prepared to battle for their country and people.

The holy queen's power had frequently to be exercised in defence of her own shrine. Edward I visited the abbey in 1291, and called upon the monks to acknowledge him as Overlord of Scotland. Three times after that did he revisit it during the twelve years that followed—years marked by pillage and demolition on the part of his soldiers. On the last occasion, in 1303, with an utter want of gratitude for the princely hospitality received there, he ordered his army, before leaving, to fire the buildings. The church with its shrine overawed the soldiers, and it was spared, but the monastery suffered considerably. Another English king, Richard II, is said to have again set fire to the monastery in 1385.

A few other historical facts are especially worthy of notice. In 1295 the treaty was ratified between John Baliol and Philip IV of France, in which the latter bound himself to give his niece in marriage to Edward Baliol, son and heir of the former. In Dunfermline Abbey, also, occurred the meeting between Robert II and the French ambassador in 1389, to renew the truce with France.

The patriot Wallace was held in the greatest esteem in the abbey. He is said to have taken refuge there from the English invaders in 1303. His chaplain, Arnold Blair, became a monk at Dunfermline after the hero's death, in 1305, and a few years later wrote a history of his renowned patron.

Many of the abbots were men of note. The first mitred abbot, Robert de Keldelecht, was Chancellor of Scotland during the minority of Alexander III. Falling under suspicion of complicity in a political scheme in opposition to that king, he voluntarily resigned his chancellorship, and a little later his abbacy, and retired as a simple monk to the Cistercian house of Newbottle. He eventually became Abbot of Melrose.

Richard de Bothuel was appointed one of the committee of Parliament in 1449, to revise, collate and authenticate the previous Acts of Parliament since the commencement of James I's reign. He was, moreover, one of the three ecclesiastics chosen to administer justice in various places in Scotland during a year of pestilence (1456-57), and was also placed on a committee to regulate the coinage.

Henry Creighton was presented to the abbacy by James III. This is the first instance of the canonical election having been set aside by royal mandate. James Stuart, second son of James III, held the abbey in perpetual *commendam* from 1502. He was Archbishop of St Andrews, and died at the early age of twenty-eight.

James Bethune, uncle of the famous cardinal, became abbot in 1504. He afterwards obtained the Archbishopric of Glasgow, and eventually the primacy. He filled the offices of Lord High Treasurer and Chancellor of the kingdom, and was one of the Lords of the Regency under the Duke of Albany. Abbot Hepburn became Lord treasurer in 1515.

Andrew Forman, Archbishop of St Andrews, held the abbacy *in commendam* for some five or six years; he was buried in the abbey. Dunfermline, like many other religious houses of the period, had to submit to the indignity of accepting as nominal superior one of the base-born sons of a king of Scotland, when Alexander Stuart was presented with the abbacy by his father, James IV. The unworthy custom of presentation to benefices in place of canonical election began in Scotland in the fifteenth century, and was one of the chief causes of the decadence in discipline which rendered the overthrow of the monasteries an easy matter when the time arrived.

That woeful day for Dunfermline was March 28, 1560. The Lords of the Congregation, Lindsay of Pitscottie tells us, "past to Stirling, and be the way kest down the Abbey of

Dunfermling.”* [* *Registrum, praef. p. xxv.*] The choir was reduced to ruins, the heretics wreaking a special vengeance upon the holiest portion of the fabric. The organ was broken up into fragments, the north-west tower with its blessed bells almost entirely demolished and the bells destroyed. The monastery was utterly ruined and the twenty-six monks dispersed. Yet such was their love for their desolated sanctuary and cloister, that as late as 1580, according to Dr. Robertson, a few Benedictines of Dunfermline with doors bolted and barred kept watch in their choir by the shrines of St Margaret and St David, the sepulchres of Bruce and Randolph.* [* *Quarterly Review, vol. lxxxv. p. 148.* The statement is sufficient refutation of the sweeping accusation levelled against the monks by Ebenezer Henderson in his *Annals, p. 204*, that the Conventual brethren “had become careless, lazy, vicious, and, in too many instances, abandoned characters.” The charge, made without proof, is evidently put forward in extenuation of the wholesale destruction of the abbey.]

In anticipation of coming troubles the casket which contained the chief relics of St Margaret had already, before the wreck of the monastery, been removed to a place of safety. A Life of St Margaret, published in 1660, gives the following particulars:

The Coffe or Chest, which contained the Sacred Relics of St Margaret in Dunfermline Abbey, was of silver enriched with precious stones, and was placed in the noblest part of the church. When the hereticks had stoln into the kingdome, and trampled under foot all Divine and human lawes, seized the sacred moveables of the Abbey, something of greater veneration and value were saved from their sacreligious hands by being transplanted to Edinburgh Castle.* [* *The Bollandists say that this was by desire of Queen Mary, Act. ss. tom. xxii. p. 335.*] Some holy men, fearing that the castle might be assaulted, transplanted the Coffre wherein was the head and haire* [* *The hair, of golden auburn, is said to have been very abundant.*] of St Margaret, and some other moveables of great value, into the Castle of the Barony of Dury.* [* *This was at Craigluscar, three miles north-west of Dunfermline (Hist. Dunf. vol. ii. p. 157).*] This lord was a reverend father and priest, and “monck of Dunfermling.”* [* *George Dury was the last real abbot, and was head of the family in question (ibid. loc. cit.).*] who, after his monastery was pillaged, and the religious forced to fly away, dwelt in this castle.* [* *Quoted from Annals of Dunf. p. 202. According to the Diurnal of Occurents, “Upoun the xix. day of Januar [1560], the erle of Eglintoun and the abbot of Dunfermling past to France furth of Dunbar” (Regis. praef. p. xvii.). This would be the January following the destruction, as the year was then counted from March 25 to March 25.*]

The subsequent history of the relics is thus related in a MS. of the date of 1696 by Fr. Augustin Hay, Canon Regular of St. Geneviève’s, Paris:

St Margaret’s relics were, in 1597, delivered into the hands of the Jesuit missionaries in Scotland, who, seeing they were in danger of being lost or prophaned, transported it to Antwerp, where John Malderus, Bishop of that city, after diligent examin upon oath, gave an authentic attestation, under the Seal of his office, the 5 of Septembre 1620; and permitted them to be exposed to the veneration of the people. ... Her relics are kept in the Scots Colledge of Doway in a Bust of Silver. Her skull is enclosed in the head of the Bust, whereupon there is a Crown of Silver gilt, enriched with severall Pearl and Precious Stones. In the Pedestall, which is of Ebony, indented with Silver, her hair is kept and exposed to the view of every one through a Glass of Crystall. The Bust is reputed the third Statue in Doway for its valour (value?). There are likewise severall Stones, Red and Green, on her Breast, Shoulders and elsewhere. I cannot tell if they be upright, their bigness makes me fancy that they may be counterfitted.* [* *Annals, p. 202.*]

The sacred treasure unfortunately disappeared in subsequent revolutionary troubles. Philip II of Spain at the Reformation endeavoured to obtain possession of the relics of St Margaret and her husband, and some considerable parts, if not the whole remaining portions, were supposed to have been preserved in the Escorial. When Bishop Gillis, in 1862, visited Spain

in the hope of procuring some of these relics, he found that the Peninsular War had produced much confusion among the treasures of the Escorial, and had considerable difficulty in prosecuting his search. He eventually obtained, by permission of the queen and her consort (Isabella II and Ferdinand), a large relic of St Margaret, which is still venerated in the convent of nuns dedicated to the Saint in Edinburgh.* [** History of St Margaret's Convent, Edinburgh, p. 160.*]

Thus rose and fell the royal Abbey of Dunfermline. Its immense possessions, extending over almost the whole of the western part of Fifeshire, and portions of the southern and eastern districts of the county, brought in vast revenues. No less than thirty-seven churches and chapels had been bestowed upon it by various kings, and the flocks belonging to them were in the spiritual care of the monks and their representatives. The temporal possessions were erected into an earldom, and conferred in 1605 on Alexander Seton, who received the title of Earl of Dunfermline. The spiritual responsibilities attaching to the abbey were matter of little moment to the spoilers, and the disregard of them tended, as in so many other cases, to deprive the people of that Catholic faith to which the majority were ready to cling at all hazards, had means been afforded them.

The former nave of the abbey church still stands, and is treasured by the people of the burgh. It forms merely the vestibule to the modern structure for Presbyterian worship which occupies the place of the former choir. The churchyard which surrounds it still bears the title of the "Psalter (pronounced *Satur*) Churchyard"; it was the name given, with a perspicacity scarcely to be expected from any but a thoroughly Catholic people, to the choir of the ancient Minster in the days of its glory. Truly, Scottish place-names die hard!

So much space has been allotted to the more engrossing subject of the great abbey that its dependancies can only be touched upon cursorily. COLDINGHAM, the most important of these, had a position in history many centuries before Dunfermline came into being. In 870 it was the nunnery of the heroic St Ebba; the brave abbess and her sisters in religion mutilated their faces to escape a fate worse than death, and were martyred by the Danes. In 1098, King Edgar, son of St Margaret, in conjunction with the Prior of Durham, refounded Coldingham as a monastery for men. The King attributed to St Cuthbert's aid his success in driving from his throne the usurper who had seized it. Fordun relates a vision which was vouchsafed to Edgar, in which St Cuthbert bade him carry before his army the standard of the Saint from the monastery of Durham, promising a complete victory should he do so.* [** Chronica Gentis Scotorum, lib. V. cap. 25.*] When the victory had been obtained, Edgar longed to show his gratitude to the Saint, and the donation to Durham of Coldingham with ample endowments was the outcome of this.

The monastery, dedicated to St Mary and St Cuthbert, was entirely dependent upon Durham, from which abbey it had been first colonised. From the remains still to be seen, the church appears to have been of good size; it was probably 220 feet in length and 25 feet in width. It had a transept measuring 45 feet by 34 feet, and a tower or steeple 90 feet in height, fell in 1770. Its architecture was a combination of Norman and early English. The north wall, which may still be seen, is decorated with a rich arcading of pointed arches, which is conjectured to have been the work of Prior Melsonby, a man of great taste, who, when later on he became Prior of Durham, was engaged in the construction of the splendid portion of that Minster known as the "Nine Altars."

The conventual buildings stood on the south of the church. There seems to have been accommodation for at least thirty monks. The revenues were ample, as a good number of the churches in Berwickshire depended upon the priory, and beside Scottish monarchs, nobles and gentry of the shire had liberally endowed it. One grant of Robert I is worthy of mention: the monks were to have five harts every year from the forest of Selkirk, to enable them to

celebrate worthily the feast of the Translation of St Cuthbert. Benefactions to Coldingham as well as to the mother abbey were entered in the Durham “Liber Vitæ.”

As long as the priory remained under Durham, the prior and monks of the latter house claimed the right of voting in the election of the Prior of Coldingham—a right not always granted without much dispute. The Sacrist, an important official, who often rose to the priorate, was also nominated by Durham. The result was that the majority of the Priors of Coldingham were Englishmen, although the priory itself stood in the diocese of St Andrews.

Situated as it was in the border country, Coldingham suffered somewhat less than the rest of the southern monasteries in the frequent warfare which disturbed that district, its connection with Durham and St Cuthbert forming a protection from English attack. Nevertheless, such motives were not strong enough to prevent King John from plundering it, as he retired from an unsuccessful incursion into Lothian in 1216. Lord Hailes says that he burned the monastery.* [* *Caledonia*, vol. III. p. 328 (note).] The Priors, in self-defence, sought protection from both kingdoms, and were more than once confirmed in their possession by English as well as Scottish sovereigns.

The first attempted union with Dunfermline was the result of jealousy between the two countries with regard to the connection of the priory with both. Robert Claxton, a Durham monk, who became Prior in 1375, was accused and convicted of betrayal of the interests of the Scottish King by peculation and misrule. Robert II consequently resolved upon his expulsion and the annexation of the priory to Dunfermline. A colony of monks from the Scottish Abbey were indeed sent to take possession, but met with a vigorous resistance on the part of the English monarch, as several letters in the “Priory of Coldingham” testify.* [* *Vide pp. 45-64.*] The union was not permanent, Durham continuing to exercise the same rights as previously. The priory suffered much from contests between the Crown and the family of Home, who in an evil day had been made bailiffs; the latter eventually obtained the possession of the house at the Reformation.

The resolution of James III to annex Coldingham to the Chapel Royal at Stirling cost that monarch his life on the field of Sauchie. Eventually, in 1509, it was united to Dunfermline by Pope Julius II, and James IV’s natural son, Alexander Stuart, was nominated Commendatory Abbot. The union was but short; in the English invasion of 1544 Somerset seized it and fortified the tower, and Arran tried unsuccessfully for three days to dislodge the intruders by his artillery. When the garrison eventually fled, they took care to give the buildings to the flames. When the change of religion put an end to all monastic life, Coldingham became the property of the Homes, who had so long ruled its destinies.

The cannon of Cromwell in 1648 completed the utter destruction of Coldingham Priory; nothing remains of the old buildings but a few foundations, portions of the north and east walls, now built into the modern parish church, and one of the gates.

The priory of URQUHART, or Urchard, in Moray, was founded by David I in 1125, and colonised from Dunfermline. Beyond the circumstance of its union with Pluscarden, to be referred to later, scarcely any facts remain of its history except the names of its Priors, who were nominated by the Abbot of Dunfermline, though the Urquhart community sometimes tried to claim a right to elect. Even as its records, so also all trace of the priory buildings have disappeared. Its site is only to be identified with the “Abbey Well.” At the Reformation the lands passed into possession of Alexander Seton, a favourite of James VI, the receiver being granted the title of Baron of Urquhart, which was afterwards merged into that of Earl of Dunfermline, also granted to Seton.

The Priory of PLUSCARDEN, or Pluscardyn, which in its latter days became connected with Dunfermline, has a longer history. It was founded by Alexander II in 1230, in a beautiful

valley about six miles from Elgin, in Moray, as a priory of the Order known as that of Vallis caulium, from the territory in which the mother house in Burgundy was situated. The Order had three houses in Scotland; it was introduced from France by Bishop William Malvoisin of St Andrews, a prelate of French nationality; the members were familiarly known in Scotland as “Kail Glen” monks—the Scottish equivalent for *Val des Choux*. Their rule was a combination of those of the Carthusians and the Cistercians.

The buildings of the priory were of considerable extent, as its remains show. The church, originally on a cruciform plan, has now only choir and transepts—the former measuring about 60 feet by 30 feet, the latter nearly 100 feet. The walls of the square tower are nearly complete. The transepts have four chapels towards the east groined in stone. A flight of stone steps from the south transept gives access to the dormitory, which runs over the chapter-house, slype, and calefactory. The architecture is very fine Early English and decorated, with later additions. The square chapter-house, its stone vaulting resting on a central pillar, is in perfect preservation. The kitchen, as it is locally called, but which was more probably the calefactory, is a fine building with groined roof supported on pillars which divide it into two equal aisles. Until recently it was used as a Presbyterian place of worship for the district. A square chapel of later date than the rest of the church bears the name of the “Dunbar Vestry.” It is believed to have been built by Alexander Dunbar, the last of the Priors. In the north wall of the choir is one of those stone tabernacles for the Blessed Sacrament, not uncommon in the north of Scotland, known as “Sacrament Houses.” Traces of mural painting remain under the choir arch, and were deciphered about a century ago by an antiquarian, who described them as representing St John the Evangelist writing his Gospel. The nave was probably destroyed when the “Wolf of Badenoch” burned down Elgin Cathedral and visited Pluscarden on his way; its foundations only are now to be seen.

Urquhart Priory, only a few miles beyond Elgin, had become reduced in numbers; in 1453 there were only two monks left, and as at Pluscarden there were only six, Pope Nicholas V, in answer to a petition from the Prior of Urquhart, united the houses to form a single priory under the Abbey of Dunfermline. The reasons given were the reduced revenues of both houses, which made it impossible to maintain them efficiently in independence, and the exceedingly small numbers of the inmates of each.*

[* The statement, passed from pen to pen by countless Protestant writers, that the union was the consequence of the evil lives of the Pluscarden monks, who “had become very licentious, and had given themselves up to gross immoralities” (Young, *Annals of Elgin*, 1879), is refuted with some warmth by Mr Macphail, as having no foundation in fact. Nothing of the kind is mentioned in the Bull of Nicholas V; indeed, common sense would suggest that the mere advent of two monks from Urquhart would be scarcely likely to reform the six “very licentious” monks of Pluscarden.]

The Pope accordingly decreed that the Pluscarden monks should accept the rule and habit of the Benedictines, the then Prior, Andrew Haag, having of his own will resigned the superiority.

Pluscarden accordingly became a dependency of Dunfermline, and in 1454 William de Boyis, Sacrist of the Abbey, was delegated to receive the profession of the Vallis Caulium monks and take formal possession of the house. This same William de Boyis eventually became Prior of the newly attached priory, the former Prior of Urquhart returning to Dunfermline, to which Pluscarden remained attached till the fall of that abbey. In 1524 there were twelve monks in residence beside the Prior; the Benedictine superiors were six in all.

When Prior Dunbar died in 1560, Alexander Seton became Commendator and drew the revenues, together with those of Urquhart. The monks were not disturbed at the Reformation, but lived on peacefully in the buildings, till death called each away. In 1586 there was still

one remaining. After passing through various hands the property has only recently been purchased by the Marquess of Bute. The fact is sufficient guarantee of the future reverent custody and preservation from further decay of a monastery full of interest both for beauty of buildings, charm of site, and varied history.

These notes on Dunfermline and its dependencies have been necessarily much curtailed, owing to the limited space at command, but, slight as they are, they will not, it is hoped, prove altogether devoid of interest.

MICHAEL BARRETT, O.S.B.

Dublin Review, 1899, 360-384.

Transcribed by W. T. Johnston,
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The death took place yesterday of the Rev. Michael Barrett, O.S.B., who had been officiating for twenty years at St James Catholic Church, Letterfourie, four miles south of Buckie. Mr Barrett, who was 75 years of age, was a native of the English Midlands, and as a novelist wrote under the nom de plume of Joseph Carmichael. In 1877 he became a monk of Fort-Augustus Abbey. He was the author of historical and archeological works, and also wrote for Magazines.

Glasgow Herald: 17.12.1924, 12b.