

II.

NOTES ON ST ROQUE, AND THE CHAPEL DEDICATED TO HIM, NEAR EDINBURGH. BY ROBERT CHAMBERS, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

We learn, from Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, that the life of St Roch has been obscurely preserved, but it is not doubted that he was a native of Montpellier, and lived in the fourteenth century. Having travelled into Italy, this holy man devoted himself to the cure of people sick of the pestilence, became himself infected, and experienced what was thought a miraculous recovery. He afterwards returned to his native city, and died there in 1327; but was translated to Venice, where a handsome church was dedicated to him. St Roch's Day is placed by Butler on the 16th of August.

In the Breviary of Aberdeen, well known as one of the earliest specimens of Scottish typography, some particulars of St Roque's life, perhaps more curious than authentic, are given. It is related that he was born with the mark of a cross on his left side, and, when an infant, gave presage of the self-denying life he was to lead by not sucking his mother's milk while she was fasting. He is said to have no sooner succeeded to his patrimony, than he distributed it all among the poor; and resigning his seignorial rights to his uncle, took the hat, scrip, and staff of a pilgrim, and journeyed into Italy. By the use of the sign of the cross, he was enabled to cure great numbers of people of the plague, until he himself was prostrated by disease at Placentia. After great sufferings, having recovered his health, he returned to France; but in the confusion of a war then raging, was seized and thrown into a dungeon in his own paternal castle. Here, after a confinement of five years, he died. Just before his death he prayed to God that any one afflicted with the plague, who should fly to the protection of Roque, might be healed. An inscription to this effect being found

¹ Vol. x. p. 223.

upon him, his uncle discovered who he was, and with tears gave him an honourable burial, subsequently erecting a church over his remains. The narrative of the Breviary concludes thus:—"Vale Roche angelice, ora pro nobis, ut mereamur preservari a peste. Magnificat!"

The religious merits and favours of the holy Rochus were acknowledged by the erection of fanes to him in Germany, and other countries, not merely in cities, but on waysides and in private mansions. His fame reached even our northern land, but not apparently at a very early period. In the opinion of Dr Daniel Wilson, it was most probably just at the beginning of that century in which the Reformation took place, that a chapel arose in honour of St Roque, in a lovely valley on the south skirts of the Borough Moor of Edinburgh, and almost under the shade of the Blackford Hill. Persons who suffered from the plague, or were apprehensive of doing so, came here to pay their vows and entreat protection; James IV. amongst the number, by whom an offering of fourteen shillings was made in 1507. The little fane was conveniently situated for those who, being actually infected, were compelled to encamp on the Borough Moor. There is a statute, in December 1530, to this effect:—"We do yow to wit, forsamickle as James Barbour, master and governor of the foule folk on the Mure, is to be clengit, and has intromettit with sundry folkis gudis and clais, quilkhis ar lyand in Sanct Rokis Chapell, Thairfoir all maner of personis that hes ony clame to the said gudis that they cum on Tyisday nixt-to-cum to the officiaris, and thar clais to be clengit, certify and tharin and thai do nocht, that all the said clais gif thai be of litill availl sal be brynt, and the laif to be gevin to the pure folkis." In 1532, Sir John Young, the chaplain, was endowed with four acres of ground by the Town Council, on condition of his keeping the roof and windows of the chapel in repair. There was a cemetery around the chapel where the victims of the pestilence were interred.

The remains of the chapel existed till the end of the eighteenth century; and a sketch of them appeared in Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*. Arnot relates that, long before that period, the proprietor of the ground determined on erasing the old structure, and had men actually engaged in demolishing the walls, when the fall of a scaffold, by which the men were killed, was interpreted as a judgment of heaven against the destruction of the building, and thenceforth no entreaties nor bribes of the proprietor could induce any other people to undertake so unhallowed a work! Daniel Wilson adds: "The march of intellect had made rapid strides ere its doom was a second time pronounced by a new proprietor, early in the present century, when the whole of this interesting and venerable ruin was swept away as an unsightly incumbrance to the estate of a retired tradesman."

The spot is now included in a small villa domain belonging to William Ivory, Esq., W.S., and the only visible memorial of the ancient establishment is the name of *St Roque's*, which the villa has always borne. The house having been lately re-erected on a different spot, certain excavations became necessary; and in course of these a considerable quantity of human remains was turned up, chiefly, in all probability, the relics of those who died of the plague. Beyond these remains nothing of consequence has been discovered, except the fact that the ground is very ill calculated by nature for a cemetery, the depth of soil being only two or three feet at most, and even that being much encumbered with large boulders. One fact observed by a workman was, however, significant; from the disposal of the bones in one instance, it was manifest that the body had been laid on its face. The fact brings the haste and terror attending the burial of a victim of the plague strongly before us.

By the kindness of Mr Ivory, two of the most entire skulls have been brought to the Museum of the Society.