



ST. PETER'S CHURCH, THURSO. 634. G.W.W.

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, THURSO, SCOTLAND.

A REVERENT PILGRIMAGE.

PART XI.

Crossing Aberdeenshire and Banff, we come to Elgin Cathedral, founded by the Bishop of Moray in 1223. One would naturally expect that the further we recede from the fertile valleys of the south the poorer the ecclesiastical foundations would be. That such a supposition would be a mistaken one, however, the noble proportions of this cathedral clearly prove. Burned to the ground about a century and a half after its foundation by the Wolf of Badenoch,* it gradually rose again out of its ruins to more than its former glory. But about thirty years after its completion it fell a victim to other foes. In 1568 we find the Council, under Regent Moray, ordering that its leaden roof, together with that of St. Machar, Aberdeen, be "sauld and disposit upon" for the sinews of war.† In 1711 the great central tower fell in; and fire, violence and neglect did their work here as elsewhere.

Sufficient remains, however, to mark it as one of the most stately of Scottish cathedrals. The western towers, doorway and a part of the window are still standing; also the choir, east window and high altar. The chapter-house is particularly beautiful. Like so many of the English chapter-houses, it is octagonal, with grained roof supported on a central pillar. The cathedral was anciently surrounded by a high wall, with four gates.

At Fortrose, on the Ross-shire side of the Moray Firth, we find the remains of the cathedral of the Bishops of Ross. The fragment shows the structure to have been in the purest and most elaborate Middle Pointed style of the early part of the fourteenth century. The sharpness of the mouldings is even now remarkable. Bishop Leslie, the historian, the last Roman Catholic Bishop of Ross, lost his See for his devotion to Queen Mary. The castle, or palace, of the Bishops, was completely

destroyed by Cromwell; and the cathedral, after suffering in the same attack, was used as a quarry to build Cromwell's fort at Inverness.

* Alexander Stewart, the illegitimate son of Robert II. —so-called from his ferocious disposition. With Elgin Cathedral he burned the towns of Elgin and Forres.
† Tradition states that the ship freighted with the lead sank in Aberdeen Bay.

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As we draw near the close of our pleasant wanderings, O fellow pilgrim, I begin to realize how much there is still with which I should like to show you. And chiefly, perhaps, Whithorn or Whitberne, in the far south-west, where St. Ninian, the earliest apostle to the rude tribes of North Britain, built his "Casa Candida," and the old gothic church of Haddington, which, according to Fordun, was called the "Lamp of Lothian," on account of its splendour. Monastic buildings unconnected with cathedrals—with the exception of the four great abbeys in the valley of the Tweed—we have scarcely glanced at; the smaller ancient churches we have not so much as named. At Thurso, the town in Caithness from which we sailed on our Orendian quest, there is a little roofless church, dedicated to St. Peter, which may serve as a type of many scattered throughout the land. Its cruciform shape and pointed windows are the sole guide the archæologist has to the date of its building; for the records and traditions of the place are alike silent on the subject. It is hemmed in by the houses of the rough fisher people, and the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" crowd to overflowing its little cemetery. I remember it with crumbling walls and broken, moss-grown gables, and it was then so much more venerable-looking and beautiful, one is tempted to wish that the repairers, in their laudable work, had preserved a little of the picturesque irregularity. Within the walls one dear to some of us was laid long, long ago; and we wade through rank grass and clamber over broken gravestones, and with difficulty turn the rusty key in the rusty lock. The hard grey tablet in the wall keeps faithfully its record; the mound is cared for, we see at a glance, though the grass is not green, but brown—so wild is the spot. The waves that used to sing us to

sleep are thundering still on the beach—in the great storm-tides they fleck the graves with foam. And overhead is the very sky we remember; the blue half hidden by piles upon piles of snowy clouds—the same that shaped themselves to our dreams when, in the long summer days, we lay on the green slopes of a high-walled garden not far away; a garden sacred to sweet old-fashioned blossoms and fragrant with the breath of wall-flowers. All seems the same but ourselves—ourselves and our life-time of cares.

And suddenly, as we stand by the grave—with bursting hearts, but speechless, tea-less—a boy outside the walls begins to whistle as he passes. It is a song without words, but well our memory can supply them:

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid;
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heaven and earth hath made."

And lo! the years roll back; and it is the voice of the sleeper—the minister's wife, the gentle mistress of the Manse—that we hear. What a healthful, happy life was that we lived within the old grey house by the sea! How golden were the days begun and ended with the minister's prayer and the minister's wife's kiss? How safe and warm the nights! Of all the memories of our lives these are the strongest and the dearest, and they shall keep us from harsh judgment now in summing up our wanderings.

Poor Scots should we be had we felt no pride as these sanctuaries—beautiful even in their ruins—have risen before us; poorer yet if, because they are ruins, we had felt no shame. "For it was not an open enemy that hath done this dishonour," has been the cry of our hearts, "for then I could have borne it." It was Scotsmen—there is the bitterness of it! and Scotsmen acting in the name of religion, and (some of them, at least) believing they were doing God service. Everywhere it has been the same cry: "The Reformers!" "The Reformers!" "The Reformers!" It is easy to do homage to the martyrs of the Covenant, however widely our opinions may differ from ours; but these triumphant iconoclasts it is hard to forgive—so hard that there is danger of our being as unjust to them as they were to others.