

STATEMENT RELATIVE TO THE RUTHWELL CROSS. BY GEORGE
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A few weeks ago, along with a copy of his interesting little pamphlet on the Ruthwell Cross (published by Messrs Blackwood and Sons in 1885), I received the following letter from my friend Mr M'Farlan, minister of the parish of Ruthwell:—

THE MANSE, RUTHWELL,
2nd December 1886.

DEAR SIR,—You may have heard of our plan to have the Runic monument sheltered from the weather, in a building adjoining the old parish church here. I am almost afraid to write to an Edinburgh antiquarian on the subject, as so many of the members of your Society are of opinion that the "Cross" should be sent to their care in the Edinburgh Museum. I will cling to the hope, however, that some of them will yet smile upon our plan; and, knowing the interest which you take in the monument, I will be greatly obliged if you will bring the following facts under the notice of the members of your Society, or of any of your friends who may be able to look with favour on the local preservation of the Ruthwell Cross.

The plan is to have the Cross placed in a semicircular building at the back of the present pulpit, lit by four lancet windows. This would attach it definitely to the parish church, and would overcome the difficulty of having a new building erected over the monument where it now stands. Neither the heritors nor the

minister could be held responsible for the up-keep of such a building. The heritors have sanctioned the present plan, and H.M. Office of Works has agreed to give £50 towards it if the whole of the sum required—viz., £250—be forthcoming within six months from the 1st of December. Counting the Government grant, we have £204 in all subscribed, and we are now appealing to the friends of the Cross to help us in completing the needed amount.—
Sincerely yours,
J. M'FARLAN.

In reply, I undertook to make a short statement to the Society relative to the proposal; and I have recently received a second letter from Mr M'Farlan, along with two Dumfries newspapers containing paragraphs which indicate the local opinion regarding the treatment of the Cross. "Since I wrote to you (Mr M'Farlan says) I have a letter from the Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, London, stating that they intend to support our plan. We still need about £20. Our farmers have little to spare at present, but I have no doubt they will come to the rescue if there is any fear of our losing the promised grant of £50 from H.M. Board of Works. However, apart from the matter of a donation from your Society, I am specially anxious to have their general approval for the local preservation of the monument."

After stating that it is "manifestly impossible for the heritors and minister of Ruthwell to sanction the removal of the Cross to Edinburgh," Mr M'Farlan offered to transmit, for the inspection of the Society, the architect's plans for the proposed addition to the church and for the removal of the Cross, besides indicating his willingness to come to Edinburgh for the purpose of personally expounding them. The "plan (he adds) is, I believe, pretty well known to the members of your Society. Still I am anxious that the Scottish antiquaries should have an opportunity of discussing it; and I would not like to carry out a plan which they might afterwards set down as a blunder." I accordingly requested Mr M'Farlan to send me the plans (which I now exhibit), but I did not consider it necessary to ask him to come to Edinburgh.¹ The scheme has now been formally approved of by the Presbytery of Annan.

It is quite unnecessary for me to trouble the Society with any

¹ In point of fact, however, Mr M'Farlan attended the meeting at which this paper was read, and made an explanatory statement.

detailed account of the deeply interesting monument to which my communication refers. Suffice it to state that the date of its erection was somewhere about the year 680—*i.e.*, upwards of 1200 years ago; that, according to tradition, the Cross originally stood at Priestside, on the Solway shore, from which it was removed to its present locality by a team of oxen, or by the angels; that it was thrown down during the ecclesiastical troubles in the reign of Charles I., about the year 1642, the broken fragments having been allowed to remain within the parish church for upwards of 130 years; that in 1802 the Rev. Dr. Duncan, minister of Ruthwell, found the fragments lying *outside* the church, and set up the two principal parts in the manse grounds; the erection of the pillar, as it now stands, with new cross beam and old top stone, having been completed by Dr Duncan in 1823. The Cross is referred to by Bishop Gibson, in his additions to Camden's *Britannia*, published in 1695; and at different dates, during the eighteenth century, by Dr Nicolson, bishop of Carlisle, Alexander Gordon, in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, Thomas Pennant, in his *Second Tour in Scotland*, and Cardonnel and Gough, in the *Vetusta Monumenta*, issued by the London Society of Antiquaries. During the current century the history of the Cross has been ably discussed and illustrated by a number of distinguished scholars and archæologists, including Dr Duncan, Mr Kemble (the celebrated Anglo-Saxon scholar), Dr Daniel Wilson, the Rev. D. H. Haigh, Professor Stephens of Copenhagen, Dr John Stuart, Mr Henry Sweet of Oxford, and Dr Joseph Anderson, in whose *Scotland in Early Christian Times* (2nd series) will be found an interesting account of the Cross, accompanied by several admirable illustrations.

I have reason to believe that very conflicting opinions are entertained by the Fellows of this Society regarding the point at issue. While some warmly support the views of the heritors and minister of Ruthwell—which I understand are shared by the entire population of Dumfries and Galloway—others no less strongly advocate the removal of the Cross to the Edinburgh Museum of National Antiquities, in the interests of the public and also of archæology; and that mainly on the ground that any local claim to the retention of the monument has long ago been forfeited by the treatment which it has received at the hands of those who

ought to have religiously protected it. To use the language of Dr Anderson:—"Look at its pitiable story. Demolished, broken, buried; restored and reconstructed by private enterprise; deciphered and demonstrated to be of national interest and importance as a literary and historic monument,—and yet left to weather and decay! Had it been covered with Asian bilinguals or African hieroglyphics, it might at least have had the chance of being acquired at great expense and brought to this country in triumph, with much public rejoicing over its acquisition."

In other matters besides those pertaining to archæology the rival claims of local and central control have given rise to many a warm discussion. Speaking generally, there is probably a good deal to be said on both sides. In some instances it appears to be very desirable that local opinion and local action should be entirely unfettered; but, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that a little gentle despotism, in the shape of central supervision, is occasionally very wholesome. Take the case of the concentration of the Old Parochial Registers of Scotland, in terms of Lord Elecho's Act of 1854. I venture to think that no impartial person of ordinary intelligence can hesitate to admit that, on the whole, the safe and proper custody of these important records in a central department is a great national boon. With regard to archæology, I am disposed to hold that coins and other articles of treasure trove, which are usually not very bulky, ought invariably to find their way to our National Museum. The same principle would, of course, equally apply to every other class of antiquities of moderate size; but when we come to deal with an object in sandstone, measuring about 18 feet in height, 2 feet in breadth, and 15 inches in thickness, and weighing probably about three tons, there appears to be some ground for challenging the propriety of its removal, more especially if it can be shown that henceforth every reasonable precaution will be adopted to protect the precious memorial from injury or decay. As already indicated, I have brought the subject under the notice of the Society, at the request of the minister of Ruthwell, with the view of enlisting its sympathy, if not its aid, in the retention of the unique monument in the picturesque parish of Annandale from which it takes its name.