

ART. I.—*Wymund*. By T. E. CASSON, B.A., B.Litt.

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THE annals of Furness Abbey are not, perhaps, prolific in dramatic incident; but one episode in its history almost all its chroniclers have united to term "romantic." This is the story of the monk Wymund. Even the staid Beck, when he comes to narrate it, precludes his pages with the remark, "quit we the grave highway of history to wander for a while along the mazy bypaths of romance." Yet the history of Wymund has certainly a strong sub-structure of truth, if indeed its wildest embellishments are not also sober fact.

The longest and most detailed consecutive account of Wymund is given by William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Book I. Chs. xxiii-xxiv.

From Chapter xxiii.

. . . "And so not only by the performance of works of piety, but also by the fruits of a ripe penitence, our new David, king of a barbaric race, himself yet not barbaric, conformed to the kingly pattern of the ancient David. Be it noted also that as David of Israel after his penitence was for his previous sin rightly visited by the divine chastisement in the person of a most flagitious son, so David of Scotland also, though far more mercifully, was chastised by a certain false monk and bishop. This man at a later date I saw oftentimes in our own abbey of Byland, and learned his most insolent acts and his well deserved fate. And certainly these things should not be passed over in silence, that posterity also may learn how He who resists the proud and lends grace to the humble was glorified in that man.

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Chapter xxiv. Of bishop Wimumd and his unepiscopal life, and how he was blinded.

This man was born in a very remote part of England. Though he learned the rudiments of letters, he had no means of supporting himself by teaching; but, having some slight knowledge of the art of writing, he acted as a copyist of manuscripts to some religious men, with a view to relieving his poverty. Then he took the tonsure at Furness Abbey and professed the monastic life; and, obtaining a supply of manuscripts and abundant leisure, and being aided by three excellent qualities, a keen brain, a retentive memory and a ready tongue, he quickly made such progress that high hopes were entertained of him. In process of time he was sent with other brothers to the Isle of Man. By his winning eloquence and his personal appearance (for he was tall and powerfully built), he so pleased the barbarians that they asked him to become their bishop; and their wishes were granted. In a short time he became puffed up by success, and began to aim at great objects. Not content with the dignity of the episcopal office, he aspired to strange and mighty matters, far above himself. His heart was filled with vanity, and his mouth with boasting. He collected some lawless and landless fellows, and at last, scorning the verdict of truth, he gave out that he was the son of the Earl of Moray, that he had been deprived of the heritage of his fathers by the King of Scots, and that he was resolved not only to assert his own rights but to avenge his injuries. He called on these men to share his dangers and his fortune, declaring that the venture was one of some peril and difficulty, but would entail great fame and the highest rewards. Their minds therefore were all inflamed: They bound themselves to him by oath. And he began to bluster fiercely through the adjacent provinces. He became like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord; he despised his bishop's seat, and disdained to be a fisher of men with Peter. Day

by day he was strengthened by the accession of new forces, among whom he towered from the shoulders and upwards, and, like a great leader, inflamed the minds of all. He raided the provinces of Scotland, spreading universal rapine and slaughter. When the king's army was sent against him, he withdrew to the farther glens or escaped to the ocean, and thus eluded all military onslaught. Then, when the army had withdrawn, he broke out again from his secret lairs to lay waste the provinces. When now success crowned all his endeavours, and he was a source of terror to the king in person, a certain bishop, a very simple-minded man, miraculously repelled his attack for the time being. For when Wymund denounced war on him and threatened him with extermination, unless he paid tribute, "May God's will be done," said the prelate; "for never by my example shall any bishop become tributary to another bishop." So he put heart into his flock. And, prevailing by faith alone (for in all else he was far weaker), he met Wymund's headlong onset. To inspire his supporters with courage, he struck the first stroke himself, and, hurling a small axe, smote Wymund on the forehead and, by God's grace, felled him. Encouraged by this triumph, his array rushed bravely on the pirates, slew a great number, and drove off their savage captain in ignominious flight. In after years Wymund was accustomed to tell this tale with hilarity among his boon-companions and to boast that God alone had been able to overcome him by the faith of a simple bishop. I too heard the story from one of his followers, who fled with the rest. Wymund, however, collected his strength again, and spread fire and sword through the islands and provinces of Scotland as before. The king was therefore compelled to come to terms with the freebooter, adopting the cautious plan of dealing prudently with a swollen and crafty enemy, against whom he could not employ force. Accordingly he granted him a certain province along with

the abbey of Furness, and put an end to his aggressions for the time being. Wymund, however, paraded the subdued province in great state like a king, with a powerful army, and pressed hard, and without any mercy, on that very monastery, where he had been a monk. With the consent of the nobles, therefore, the men of the province, hating either his power or his arrogance, set an ambush for him. Choosing a suitable opportunity, when he had sent forward his vast concourse to the guest-house and was following slowly with a meagre bodyguard, they captured him and bound him. They then blinded him in both eyes, because both were evil, and made him an eunuch, not for the kingdom of heaven, but for the peace of the kingdom of Scots. Wymund afterwards came to our abbey of Byland, and there remained for many years in quietude until his death. Yet even then he is reported to have said that, if he had only a sparrow's eye, his enemies would have little cause to make their boast over him."

In this narrative of an eye-witness, it should be noted that it is expressly stated that Wymund was a native of England, not Scotland; that in his claim to the earldom of Moray, he "paid no respect to the verdict of truth"; and that his actions were "most insolent." William of Newburgh plainly regards the monk, to put it bluntly, as a liar, a braggart and a truculent ruffian.

In addition to this narrative of William of Newburgh, we have a reference to Wymund in Matthew Paris, *Historia Major*, 71:

"In the same year (1151) John, a monk of Seez, was made second prelate of the Isle of Man, which is between England and Ireland, but nearer to England; whence also that bishop is subject to the bishop of York. The first bishop there, however, had been Wimund, a monk of Savigny, but on account of his violence he had been deprived of his eyes and driven out."

In the Chronicle of the Isle of Man, a certain Hamond is stated to have been consecrated Bishop of Man by Thurstan, and to have died in 1151.

Drake, in his *Antiquities of York*, states that Olave, king of the Isles, wrote to Thomas, archbishop of York, to confer episcopal orders on the abbot of Furness, whose name he gives as Wynmunde. This statement of Drake is controverted by West (*Antiquities of Furness*, p. 125, 1805 ed.), who points out that Thomas died in 1114, twelve years before Furness Abbey was founded; and there is no name Wynmunde among the Abbots of Furness. The archbishop to whom the letter was addressed was Thurstan. He further adds that Olaf, King of Man, bestowed the election of the Bishops of Man on the monastery of Furness, and that this was confirmed by a Bull of Pope Celestine. This Bull, however, could not have been promulgated till 1195, as it is dated the fourth year of the pontificate.

All authorities admit that Wymund was a monk of Furness, who was elected Bishop of Man, and laid claim to the Earldom of Moray. And, since Rushen Abbey was not founded till 1134, his election to the bishopric must have been subsequent to that date. It is only when the question of Wymund's claim to the Earldom of Moray is mooted, that historians differ. Was Wymund the true son of the Earl of Moray, or was he not? William of Newburgh, we have seen, says he lied. Ailred, in his eulogium upon King David, also gives evidence to that effect. "God sent as a foe against him," he says, "a certain spurious bishop, who lied and said he was the earl of Moray's son"; and again, "the Lord had scourged with the lies of a certain monk that invincible king who had subdued unto himself so many barbarous nations, and had without great trouble triumphed over the men of Moray and the islands." (Ailred, *Eulogium Davidis*). Beck says he "deposited a certain unsavoury ingredient,

called truth, with his mitre in a snug corner of his mansion." Aeneas Mackay (D.N.B. Art. David I) says he was an "impostor," and is followed by Dr. Macbain in his edition of Skene's "Highlanders of Scotland" (1902). Sir Herbert Maxwell terms him a "renegade." On the other hand, W. F. Skene and Richard Howlett who edited William of Newburgh in the "Records Series" think his claim was genuine. Our late President Mr. W. G. Collingwood speaks of him as a "romantic adventurer," perhaps steering a mean course between these extremes.

To understand Wymund's contention, we must consider briefly the history and significance of the Earldom of Moray. Angus, Earl of Moray, whose son Wymund claimed to be, was killed at the battle of Stracathro or Strickathrow in Forfarshire in 1130. He was defeated and slain, not by David I, who was then at the court of Henry I of England, but by Edward, son of Earl Seward, acting in his stead. The Earldom of Moray represented the original Pictish kingdom, which amalgamated with the Scots, to form the Kingdom of Scotland; and was a continual thorn in the side of the Scottish Kings long before David I and for some years after him. Macbeth was Mormaer or Earl of Moray, and slew Duncan and became King. After Macbeth his cousin's son, Lulach, claimed the kingdom for a short time. Lulach's daughter married Earl Ed or Heth, who was the father of the Angus slain at Stracathro. Wymund, therefore, claimed to be Malcolm Mac-Heth, son of Angus Mac-Heth, Earl of Moray; and his claim to the Earldom of Moray would seem to be tantamount to an assertion of right to the throne of Scotland. By this claim he postulated kinship with Macbeth, as indeed he is himself called Macbeth by Buchanan. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that David I was the first king to introduce, in any complete degree, the feudal system into Scotland. This innovation was resented by all who clung to the Gaelic method of

inheritance and tribal usages; and the hostility of the earldom of Moray may be said to mark the lingering opposition of the Pictish race.

The history of Wymund has been told in full by Skene in his "Highlanders of Scotland" (1837) and his "Celtic Scotland" (1886). Wymund was admitted as a monk of Furness Abbey shortly after its foundation in 1127. Newburgh states that he was born in a most obscure part of England and had acted as a scribe to certain monks. In his own profession, as given by Stubbs, he says, "Ego Wymundus sanctae ecclesiae de Schiel," that is, Skye. If this is correct, it is an indication of his connection with the neighbourhood of Moray. Wymund next went, with several brethren from Furness Abbey, to occupy the new monastery of Rushen in the Isle of Man, which Olaf Bitling, King of Man (1113-1153), founded in 1134, making application to the Abbot of Furness for monks to fill it. Shortly afterwards, he was elected by the Manx as their bishop. Olave applied to Thurstan, archbishop of York, to consecrate him; and this he did. Wymund was no sooner consecrated bishop of Man than he gave out that he was Malcolm Mac-Heth, son of Angus, Earl of Moray, who had been killed at Stracathro in 1130, and that he had been deprived of his inheritance by King David of Scotland. He collected a band of landless and lawless men, wasted the provinces of Scotland, and, whenever the royal army was sent against him, withdrew to the forests or the sea, sallying out again when the king's forces had withdrawn. His claim was recognised by Somerled, the regulus of Argyll, who gave him his sister in marriage. (Or, according to Howlett, William of Newburgh, Records Series, his daughter). Wymund next invaded Galloway, and demanded tribute from the bishop, Gilla Aldan of Whithorn. Gilla Aldan, however, refused to admit that one bishop should pay tribute to another, and met and defeated Wymund on the banks of

the Cree. The battlefield is still shewn at Causewayend, where the Wigtownshire railway crosses a stream known as the Bishop's Burn, though it has been held that the name is not derived from Gilla Aldan. (Maxwell, *History of Dumfries and Galloway*, pp. 52-5). King David at length captured Wymund, and confined him in the castle of Marchmont or Roxburgh. (1134, *Malcolmus capitur et in arcta ponitur in turre Rokesburgh custodia.—Chron. Melrose.* Tandem capitur et ab eodem rege David in turre castri de Marchmont arta custodia trucidatur. Fordun *Annalia.* i). Skene asserts that Wymund's clerical character saved his life.

On the death of King David I in 1153, his grandson Malcolm IV succeeded to the throne, and was crowned at Scone. This had no sooner occurred, however, than the new king was assailed from all quarters. The succession of a grandson to his grandfather was unacceptable to the Celtic population as an infringement of the law of tanistic succession; and, in this case, the hostility to Malcolm IV was augmented by the fact that he was a minor. In consequence, Somerled, the regulus of Arregaithel or Argyll, rose in rebellion, along with his nephews, Wymund's sons. (1153, 6th November, *Eo die, apud Scotiam, Sumerled et nepotes sui, scilicet filii Malcolmi, associatis sibi plurimis, insurrexerunt in regem Malcolm; et Scotiam in magna parte perturbantes inquietaverunt.—Chron. S. Crucis.*) The civil war continued for three years; but in 1156, Donald, the eldest son of Wymund, was taken prisoner at Whitherne by Malcolm IV's adherents. He was incarcerated in Roxburgh Castle with his father Wymund. (1156. *Dovenaldus filius Malcolmi apud Witerne captus est et incarceratus a turre de Rokesburc cum patre suo. Chron. Melrose.*) Malcolm IV, however, found it expedient to come to terms with Malcolm Mac-Heth or Wymund; and in 1157 he set him free, and gave him, according to William of Newburgh,

“a certain province.” Skene thinks that this province was the earldom of Ross; but William of Newburgh explicitly states that the Abbey of Furness was situated in it. (Cedens ergo illi quandam provinciam cum monasterio Furnesiensi). The province, therefore, would seem to have been on the border of Cumberland. Wymund was caught in an ambushade by the men of his province, being taken while seeking entertainment, as it is said, at Furness Abbey. He was blinded and mutilated, and afterwards took refuge at Byland Abbey, where he had frequent conversations with William of Newburgh, and where he ended his days.

Wymund, we are informed, had two sons and one daughter. His eldest son Donald fled to Galloway after Wymund's capture; but was himself captured in 1156, and imprisoned with his father in Roxburgh Castle. His other son Kenneth received the support of Somerled, rose in rebellion, was driven into exile in Ireland, and finally defeated and slain on his return to Scotland. Wymund's daughter Gormflaith married Jarl Harald of Orkney, a marriage which brought on him the enmity of William the Lion. (Collingwood, *Scandinavian Britain*, p. 255).

The date assigned by Skene for Wymund's internment in the castle of Roxburgh is 1137. Sir Herbert Maxwell dates his rebellion “somewhere between the years 1141 and 1160.” That the date is 1137 is made clear, however, by a passage in Ailred, where, on the eve of the Battle of the Standard (1138), Robert de Brus is thus made to address King David: “Recollect last year when thou didst entreat the aid of the English in opposing Malcolm, the heir of a father's hate and persecution, how keenly, how promptly, with what alacrity, Walter Espec and many other English nobles met thee at Carlisle; how many ships they prepared, the armaments they equipped them with, the youths they manned them with; how

they struck terror into thy foes till at length they took the traitor Malcolm himself prisoner, and delivered him bound to thee. Thus the fear of us did not only bind his limbs but still more daunted the spirits of the Scots, and suppressed their tendency to revolt by depriving it of all hope of success." (Ailred, *de Bello apud Standardum*).

The claim of Wymund to the earldom of Moray has been supported, with much cogency, by Skene. In his *Highlanders of Scotland* (Part II, ch. vi.), he says:

"Historians have generally considered Wimund to be an impostor; but when, in addition to the improbability of any such imposition having either been conceived or likely to have been attempted with any prospect of success, we reflect, that the circumstances of his assuming the name of Malcolm Macheth proves at least that Angus had children, and if so, that they must of necessity have fled from the wrath of David; that Wimund not only received assistance from the Gaelic chiefs, but even from the earl of Orkney, all of them openly countenancing his pretensions; and that in the Norse sagas he is distinctly styled Malcolm, earl of Moray, without any surmise of his title to that dignity being doubtful or called in question by any one at the time,—we must admit that Wimund's claim may have been well founded."

That Wymund was not the rightful heir to the earldom of Moray has been urged by Robertson in his "*Scotland under her Early Kings*." Robertson argues that Fordun is mistaken when he states that Wymund was the same person as Malcolm mac Heth. Malcolm mac Heth, he contends, was the brother, not the son, of Angus, Earl of Moray. Malcolm mac Heth fought with Earl Angus in 1130; and Ordericus Vitalis, Robertson thinks, is in error when he affirms that the Malcolm of this campaign was a son of Alexander I. To Robertson's arguments Skene replies, however: "It is impossible to deal with authorities

in this fashion, and Mr. Robertson's usual sound judgment seems on this occasion to have deserted him."

Robertson's argument has been supported by Dr. Alexander Macbain in a note which he appends to his edition (1902) of Skene's *Highlanders of Scotland*, Dr. Macbain says: "Much nonsense has been written about Malcolm Mac-Heth, whose life history is complicated by the fact that an impostor, Wymund, Bishop of Man, tried to act his part . . . Earl Ed (or Aed or Eth) was married to King Lulach's daughter, and was thus father of Angus, Earl of Moray, slain in 1130. Malcolm Mac-Heth was another son of Aed, and he continued the war. He married Somerled's sister, and was thus the father of the Mac-Heth nephews whom Somerled supported in 1153. Malcolm Mac-Heth was reconciled to the king in 1157, and made Earl of Ross. The impostor's share in the whole story is not clear."

We are confronted, then, with a complicated problem: (1) Was Wymund, the monk of Furness, Malcolm Mac-Heth, son of Angus Mac-Heth, Earl of Moray? (2) Or was Malcolm Mac-Heth the brother of Angus Mac-Heth, Earl of Moray? (3) Was there no such person as Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Angus Mac-Heth, and were all the actions ascribed to Malcolm Mac-Heth performed by Wymund? (4) Were there two men, Malcolm Mac-Heth and Wymund the monk, each claiming to be Earl of Moray? (5) Did Wymund, monk of Furness, perform *all* the actions ascribed to Malcolm Mac-Heth by the chroniclers, and was he yet an impostor, and *not* the son of Angus, Earl of Angus?

If it be argued that we should accept all that William of Newburgh says with regard to Wymund, and then differentiate him from Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, and confine his actions to the western islands, his campaign against a certain bishop, presumably Gilla Aldan of Whithorn, his elevation by the King of Scotland

to the command of a province where he was captured (it is distinctly asserted by Newburgh that this included Furness Abbey and was therefore not Ross), his loss of his eyes and his death—if we thus limit the sphere of Wymund's action, and deny that he married Somerled's sister, we are still confronted by Ailred's *Eulogium Davidis*. "God sent as a foe against him a certain spurious bishop, who lied and said he was the earl of Moray's son"; and again, "the Lord scourged with the lies of a certain monk that invincible king who had subdued unto himself so many barbarous nations." These passages, which ascribe David I's afflictions to a "spurious bishop," i.e. Wymund, read as if these incidents were the chief insurrection against the king, not the campaigns of Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, who was not a bishop.

Again, Dr. Macbain states that Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, married Somerled's sister and that his children, not Wymund's, were supported by Somerled in his campaign of 1153-1156 against Malcolm IV of Scotland. Dr. Macbain also affirms that in 1157 Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, was reconciled to Malcolm IV and made Earl of Ross. Somerled's two nephews, who took refuge with him in 1153, were Donald and Kenneth. Of these Donald was captured in 1156; but Kenneth fled to Ireland, and, returning later to Scotland, was slain in 1214. If, then, Kenneth's father had been reconciled to Malcolm IV, why should Kenneth remain in Ireland after 1157, an enemy of the King of Scotland? Again, if Wymund, not Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, married Somerled's sister, it is to be remembered that Somerled married Ragnilda, daughter of Olaf Bitling. That is to say, if Olaf Bitling supported the claim of his protégé Wymund to the Earldom of Moray, it is more likely that Wymund married into the family of Somerled than that his rival Malcolm, brother

of Earl Angus, did. Moreover Olaf Bitling himself was the son-in-law of Fergus of Galloway, who took part in the rebellion of Earl Angus of Moray in 1130. We have, then, Olaf Bitling, Somerled and Fergus of Galloway all connected in marriage. Unless, then, Wymund set up his claim to the earldom of Moray in disregard of Olaf Bitling, it seems likely that Olaf and Somerled accepted him into their family circle by marriage.

On the other hand, if the Melrose Chronicle is right in its statement, 1134 *Malcolmus capitur et in arcta ponitur in turre Rokesburch custodia*, then this Malcolm could not have been Wymund, for Wymund only came to Rushen Abbey in 1134. The Melrose Chronicle, in fact, points to Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, slain in 1130. And if this is so, the second entry of the Melrose Chronicle, 1156 *Dovenaldus filius Malcolmi apud Witerne captus est et incarceratus a turre de Rokesburc cum patre suo* must mean that Donald was incarcerated with his father Malcolm Mac-Heth, brother of Earl Angus, not with Wymund. If that is so, Robertson and Macbain are right and Skene is wrong. On the other hand, Ailred gives the date of Malcolm's incarceration as 1137.

It should certainly be borne in mind that William of Newburgh, who knew Wymund personally, says distinctly that he was a liar and an impostor. This might be said to weigh heavily against Wymund. On the other hand, William of Newburgh had no doubt the hostility of a monk to a "pseudo-monk" as he calls him. Indeed, it is curious that Newburgh terms Wymund both "pseudo-monk" and "pseudo-bishop," for he was neither. He was, as far as we know, lawfully admitted to monastic orders and lawfully consecrated bishop. Newburgh must therefore mean, not a *soi-disant* monk or bishop, but one who proved false to his vocation. William of Newburgh was perhaps rather an acid writer; for he terms Geoffrey of Monmouth also a "petulant and impudent liar."

("quam petulanter et quam impudenter fere per omnia mentiatur." Prooemium to History).

If William of Newburgh is impatient of romance, however, that is far from being the case with the writer of this paper. I would, if I could within the bounds of just evidence, gladly have established the claims of the monk of Furness Abbey to the Earldom of Moray, and have pictured him, to the imagination, as wandering in the cloister of Saint Mary's and feeding his mind with the example of his masterful, if ruthless, kinsman Macbeth. But the bias of the evidence, such as it is, and the general attitude of the chroniclers render me unable to accept the contentions of Skene without reservation. The problem, in fact, seems to me ultimately insoluble. For, even if we reject *in toto* the existence or claims of another Malcolm Mac-Heth, we have no evidence to prove that Wymund did not put forward a false claim. We have no birth certificate. We have indeed the assertion of two chroniclers that he lied. We must be content, therefore, to leave the story involved in something of the Celtic twilight. But one thing is plain. There did, in the first half of the twelfth century, reside in the Vale of Deadly Nightshade a man who claimed, whether truly or not, to be the successor of Macbeth, one indeed

" whose thought

Shook so his single state of man, that function
Was smother'd in surmise; and nothing was
But what was not."

And, like his great prototype, he was an actor

" Of vaulting ambition, that o'er leaps itself."