

I.

NOTES OF SOME MSS. IN ENGLISH LIBRARIES, EXAMINED WHILE PREPARING THE MATERIALS FOR THE SECOND PART OF THE "NATIONAL MSS. OF SCOTLAND," NOW BEING PHOTOZINCOGRAPHED AT SOUTHAMPTON. BY COSMO INNES, Esq., M.A., PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, &c., F.S.A. Scot.

I had occasion to spend the month of October in England, and most of my time in record offices, manuscript rooms, and libraries, and I propose to describe to you a few of the things I found especially interesting.

I will only say, as preface, that my object was to discover and note MSS. illustrative of Scotch history, and fit for representation in the new process of fac-simile by photography on zinc.

The period I was especially engaged upon was the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the first half of the sixteenth—in short, from the coronation of Robert Bruce down to the Reformation.

My first and chief source was the grand accumulation of national records now brought together under the Master of the Rolls, and his able lieutenant Mr Duffus Hardy, in the new building between Chancery Lane and Fetter Lane, which includes what used to be known as the "Rolls House." In that spacious edifice are now collected the whole national records of England, which were formerly distributed between the Tower of London and the Chapter House of Westminster, and also the immense stores of state papers and historical documents that used to be kept in the State Paper Office beside Downing Street, which has been swept away to make room for the new Government buildings.

I need not say that I saw there much of historical interest; but the documents I found of my period are for the most part wanting in the palæographic or the personal interest which I desiderate for my present purpose. It is vain to look for papers possessing personal interest in all that exciting part of our history, the great wars of the succession and of independence, and Bruce's wars. Personal correspondence is abundant, and the news of the day are communicated freely—of the mighty hosts preparing to be launched against Scotland; of the troops and stores for the garrisons; of the sieges and battles; of the engines for battering castle walls—we learn even the names of that primitive artillery,

the "Vernay," the "Robyn," the "Segrave," all, I think, made at Brechin, and named, I suppose, after the engine-maker; of Edward's desire that the young knights should win their spurs in some feat of arms—some *chevauchy* the phrase was—against those wild Scots. The writers of that day speak of them and their leader with a show of contempt which concealed another feeling. In one news-letter from the court at Carlisle, Edward is described as *bien courroucé*—much enraged, that his gallant soldiers had retreated without showing face at all before the leader of the Scots, whom the writer nicknames "le Roy Hob"—"King Bob," we should say.

These endless scraps of news have wonderful interest when placed in due order, and a time assigned to each, as Mr Joseph Stevenson is now engaged in doing; but strange to say, they are for the most part undated as to time, and almost always unsubscribed. The writer perhaps trusted to his seal, which is now gone, or left the bearer of his epistle to declare from whom it came. These defects make that large class, though of so much historical interest, unsuitable for my purposes, and I selected only a few, to illustrate the manner of correspondence of the time of Edward I. and II., and to mark also the light in which Scottish events were then viewed from the Southern point of view. I had the assistance of Mr Stevenson, whose knowledge of the materials of early Scots history is invaluable to a student working his way through that vast mass of hitherto unarranged and uncatalogued documents.

The British Museum is quite a different scene. With the assistance of Mr Bond, the keeper of the MSS., and the large (if not very accurate) catalogues of the several collections, the searcher's labour is much lightened. I soon found abundant documents for my purpose, but so well known as to render it unnecessary for me to describe them. It was there first that it occurred to me to produce, by our new and truthful process, specimens of the earliest Scottish writings in history, in poetry—in short, in any department of literature. I propose to give the page from the Chronicle of Melros, which Thomas Innés declared to be the earliest Scots writing of a historical nature; a page of old Andrew Wyntoun's Chronicle in Scottish rhyme; a specimen of the fine Fordun, used and preferred by Tom Hearne, the Oxford editor; and some others. From that store also I shall exhibit a number, almost a consecutive and

unbroken series, of letters of our Stewart kings, and the great nobles—the Douglasses, Dunbars—who were the first in our country to learn to write, and, fortunately, among the first to use our native language. Some are in Latin, many in French, but many of these letters of correspondence are among our earliest specimens of Scots, which had come into use a few years before the end of the fourteenth century—at which period came in the use of paper also, and the modern manner of signing or subscribing letters.

But, as I told you, the stores of the British Museum are comparatively well known to the scholar and the antiquary. One volume (Cotton MSS. *Vespasian F. vii.*) has furnished whole appendixes to our Scottish historians, and these are already as well known as to their substance, as I hope soon to make their shape, form, and appearance familiar to the eye of all curious readers.

Now pass with me, if you please, to Cambridge, where my friend Mr Bradshaw, the librarian of the University Library, was prepared to show me some discoveries of his, interesting to me and to all good Scotsmen. You know Mr Bradshaw is an enthusiastic discoverer. It is only a few years since he brought to light the venerable Book of Deir, our oldest Scots MS., which our Secretary is now employed in editing; and not satisfied with finding such a treasure, but inspired to new energy, Mr Bradshaw has gone on digging for more and disinterring things of great moment for Scottish literature. What interested me most were certain MSS., which we can hardly err in believing to be very early copies of poems, hitherto unknown, of our admirable John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, the historian and poet of the deeds of Robert the Bruce. It was known that the archdeacon had composed other works besides the life of our hero king. He himself alludes to more than one, but not to any of those which Mr Bradshaw has disinterred at Cambridge. Let me describe these, and tell you the grounds on which we think they are to be ascribed to Barbour.

1. First, we have a volume, brought from Scotland long ago, and described in the Sale Catalogue of the Duke of Lauderdale's MSS. in 1692, as (46) "*History of the Grecian and Trojan Warrs, in old English Verse.*" It is a small folio on paper, and appears to have cost Bishop Moore L.1, 10s. The original part is in the hand of a Scots scribe of the latter half of the fifteenth century, and consists of Dan Lydgate's metrical translation

of the Latin poem of Guido de Colonna of the "Destruction of Troy." The copyist, from some cause—perhaps from having an imperfect book to copy from—has supplied the beginning and end from an earlier version of the work. The MS. is written by the same hand throughout, but the passages of the earlier version used are noted thus:—"Her endis the monk and beginis Barbour;" and "Here endis Barbour and beginis the monk." Lydgate we know was a monk of Bury.

The two portions which are thus ascribed to Barbour, consist, the one of 1560 lines, the other of 600. And it must be noted that some portions of the Barbour version that are wanting here, are found in a volume now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Douce MSS., 148), which has apparently been copied from this Cambridge MS. before it was so much mutilated.

Even without all the circumstances already mentioned, which go to prove this supplement to the translation to be the work of our venerable Archdeacon of Aberdeen, the language and rhythm of the Romance octosyllabic couplets would satisfy the student well acquainted with "the Bruce," that this is his work.

But this is not the only work of the indefatigable poet that has turned up at this late day. There is in the same library—the Cambridge University Library—a tall narrow volume of paper, closely written in a uniform and unmistakably Scots hand. It consists of about 400 staves, or nearly 32,000 lines, in octo-syllable couplets, in the Scots of Barbour, and contains the lives or legends of fifty saints.

The prologue begins:—

"Cato says that suthfast thing is
 That Idleness gives nourisings
 To vices. Thare for wha sa wil be
 Virtuse suld idleness flee.
 As says the romance of the Rose
 But setting of any glose.
 Thairfore in little space here
 I write the life of saintis sere (many)
 How that men may ensample ta
 For to serve God as did thai
 And wha sa wil not sal have blame
 When he sal come til his lang hame
 Tharfor, since I may not wirk
 As ministere of haly kirke

For great eld and febilness,
 Yet for til eschew idleness
 I hafe translaitit symply
 Sum part as I fand in story
 Of Mary and her son Jhesu."

He takes the apostles and evangelists first, then Mary Magdalene, Martha, St Mary of Egypt, St Christopher, St Blaise, St Clement; and to conclude the first portion, St Maurice, or St Machar, the patron, you know, of Aberdeen. In the prologue to this last he says:—

"But before uthir I wald fayne
 An I had cunnyng set my mayne
 Something to say of Saint Moryss
 That in his tyme was war and wise
 And, in the end, of sic renowne
 And als in Heavin sa hye patroun
 Of Abirdeen in the Citie
 Thru haly lyf was wont to be."

The second half of the volume contains 23 lives, from St Margaret to St Katharine. Among them the longest is that of St Ninian. Many stories are given which are not found in the original Latin legends; indeed such is the manner of that kind of literature. In the life of St Ninian, the author tells one story of a "ferly" that happened in his own time, of a knight named Sir Fergus Magdouel and his dealings with the English. At the close he says, this thing happened when David Bruis was king. Another story he tells

"Of a gud man in Mwrefe borne.
 In Elgyne and his kin beforne
 And callit vas a faithful man
 And al thame that hyme knew than
 And this mair trastely I say
 For I kend hyme weile many a day
 Johne Balormy ves his name
 A man of ful gud fame."

It is not surprising that Mr Bradshaw should ask, in his first letter to me, announcing his discovery, "What Scots poet have you who was an ecclesiastic, who was contemporary with king David Bruce; who, in his old age, when unfit for active work in the Church, felt proud to celebrate,

before others, St Machar, the patron saint of Aberdeen—can it be any but our old friend the archdeacon?”

One may wish that the poems so long hidden, so unexpectedly brought to light, were “the Brut,” or some of the quasi-historical romances which we know Barbour did compose, instead of a translation of a middle-age romance, of no great importance. But even the translation, especially a very literal translation of the Latin poem, made by Barbour, and transcribed in the fifteenth century in Scotland, is very valuable.

But if we consider the evidence complete, and that these fragments, preserved so fortunately at the English universities where the Archdeacon of Aberdeen studied, and no doubt wrote, before we had any University in Scotland, it adds greatly to their interest that they, as it were, fill up the outline we had formed before of the dignified ecclesiastic, full of years and honour, still devoted to religious study and to literature, after his age had rendered him unfit for the duties and labours of the high office which he held.

The Cambridge men were very hospitable and kind to the poor Scot, who came to spy the riches of the land. I dined each day with the Fellows of Trinity, in that magnificent hall where I have (on a former visit) sat among 500 men at table, and with a gallery full of ladies looking down on the banquet; the hall brilliantly lighted, showing in all their splendour the pictures on the walls, the old massive college plate, and the gay colours of the dresses in the gallery—a sight, I think, unrivalled in England. One day after dinner, in the Combination room, I had the good fortune to sit beside the Master of Magdalene College, a guest, like myself, at Trinity. He heard me speak of my objects in the libraries of the University, and also of my regret that the Pepysian Collection was so difficult as to make me despair of getting access. The Honourable Mr Neville, the Master, soon removed that feeling, and undertook to let me spend the whole of next morning among the Pepys books—MSS.—drawings—prints—an offer which I was eager to take advantage of. Further, next morning, when Mr Bradshaw and I had enjoyed a free and unrestrained exploration of the wonderful collection, the Honourable the Master promised all facility if we would send the photographic staff to his college—darkness for preparing, plenty of water, plenty of light for the camera. In short, the college and the college

garden should be at the disposal of the photographers from Southampton. I need not tell you that the Pepys collection contains some of our most valuable remains of Scottish early poetry—some of those materials which Mr D. Laing knows to turn to so good account in his admirable editions of Dunbar, of Henryson, and, I hope, by-and-by, of Davy Lindsay.

In the library of St John's College, Cambridge, is one of the two good MSS. of Barbour's "Brus," the writing of which is dated 1487. The other, you know, is here, in the Advocates' Library, the work of the same scribe.

Of another Scots poet of equal, or even greater interest, the library of Trinity College possesses the only good MS. It is a copy of Virgil, the great work of Bishop Gawin Douglas, with this marking at the end:—"Quhilk is the first correck copy nixt eftir the translation, wryten be Master Matho Geddes scribe and writar to the Translator." There are some annotations, which I take to be in the hand of the poet himself. The MS. has been printed for the Bannatyne Club, but without any of the helps that the accomplished editor was expected to supply.

At Corpus College they have a Fordun, but I was too late of giving notice of my wish to see it. That library requires some of the strict forms which are forgotten or abolished elsewhere. Mr Bradshaw undertakes to furnish me with an accurate description of that MS., with its curious marginal pictures, which is only one of some thirty that I have seen or known by trustworthy report.

One MS. at St John's College I was very eager to claim for our country. It is a Psalter, of great antiquity, with glosses and notes in a Celtic language. The illuminations seem to be coloured in the same rather poor tints used in our Book of Deir, only fresher. The figures—I remember a crucifixion, and a picture of David as a shepherd—are rather larger, and more freely drawn. The authorities on whom I rely, more than on my own slender experience of MSS. of that class and age, pronounce it to be considerably older than the Book of Deir, judging both from the writing, and the illuminations or ornaments. I think there is nothing to mark its country, unless something may be found in the few Celtic glosses, which, I believe, are all collected by Mr Whitley Stokes, who has given it unhesitatingly to Ireland. We might have some means of guessing, nothing more, if we could ascertain *where its first*

known owner, Lord Southampton, mostly collected. I fear he did not come into Scotland for that purpose.

Another MS. which I saw at Cambridge, attracted me more even than any of those I have mentioned, though I could invent no pretext for connecting it with Scotland, or with my work. But I have always felt a keen interest in a class, now fortunately unknown among us, the serfs or neyfs, *nativi homines*, who used to be part of the stock of an estate of land, and conveyed with it by charter and seisin. It was the same in both ends of the island, and in both countries the class has disappeared, simply by the growth of free institutions and of the feelings that are produced by them, without any interference of legislation.

The state of *serfdom*, or predial servitude, was the law of all Europe as well as of this island, though Blackstone strangely seems ignorant of it. Many estates were cultivated by serfs bound to the soil, in France, down to the Revolution, and in a great part of Germany even in the present century.

In the reign of the virtuous and pious king Edward VI., a law was passed to legalise slavery in England, but it was soon repealed. On the other hand, English lawyers point to a statute of Charles II.'s bad reign, for an act which, while dealing with copyhold tenures, is said to have virtually abolished servile holdings. It was not till much later that an English judge was able to say, from the King's Bench, that "the air of England was too pure for a slave to breathe."

The condition and the law applicable to these poor serfs has always been an object of study and interest with me, and therefore you may judge of my pleasure when my friend Mr Bradshaw, one morning, in his own rooms, put in my hands a goodly-sized square volume of vellum, and asked me if we had anything like that in Scotland, for he had not met with anything similar in England.

It was an estate-book, or kind of register of the lands and stock of the old Abbey of Spalding, down in the Fens of Lincolnshire. The dates ran as old as Henry III., but I think the writing was not earlier than Richard II.'s time. I daresay there was much of rural life and management to interest one, but my attention was at once engrossed by the early leaves, which give the pedigrees of the *nativi homines* dwelling upon each of the Abbey's manors, and show on what condition, and for

what payment they were allowed to marry, and to give their daughters in marriage.

Thus the Abbey Manor of Weston was cultivated by serfs, all sprung of one Hubert, who seems to have lived about 1250. What his surname was is not found, nor whether he had one. His male descendants all bore the name of Crosse. One page gives four generations in this manner. (See opposite page, 371.)

It is (I suppose) like a well kept stud book, the females of the brood being by no means neglected. The references at the foot of the genealogical page I have copied for you, give—"Johanna filia nigel fecit merchetum pro se ipsa maritanda xviii^d," and many such; and this other—"Thomas filius Nigell fecit merchett pro Emma filia sua maritanda Simoni filio Patricii dim. marc.

1 Ric II. Weston. Thomas Crosse habet licentiam ducendi in uxorem Emmam filiam Thome filii Roberti;" and the price paid for that license is "vi s. viiid." The prices paid may not seem heavy, but they only more mark the degradation of the class.

Here is a form of an oath taken by the *nativi homines*. It is a good specimen of early language:—

fol ix.

Spaldynge

"I xall feythe bere to the lord of this lordeschip and justifiable be in body and godys and in catell as his oune man att his oune wylle. So helpe me God att the holy dome, and be this boke."

I know nothing among our monastic records that shows so fully the life of the serf. We are not without evidence, however, that the position of the neyf was essentially the same in Scotland as in England. I would refer those of you who feel any interest in a little worked subject, to some entries in the Register of Dunfermline, giving the pedigrees of the Abbey serfs; and to a few Berwickshire charters, printed in the first volume of the "National MSS. of Scotland," showing the market price at which slaves were sold. It is odd how many of these slave transactions of the Merse are by people of the family of Prendergest.

I am afraid I have occupied too much of your time about my special hobby. But if you are not tired, and will give me half an hour on a future evening, I have more to tell of Scots MSS. at Oxford and at Canterbury.

