

IV.

NOTICE OF A STONE COFFIN, FOUND IN THE PAVEMENT OF THE ABBEY CHURCH, DUNFERMLINE, IN 1849, AND OF ITS CONTENTS. BY THE REV. PETER CHALMERS, D.D., M.A., F.S.A., SCOT.

During the relaying of the pavement, along with other repairs, of the Nave of the Abbey Church of Dunfermline, under the direction and at the expense of the Commissioners of her Majesty's Works, in the Autumn of 1849, the workmen came upon two massive stone coffins, lying side by side at the east end of the centre of the building, in one of which was found a leathern shroud. The shroud is in good preservation, except at the forepart of the legs, where it is entirely wasted; and the portion which surrounded the head has, from being appropriated by various early visitors, disappeared. The tanned leathern skin has double folds, had been wrapped round the body in the mummy fashion, had

¹ Meteor., lib. iv., c. 6.

been laced on the breast like a pair of stays, and is still closely stitched with a strong leathern thong all down the back from the neck to the heels, and along the soles of the feet very carefully. The length of what remains is nearly five feet.

The body thus swathed had become almost entirely decomposed, only the small fragments of a bone being found by me, which was so much decayed that it soon mouldered into dust. There was remaining also a little of the hair, which is of a dark colour.

The exact spot where the stone coffin lay is a little before and between the second and third eastern columns, now marked by an ancient grave-stone, transferred for this purpose from the middle area of the edifice, bearing in old English letters the name "Johannes Scott," &c., and the date 1508, the oldest that remains, with a legible inscription, on the once lettered pavement of the Abbey Church.

The coffin is hollowed out of one block of sand-stone, with a circular space for the head, and the lid or covering, consisting also of one stone, is slightly peaked or gently tapers upwards, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Its dimensions externally are, 6 feet 7 inches in length; 2 feet 2 inches in breadth at head; 2 feet 3 inches in depth at head; 1 foot $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth at foot; 2 feet 1 inch in depth at foot.

Quite contiguous to it on the south was another stone coffin, smaller in size, but of similar construction, inclosing a body, the large bones of which still existed, but all in a separate condition.

Both coffins were lifted, and have been removed to the floor at the west end of the church, where it is likely they may remain for the inspection of the curious.

From the absence of all inscriptions on the stone coffin, in which was the leathern envelope, it is difficult to fix absolutely either the owner or the date. But there is every reason to believe that the position was near or "before the altar of the holy cross," termed by Wyntoun "the Rude Awtare of the Kirk of Dunferme-line," where the remains of King Malcolm III, the founder of the monastery, and of his renowned queen, its tutelary saint, were deposited, and whence they were taken up and transferred by Alexander III. at the famous translation in the year 1250, not long after the finishing of the eastern portion of the sacred edifice, which was begun, it is thought, by Malcolm, "to a more honourable part of the building, in the choir above the great altar,"¹ or the Lady Aisle, now indicated by the large blue slab, or Queen Margaret's tomb-stone, outside the present place of worship. The wearer of the skin-wrapper must, evidently,

¹ Fordoun, x. 3.

have been a person of distinction ; and as there was another stone coffin alongside of his, smaller, but of similar character, the following lines of Wyntoun, prior of Lochleven, in his Rhyming Chronicle, written about the latter half of the fourteenth century, most probably refer to the spot, and to the occupants of both, two royal brothers, sons of Malcolm and Margaret :—

“ Be-for the Rwde Awtare, wyth honowre,
 Scho wes layd in haly sepulture,
 Thare hyre Lord wes laid alsuá,
 And wyth thame hyre sownys twa,
 Edwarde the first, and Ethelred,¹
 * * *
 Saynt Margretis body a hundyr yhere
 Lay be-for the Rwde Awtare,
 In-to the Kyrk of Dunfermelyne ;
 But scho was translatyd syne
 In-to the Qwere, quhare scho now lysis,
 Hyr spryt in-til Paradys.”²

The interment of Edward in the Trinity Church of Dunfermline is attested also in Balfour's Annals, Edinburgh, 1824, i. p. 2, and in Hailes' Annals, i. p. 24. Edward was the eldest son, but neither he nor his younger brother came to the throne. The larger stone coffin, and the leathern shroud, harmonize with his senior age and superior dignity. The Holy Cross, or Rwde Awtare, must have been at that time at the east end of the present old church, so that these two stone coffins, and the others in which the monarch and his consort lay, would be precisely before, or a little to the west of it. Altogether, therefore, there is almost a certainty of this interesting relic having encircled the person of Prince Edward, the first born of Malcolm Canmore and the sainted Margaret.

And as he fell in consequence of a mortal wound received in the forest of Jedwood, during his flight from the siege of Alnwick, where his father was killed, and was buried with him, first at Tynemouth, whence both bodies were afterwards conveyed to Dunfermline, his corpse may have been there swathed in this leathern skin, for its better preservation in the view of its transportation hither—the date being, consequently, the end of the eleventh century. Ethelred, the younger brother, who escaped from the fatal battle, communicated the mournful tidings of the double calamity to his expiring mother in the castle of Edinburgh, and being driven into exile by his uncle, Donald Bane, who had usurped the Scottish throne, died in England, but, according to Wyntoun, as just shown, was interred also in Dunfermline.

¹ Wyntoun, vii., 3, line 103—7.

² Wyntoun, vii., 3, line 115—124.