

**TWO ANCIENT RECORDS OF
THE BISHOPRIC OF CAITHNESS
FROM THE CHARTER-ROOM
AT DUNROBIN**

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Two ancient records of the bishopric of Caithness from the charter-room at Dunrobin by
Anonymous

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CONTRIBUTED

BY THE DUKE OF SUTHERLAND

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TWO ANCIENT RECORDS OF THE BISHOPRIC OF CAITHNESS,
FROM THE CHARTER-ROOM AT DUNROBIN.

WHEN the Bishopric of Caithness was founded, whether by Alexander I. or by his brother King David, the Scotch monarch exercised but a partial and uncertain sway over the territory of the new northern diocese. The peninsula beyond the Moray Frith was for long afterwards in the hands of the Norsemen, who acknowledged their allegiance to the Kings of Scotland only when it suited them to resist the more distant authority of the crown of Norway, or when divisions among themselves rendered it impossible to assert an absolute independence.

The Dalesmen of Caithness and Sutherland, however, unlike their island neighbours, drew their ecclesiastical institutions from Scotland;¹ and this must have been one means of preserving the connexion between them and

¹ The legendary history of the Church in Caithness, pointing to a time before the Northmen had any footing there, connects it still more with the missionaries of Ireland and Scotland.

The legend of St Finbar, or St Barr, the bishop, "qui in Cathania magno cum honore habetur," (*Brev. Aberdon. mense Septemb., fol. cxv.*) is plainly identical with that of St Finbar, first Bishop of Cork, who has been rudely transplanted to Scotch ground, with all his miracles and renown—marking, perhaps, the early settlement of some Irish colonists, bringing with them the veneration they had rendered in their old country to the patron saint of their tribe or province.

Saint Duthac was connected with Caithness. He is said to have wrought a miracle at

Scotland proper, when the authority of the Crown was little felt so far. David I., early in his reign, addressed a letter to Rognvald Earl of Orkney, and to the Earl (he does not name him) of Caithness, and to all good men of Caithness and of the Orkneys, praying that, for love of him, they would favour the monks who dwelt at Dornoch in Caithness, and protect them wherever they came within their bounds, and not permit any to do them injury or shame.¹

The Abbey of Scone was from an early period peculiarly connected with Caithness and Sutherland. Harald, styling himself Earl of Orkney, granted a mark of silver yearly to the canons of Scone, for the weal of the souls of him and his wife, and for the souls of his predecessors.² In the reign of Alexander II., when the King's writ was of some potency, the abbot of Scone obtained a royal precept to the sheriffs and bailies of Moray

Dornoch, on the festival of St Fimbar, to whom, perhaps, that cathedral was of old dedicated.—(Brev. Aberdon. mense Marc., fol. lxx.)

Saint Fergus, bishop and confessor, is likewise numbered among the missionaries who preached the faith in Caithness. He was consecrated to the episcopal office in Ireland, from whence, sailing with a few priests and clerks to the western parts of Scotland, he reached strogeth. There, for some time, he led a solitary life; but seeing the land that it was good, he put his shoulder and hands to the work, and founded and endowed three churches there. Thence he retired into Caithness, still preaching Christianity and converting the people, not more by his eloquence than by the lustre of his virtues. From Caithness he sailed to the shores of Buchan, to a place known by the vulgar as Lungley, where he built a church that still bears his name. Last of all, he came to Glamis, in Angus, where he chose his place of rest. There he died and was buried; but his relics, after many years, were translated to the Abbey of Soone, where they did many famous miracles.—(Brev., fol. clix.) Certain other of his relics were preserved in the treasury of the cathedral church of Aberdeen.—(Regist. Aberdon., Vol. II. pp. 143, 160, 167, 171, 172, 182.) The ultimate deposit of the bones of the saint of Caithness in the church of Scone marks their early connexion. It is remarkable, that the great house of Le Chene, so much connected with Caithness, was proprietor of the parish in Buchan, which derived its name of St Fergus from the Caithness Saint.

¹ Regist. Dunform., 23.

² Liber de Scon., 58.

and Caithness, for the protection and defence of the ship belonging to the convent, while on her voyage within their jurisdictions. These transactions prepare us for finding the abbey at a somewhat later period, the proprietor of the church of Kildonan, with the lands of Borubol, which were the subject of a curious bargain in 1332.¹

The first of the bishops of the northern diocese, of whom we have any knowledge, was Andrew. He cannot have resided much in his bishopric, and indeed appears to have been in almost constant attendance on the court of King David I., and his grandsons, Malcolm and William. He was present, however, at one memorable transaction, the beginning of great calamities to his diocese. In the time of Pope Alexander III., Earl Harald, for the redemption of his sins, granted to the Roman see a penny yearly (unum denarium) from each inhabited house in the earldom of Caithness;² and that grant was attested by Bishop Andrew, and other nobles of the land. Bishop Andrew was once a monk of Dunfermline. Deriving probably a scanty revenue from his bishopric, he had a grant of the land of Hocht common from David I., and held the church of the Blessed Trinity of Dunkeld; which was bestowed by Malcolm IV. upon the Abbey of Dunfermline, as soon as it should fall vacant by his death.³ He was undoubtedly a person of eminent qualities, were we only to judge from his being so constantly attached to the court and person of a monarch like David I.,

¹ Liber de Scon., 162.

² Epist. Innoc. III., Lib. I., No. 218. A similar grant was made to the Monks of Paisley by the Lords of the Isles in the twelfth century—*singulis anni unum denarium ex qualibet domo totius terre sue unde funus exit*.—(Regist. Fasselet, p. 125.) It was an imitation of the hearth-tax, called Peter's Pence, or *Romfeoi*, in Saxon England. The same principle of assessment prevailed in the vexatious petty rents that so long oppressed the Orkneys, and some of which are yet known among us, as 'kain.' It is not yet beyond memory, even on the mainland, that each fire house of a barony paid its 'reek hen'—*unam gallinam de qualibet domo unde funus exit*.

³ Regist. de Dunfermlin.

and his grandsons.¹ He is quoted, as an authority on the geography of his country, by the English author of the little fragment "De situ Albanie," which has been attributed to Giraldus Cambrensis.² Andrew was bishop from about the year 1160,³ and he held the see till his death, on the 3d of the kalends of January 1185.⁴

The next Bishop of Caithness was John. It appears that at first he declined to exact the Papal contribution; but the Pope (Innocent III.) summoned him to obedience, and even granted a commission to the bishops of Orkney and Rosmarky to compel him to levy the tax, by the heavy censures of the church.⁵ Whether the poor bishop complied, or attempted to enforce the exaction of the tax, we are not informed; but his subsequent fate, as narrated in the wild sagas of the Norsemen, might appear incredible, were it not singularly corroborated by a Roman record. Earl Harald Madadson, who had been deprived of his Caithness possessions by William the Lion, resolved to recover them by force, and crossed from his Orkney kingdom to Thurso with a great fleet. There was no force capable of resistance. The bishop, who was residing in his palace of Skrabister, went out to meet him, as the intercessor for the poor Caithness men; but the savage Earl took him and cut out his tongue, and dug out his eyes

¹ There is much reason to think he was a man of property, and that the Church of Dunkeld was his of inheritance. Bishop Richard of Dunkeld confirmed to Dunfermelin "donationem regis Malcolmi et Andree episcopi Katenensis secundum quod eorum carte testantur, ecclesiam s. trinitatis de Dunchelde et omnes terras juste ad eam pertinentes."—Dennylyne col. of orig. ch. No. 81.

² "Sicut mihi verus relator retulit Andreas videlicet vir venerabilis Katanensis episcopus natione Scottus et Dunfermelis monachus."—(T. Innes's Critical Essay, Ap. I.) Innes's reference is now antiquated. The fragment still exists, however, in the Royal Library at Paris.—(MS. Reg., 4126, fo. 16.) A collation by M. Teulet of the *Archives du Royaume* has furnished very few and unimportant corrections of the text as settled by Innes, and none that affect the sense of this curious piece of antique geography.

³ Regist. Glasg., 11.

⁴ Chron. Mailr.

⁵ Epistol. Innoc. III., Lib. I. No. 218.

with a knife.¹ The saga goes on to tell us, that Bishop Ion recovered the use of his tongue and his eyes, by the miraculous intervention of a native saint, written Tröllhæna.

The latter part of the story is not confirmed by any good authority; but some part of the barbarity of the Earl, and the bishop's sufferings, is confirmed by the following letter of Pope Innocent, ascribed to the year 1202, addressed to the Bishop of the Orkneys:—"We have learnt by your letters that Lombard, a layman, the bearer of these presents, accompanied his Earl on an expedition into Caithness; that there the Earl's army stormed a castle, killed almost all who were in it, and took prisoner the Bishop of Caithness; and that this Lombard (as he says) was compelled, by some of the Earl's soldiery, to cut out the bishop's tongue. Now, because the sin is great and grievous, in absolving him according to the form of the church, we have prescribed this penance for satisfaction of his offence, and to the terror of others—That he shall hasten home, and, barefooted, and naked except breeches and a short woollen vest without sleeves—having his tongue tied by a string, and drawn out so as to project beyond his lips, and the ends of the string bound round his neck—with rods in his hand, in sight of all men, walk for fifteen days successively through his own native district, the district of the mutilated bishop, and the neighbouring country; he shall go to the door of the church without entering, and there, prostrate on the earth, undergo discipline with the rods he is to carry; he is thus to spend each day in silence and fasting, until evening, when he shall support nature with bread and water only; after these fifteen days are passed, he shall prepare within a month to set out for Jerusalem, and there labour in the service of the Cross for three years; he shall never more bear arms against Christians; for two years he shall fast every Friday on bread and water, unless, by the indulgence of some discreet

¹ Orkn. Saga, p. 414.