

CHURCH AND MANSE OF METHVEN.¹

THE ancient history of Methven possesses considerable interest. Prior to the fourteenth century the lands belonged to the family of Mowbray, whose ancestor, Roger Mowbray, a Norman knight, came into England with William the Conqueror. Sir Roger Mowbray, proprietor of the lands during the wars of the succession, having taken the part of Baliol and the English interest, had his property confiscated by Robert I., who bestowed Methven upon his son-in-law, Walter, the eighth hereditary Lord High Steward of Scotland, and whose son afterwards succeeded to the throne as Robert II. in right of his mother Marjory Bruce. By that monarch the lordship of Methven was granted to his second son, Walter, Earl of Athol, and on his forfeiture it reverted to the crown. It became part of the dowry lands appropriated to the maintenance of the Queen Dowager of Scotland, and along with other properties was settled on Margaret Queen of James IV. who having divorced her second husband, Archibald Earl of Angus, married Henry Stuart, son of Lord Evandale, a descendant of Robert II., for whom she procured from her son James V. in 1528 the title of Lord Methven, on which occasion the barony was erected into a lordship in favour of Henry Stuart and his heirs male. The Queen died at Methven Castle in 1540, and was buried at Perth beside the remains of James I. The third Lord Methven having died without issue, the lordship was in 1584 conferred upon Lodowick Duke of Lennox, from whose family it was purchased by Patrick Smith of Braco, and on his decease without representatives in 1672 it became the property of King Charles II. as nearest male heir. Such is a brief abstract of the history of the district of Methven to the end of the seventeenth century.²

It appears that the first ecclesiastical establishment in this parish was a provostry or collegiate church founded in 1433 by Walter Stuart, Earl of Athol, who endowed it with an ample revenue from lands and tithes. An aisle once connected with the ancient church appears, from a stone built in the wall, to have been erected by some of the royal family; on the stone in question is sculptured the Royal Lion of Scotland with the crown above and some Saxon characters below, now defaced and illegible. It is not improbable that this aisle may have been built by Margaret the Queen Dowager during her residence at Methven Castle.³

The parish church, which is conveniently situated for the parishioners, is large and commodious; and the manse is an exceedingly well finished, convenient, and even elegant structure, and may be justly regarded as an unquestionable proof of the liberality and good taste of the heritors.⁴

¹ Presbytery of Perth. Minister of the parish, the Rev. Thomas Buchanan.

² See New Stat. Act., art. Methven.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

We shall conclude this brief notice by mentioning that in this parish Bessy Bell and Mary Gray, celebrated in one of our most pathetic Scottish ballads, are said to have been buried. The popular tradition on which the ballad is founded is to the following effect. Bessy Bell, a daughter of the Laird of Kinvaid—a family now extinct,—was during the plague of 1665 on a visit to her friend Mary Gray at her father's house of Lednock. The two young ladies possessed great personal attractions and were highly accomplished. They entertained for each other the tenderest friendship, which was not interrupted by the untoward circumstance of their being both attached to the same young gentleman, who is said to have been so devoted on the other hand to each of the fair friends as to be unable to prefer either. To avoid the terrible pestilence which at the time was raging in every city and village, the two maidens retired to a sequestered glen, where they inhabited a little hut thatched with rushes, and were supplied with the necessaries of life by their devoted swain. But all the precautions which love and friendship could suggest were vain. The young man, in one of his visits to convey provisions to the fair hermits, communicated to them the contagion by which he had himself been seized. They all fell victims to the pestilence, and were buried on the banks of the stream where the site of their bower is still shown. The ballad in which the mournful incident is commemorated is well known, but the descriptive lines of Leyden, less familiar, perhaps, to the reader, although referring the locality of the tale to a different part of the country, may here be appropriately cited:

“ Two beauteous maids the dire infection shun,
 Where Dena's valley fronts the southern sun;
 While friendship sweet, and love's delightful power,
 With fern and rushes thatched their summer bower.
 When spring invites the sister-friends to stray,
 One graceful youth, companion of their way,
 Bars their retreat from each obtrusive eye,
 And bids the lonely hours unheeded fly.
 Leads their light steps beneath the hazel spray,
 Where moss-lined boughs exclude the light of day,
 And ancient rowans mix their berries red,
 With nuts that cluster brown above their head.
 He, mid the wreathing roots of elms, that lean
 O'er oozy rocks of ezlar, shagged and green,
 Collects pale cowslips for the faithful pair,
 And braids the chaplet round their flowing hair,
 And for the lovely maids alternate burns
 As love and friendship take their sway by turns.
 Ah! hapless day that from this blest retreat
 Lured to the town his slow unwilling feet!

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A veil of leaves the redbreast o'er them threw
 Ere thrice their locks were wet with evening dew.
 There the blue ring-dove coos with ruffling wing,
 And sweeter there the throstle loves to sing;
 The woodlark breathes in softer strain his vow,
 And love's warm burden floats from bough to bough.”