

**ROYAL EDINBURGH**  
**HER SAINTS, KINGS, PROPHETS**  
**AND POETS**

BY  
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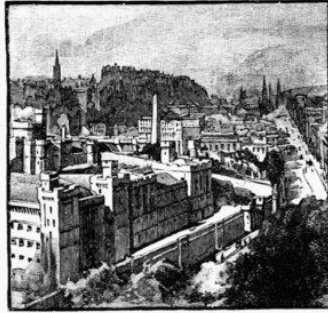
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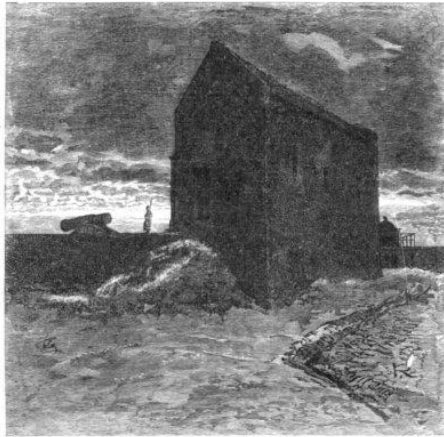


**ST. GILES'S FROM THE LAWNMARKET**

TO MY OLD FRIEND  
ALEXANDER MACMILLAN



# ROYAL EDINBURGH



**QUEEN MARGARET'S CHAPEL, EDINBURGH CASTLE.**

# PART I

## MARGARET OF SCOTLAND, ATHELING—QUEEN AND SAINT

It is strange yet scarcely difficult to the imagination to realise the first embodiment of what is now Edinburgh in the far distance of the early ages. Neither Pict nor Scot has left any record of what was going on so far south in the days when the king's daughters, primitive princesses with their rude surroundings, were placed for safety in the *castrum puellarum*, the maiden castle, a title in after days proudly (but perhaps not very justly) adapted to the supposed invulnerability of the fortress perched upon its rock. Very nearly invulnerable, however, it must have been in the days before artillery; too much so at least for one shut-up princess, who complained of her lofty prison as a place without verdure. If we may believe, notwithstanding the protest of that much-deceived antiquary the Laird of Monkbarns, that these fair and forlorn ladies were the first royal inhabitants of the Castle of Edinburgh, we may imagine that they watched from their battlements more wistfully than fearfully, over all the wide plain, what dust might rise or spears might gleam, or whether any galley might be visible of reiver or rescuer from the north. A little collection of huts or rude forts here and there would be all that broke the sweeping line of Lothian to the east or west, and all that width of landscape would lie under the eyes of the watchers, giving long notice of the approach of any enemies. "Out over the Forth

I look to the north," the maidens might sing, looking across to Dunfermline, where already there was some royal state, or towards the faint lines of mountains in the distance, over the soft swelling heights of the Lomonds. No doubt Edinburgh, Edwinesburgh, or whatever the antiquaries imagine it to have been, must have been sadly dull if safe, suspended high upon the rock, nearer heaven than earth. It is curious to hear that it was "without verdure"; but perhaps the young ladies took no account of the trees that clothed the precipices below them, or the greenness that edged the Nor' Loch deep at their feet, but sighed for the gardens and luxuriance of Dunfermline, where all was green about their windows and the winding pathways of the dell of Pittendreich would be pleasant to wander in. This first romantic aspect of the Castle of Edinburgh is, however, merely traditional, and the first real and authentic appearance of the old fortress and city in history is in the record, at once a sacred legend and a valuable historical chronicle, of the life of Margaret the Atheling, the first of several Queen Margarets, the woman saint and blessed patroness of Scotland, who has bequeathed not only many benefits and foundations of after good to her adopted country, but her name—perhaps among Scotswomen still the most common of all Christian names.

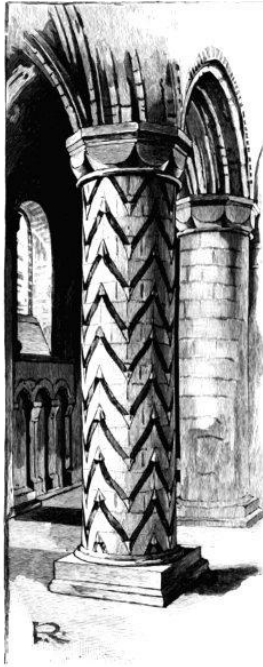
No more moving and delightful story was ever written or invented than the history of this saint and Queen. She was the daughter of Edward, called the Outlaw, and of his wife a princess of Hungary, of the race which afterwards produced St. Elizabeth: and the sister of Edgar Atheling, the feeble but rightful heir of the Saxon line, and consequently of the English throne. The family, however, was more foreign than English, having been brought up at the Court of their grandfather, the

King of Hungary, one of the most pious and one of the richest Courts in Christendom; and it was not unnatural that when convinced of the fact that the most legitimate of aspirants had no chance against the force of William, they should prefer to return to the country of their education and birth. It was no doubt a somewhat forlorn party that set out upon this journey, for to lose a throne is seldom a misfortune accepted with equanimity, and several of the beaten and despondent Saxons had joined the royal exiles. Their voyage, however, was an unprosperous one, and after much beating about by winds and storms they were at last driven up the Firth of Forth, where their ship found shelter in the little bay at the narrowing of the Firth, which has since borne the name of St. Margaret's Hope.

Lying here in shelter from all the winds behind the protecting promontory, with perhaps already some humble shrine or hermit's cell upon Inchgarvie or Inchcolm to give them promise of Christian kindness, with the lonely rock of Edinburgh in the distance on one side, and the soft slopes of the Fife coast rising towards the King's palace at Dunfermline on the other, the travellers must have awaited with some anxiety, yet probably much hope, the notice of the barbaric people who came to the beach to stare at their weather-beaten ships, and hurried off to carry the news inland of such unwonted visitors. It is the very spot which is now disturbed and changed by the monstrous cobwebs of iron which bear the weight of the Forth Bridge and make an end for ever of the Queen's Ferry, which Margaret must have crossed so often, and by which a personage more familiar, Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck, once, as we all know, made his way to the North; but these are modern reflections such as have nothing to do with that



primitive morning, fresh no doubt as to-day with sun and dew, when Malcolm's messengers came hurrying down to see what were these intruders, and what their purpose, and whether anything was to be apprehended from a visit apparently so unusual. The eager and curious emissaries had apparently no warrant to board the strangers, but gazed and wondered at the big ship and all its equipments, so unlike their own rude galleys; then hastened back again with an excited and exciting description of the greatness of the passengers on board and all their splendid array. Malcolm, cautious yet excited too, sent forth, as we are told in the *Scotichronicon*, "his wisest councillors" to make further inquiries. They too were astonished by the splendour of all they saw, and especially by the mien of a certain lady among these strangers, "whom, by her incomparable beauty, and the pleasantness of her jocund speech, I imagined to be the chief of the family," said the spokesman; "nor was it wonderful," adds the chronicler, "that they should believe her to be the chief who was destined to be Queen of Scotland and also heir of England." Perhaps it was the after light of these events that conveyed that high appreciation of Margaret's qualities into the story, for she must have been quite young, and it is very unlikely that in presence of her mother, and the brother whom they all considered as the King of England, a young girl, however gifted, would have taken upon her the chief place.

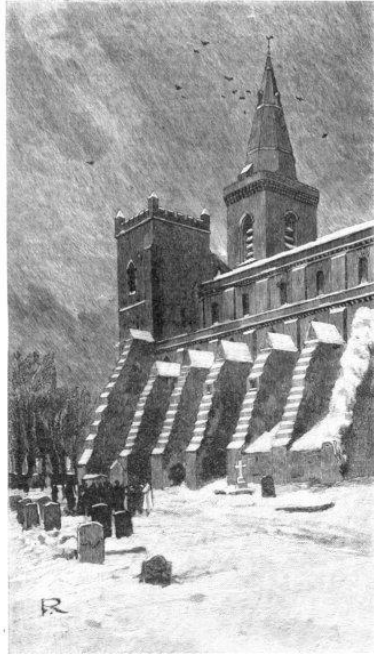


### **PILLAR IN NAVE, DUNFERMLINE ABBEY**

The report he received, however, had so much effect upon King Malcolm that he went himself to visit the strangers in their ship. He was not a mere barbaric prince, to be dazzled by the sight of these great persons, but no doubt had many a lingering recollection in his mind of Siward's great house in Northumberland, where he had taken refuge after his father's murder. It is curious and bewildering to go back in that dawn of national life to familiar Shaksperian regions, and to think that this primitive King who had so much in him of the savage, along with all his love and gentleness, was the son of that

gracious Duncan who addressed his hostess like a kingly gentleman though her hospitality was to be so fatal. King Malcolm came down, no doubt with such state as he could muster, to see the wandering foreign princes. He was not unlearned, but knew Latin and the English tongue, though he could not read, as we are afterwards told. He had already reigned for fourteen years, after about as long a period of exile, so that he could not now be in his first youth, although he was still unmarried. He came down with his suite to the shore amid all the stir of the inquiring country folk, gathered about to see this strange thing—the ship with its unusual equipments, and the group of noble persons in their fine clothes who were to be seen upon the deck. The Athelings were carrying back with them to Hungary all the gifts with which the Emperor, Henry III, had loaded their father when he went to England, and had jewels and vessels of gold and many fine things unknown to the Scots. And Margaret, even though not so prominent as the chroniclers say, was evidently by the consent of all a most gracious and courteous young lady, with unusual grace and vivacity of speech. The grave middle-aged King, with his recollections of a society more advanced than his own, which probably had made him long for something better than his rude courtiers could supply, would seem at once to have fallen under the spell of the wandering princess. She was such a mate as a poor Scots King, badgered by turbulent clans, could scarcely have hoped to find—rich and fair and young, and of the best blood in Christendom. Whether the wooing was as short as the record we have no means of knowing, but in the same year, 1070, Margaret was brought with great rejoicing to

Dunfermline, and there married to her King, amid the general joy.



**DUNFERMLINE ABBEY**

The royal house at Dunfermline, according to the chronicle, was surrounded by a dense forest and guarded by immense cliffs. The latter particular, however, it is difficult to accept, for the dell in which the ruins of the mediæval palace (a building much more recent, it is needless to say, than that of Malcolm) still stand, though picturesque in its acclivities and precipices, is as far as possible from including any cliffs that could be called immense. The young Queen made a great change in the

internal arrangements of what was no doubt a grim stronghold enough, soft as was the country around. Probably the absence of decoration and ornament struck her painfully, accustomed as she was to palaces of a very different kind—for almost the first thing we hear in the contemporary history written by her confessor Theodoric, afterwards a monk at Durham, is of the workshops and rooms for embroidery and all the arts which were established in Dunfermline, presumably in the palace itself under Margaret's own eye, for the beautifying of the great church which she founded there, and also no doubt for her own house. Certain women of good birth were judged worthy to share the Queen's work, and lived with her, it would seem, in a kind of seclusion, seeing only such chosen visitors as Margaret brought with her to cheer their labours, and forswearing all idle talk and frivolity. The Queen had such austerity mingled with her graciousness and such grace with her severity, says her monkish biographer, loving an antithesis, that all feared and respected her presence. "Her life was full of moderation and gentleness, her speech contained the very salt of wisdom; even her silence was full of good thoughts."

This biographer—according to the conscientious and painstaking investigations of the Bollandist Fathers, who examine in their careful way all the guarantees and traditions of the manuscript with a jealousy worthy of the most enlightened historians—is not Turgot, who is usually credited with it, but Theodoric, a monk of Durham, who must have shared with Turgot, at some period of his life, the office of spiritual director and confidant to the Queen. It is curious that both these writers should have passed from the northern Court to the community at Durham, of which Turgot was prior and

Theodoric a simple brother; yet not so strange either, for Durham was largely patronised and enriched by Margaret and her husband, their kingdom at this period reaching as far south. Of Turgot's Life, which was presumably written in the vernacular, there seems nothing existing; but that of Theodoric is very full, and contains many details which set before us the life of the simple Court, with its many labours and charities: the King full of reverence and tender surprise and admiration of all his wife's perfections; the young saint herself, sweet and bright in modest gravity amid a tumultuous world little respectful of women, full of the excessive charity of the age and of her race, and of those impulses of decoration and embellishment which were slow to develop among the ruder difficulties of the north. Theodoric himself must have been more or less of an artist, for in speaking of the "golden vases" and ornaments for the altars of her new church which Margaret devised, "I myself carried out the work," he says. These must have been busy days in Malcolm's primitive palace while the workmen were busy with the great cathedral close by, the mason with his mallet, the homely sculptor with his chisel, carving those interlaced and embossed arches which still stand, worn and gray, but little injured, in the wonderful permanency of stone, in the nave of the old Abbey of Dunfermline: while the Queen's rooms opened into the hall where her ladies sat over their embroidery, among all the primitive dyes that art had caught from herbs and traditional mixtures, on one hand—and on the other into noisier workshops, where workmen with skilful delicate hammers were beating out the shining gold and silver into sacred vessels and symbols of piety. Margaret along with her stores of more vulgar wealth, and the ingots which were

consecrated to the manufacture of crucifix and chalice, had brought many holy relics: and no doubt the cases and shrines in which these were enclosed afforded models for the new, over which Father Theodoric, with his monkish cape and cowl laid aside, and his shaven crown shining in the glow of the furnace, was so busy. What a pleasant stir of occupation and progress, the best and most trustworthy evidences of growing civilisation, must have arisen within the shelter of the woods which framed that centre of development and new life: the new abbey rising day by day, a white and splendid reality in the clearing among the trees; the bells, symbols of peace and pleasantness, sounding out over the half-savage country; the chants and songs of divine worship swelling upward to the skies. Margaret's royal manufactory of beautiful things, her tapestries and metal work, her adaptation of all the possibilities of ornament latent in every primitive community, with the conviction, always ennobling to art, that by these means of sacred adornment she and her assistants and coadjutors were serving and pleasing God, no doubt consoled her ardent and active spirit for the loss of many comforts and graces with which she must have been familiar. At the same time her new sphere of influence was boundless, and the means in her hand of leavening and moulding her new country almost unlimited—a thing above all others delightful to a woman, to whom the noiseless and gradual operation of influence is the chief weapon in the world.



### **WEST TOWER, DUNFERMLINE ABBEY**

There is nothing, however, in this history more charming than the description of the relations between the royal pair. King Malcolm had probably known few graces in life except those, a step or two in advance of his own, which were to be found in Northumberland in the house of Earl Siward; and after the long practical struggle of his reign between the Scots and Celts, who had already so far settled down together as to constitute something which could be called a kingdom, he had no doubt fallen even from that higher plane of civilisation. Such rude state as the presence of a queen even in those primitive days



might have procured had been wanting, and all his faculties were probably absorbed in keeping peace between the unruly chieftains, and fostering perhaps here and there the first rising of a little community of burghers, strong enough by union to defend themselves. Uneasy, there can be little doubt, was often the head which bore the circlet of troubled supremacy among all those half-subdued tribes; and his dwelling in the heart of the "dense forest," amid all the noisy retainers in the hall and jealous nobles in the council chamber, would leave little room for beauty or sweetness of any kind. When the stranger princess suddenly came in like an enchantment, with her lovely looks and "jocund eloquence"—full of smiles and pleasant speech, yet with a dignity which overawed every rude beholder—into these rude and noisy halls, with so many graceful ways and beautiful garments and sparkling jewels, transforming the very chambers with embroidered hangings and all the rare embellishments of a lady's bower, with which no doubt the ship had been provided, and which mediæval princesses, like modern fine ladies, carried about with them—the middle-aged man of war was evidently altogether subdued and enraptured. To see her absorbed in prayer—an exercise which Malcolm had perhaps felt to be the occupation of monks and hermits only—to see her bending over her beautiful book with all its pictures, reading the sacred story there, filled him with awe and a kind of adoration. He could not himself read, which made the wonder all the more; but though incapable of mastering what was within, he loved to handle and turn over the book from which his beautiful wife derived her wisdom, touching it with his rude hands with caressing touches, and kissing the pages she loved. When he found one manuscript

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