

*On the Offices of Thane and Abthane.*

*To the Right Hon. the Earl of Buchan.*

MY LORD,

FRIARS CARSE.

THE great deference I always pay to your Lordship's opinion, concerning any thing relative to the constitution and antiquities of Scotland, has induced me to request your Lordship's opinion upon some remarks I have lately made on the title of *Thane*, in Scotland; and the authority that was annexed to that most ancient and honourable office, by our kings and the estates, in the earlier ages of the Scottish monarchy.

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A Thane, which signifies a Servant, held, under the king, a jurisdiction over a district called a Thanedom, and afterwards a sheriffdom, or county. His office was to give judgement in all civil and criminal cases within his Thanedom.

Upon perusing the claims of hereditary jurisdictions in Scotland, when they were annexed to the crown, in 1748, I find, that in the year 1405, a precept was granted by Robert Duke of Albany, Regent of Scotland, for infesting Donald, Thane of Calder, in his Thanedom, as heir at law to Andrew, Thane of Calder, his father, to whom he had previously been served heir, and returned in the heritable offices of sheriff (or Thane) of Nairn, and constable of the castle of Nairn. He was accordingly seised of his lands and Thanedom, and the seisine is produced as a voucher in the year 1748, to prove the fact. By this it appears, that the Thanes of Calder exercised a jurisdiction over the Thanedom, and afterwards sheriffdom, of Nairn.

The title of Earl, (an English dignity, derived from the Saxon word *Ebre*, signifying honour, and the monosyllable *all*) was introduced in Scotland, first, by Malcolm Canmore, and gained ground to the prejudice of the more ancient title of Thane. The title of Earl was often granted without any jurisdiction annexed to it, but the dignity of Thane, never. And this, perhaps, was the chief reason for its total disuse in the year 1476, when William, Thane of Calder, had his Thanedom erected into a free barony and regality. He was the last Thane in Scotland; for the crown, to add to its influence, then abolished this dignity.

As to the very ancient title of *Abthane*, I am more at a loss to point out the nature and extent of its jurisdiction. I find Crinan, Abthane of Dull and the western isles. He married Beatrix the eldest

est daughter of Malcolm II. and was father to Duncan I. king of Scotland; he was considered as the most powerful man in the kingdom.

It is generally thought that he exercised the office of chief justiciar over the kingdom, perhaps in a similar manner as it was exercised by the family of Argyle, so late as the year 1628, when the Lord Lorn, heritable justiciar of all Scotland, did resign that high office to King Charles I.

In addition to the office of chief justiciar, Crinan, it is thought, was the king's steward over the crown lands in the western isles, as well as a large district on the main land of Scotland, called Dull.

What the extent was of the crown's patrimony, called Dull, I do not know; but, in the claim of Sir Robert Menzies for the lordship of Apin O'Dull, in 1748, the Lord Advocate, in his reply, says, that the lordship of Apin O'Dull was anciently a part of the patrimony of the crown. And it is natural to suppose that it was part of Crinan's Abthanedom.

The lordship of Apin O'Dull, as claimed by Sir Robert Menzies, comprehends the lands situated in the parishes of Weem and Dull, and Logierait.

Crinan was the last Abthane in Scotland; for his son, Duncan I. appointed Bancho, Thane of Lochaber, as his Dapifer or Senescalus; and Malcolm Canmore appointed Walter to the office of Dapifer *domini regis*, which became hereditary in his family, until they succeeded to the throne, in the person of Robert II.

I shall be extremely happy to receive your Lordship's sentiments on this subject, and am,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

Most Obedient Servant,

ROBERT RIDDEL.