

### III.

#### NOTICES OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE PARISH OF GOVAN.

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At an early period it appears that Govan was the seat of an ecclesiastical establishment; a "Monasterium," as it is termed in the Breviary of Aberdeen. Constantine, King of Cornwall, according to Fordun, having renounced his throne, accompanied St Columba to Scotland in A.D. 565, and preached the doctrines of Christianity to the Scots and Picts. He was put to death by the inhabitants of Cantyre, whom he had laboured to convert, and his remains were deposited in the monastery of Govan, of which he had been the founder, and over which he had presided.

Notwithstanding the obscurity which invests the history of this early religious settlement, leaving it impossible to indicate the successive stages of its progress and decay, in monuments still extant, which recent discoveries have brought to light, there is evidence to show that the monastery of Govan must have occupied an important place among the religious houses of our early history.

The parish of Govan, intersected by the River Clyde, and lying chiefly within the sheriffdom of Lanark, was anciently bounded, on the west by the parish of Renfrew, and north of the river, on the east (not *west*, as stated in "Origines Parochiales") by the water of Kelvin. Stretching eastward from the boundary of the parish of Renfrew, along the south bank of the Clyde, to the distance of  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles, it comprehended the present parish of Gorbals, which was erected into a separate parish in 1771. The division of the parish lying south of the River Clyde formed of old the township and territory of Govan, as did that on the north the township and territory of Partick; and as these were distinct

manors, it is held probable that previous to 1152 they had also formed distinct parishes.

Prior to the year 1147, King David I., with consent of his son Henry, granted Guen "in perpetual alms" to the see of St Kentégern of Glasgow, and soon after the church of Govan, "with all its ecclesiastical rights and pertinents, and with 'the islands between Govan and Perthec, together with that part of Perthec which David the king gave to the church of Glasgow at its dedication; and that other part of Perthec which the same king afterwards gave in pure alms to Bishop John and his successors,'" was erected by Bishop Herbert into a prebend of the cathedral church of Glasgow.

"Under these grants," says the author of Caledonia, "the whole parish of Govan belonged anciently in property and superiority to the bishops of Glasgow" (who had a residence at Perthec previous to 1277), "and was included in the regality of Glasgow," which, according to Hamilton of Wishaw, comprehended, in addition to the parish of Govan, "the parishes of Glasgow, Barony, Calder, and part of Old Monkland.

The church of Govan was dedicated to St Constantine. It had an altar consecrated to the Virgin, and an endowed chaplainry, the revenues of which, at the time of the Reformation, were, 12 bolls of oats, 3 bolls of meal, and 26 shillings in money. In 1560, on the withdrawal of Archbishop Beaton into France, the patronage was assumed by the Crown, and was afterwards (1577) bestowed on the University of Glasgow, in which it is still vested. In the same year commission was granted to Walter Commendator of Blantyre to feu the whole lands within the lordship and regality of Glasgow, which in 1590 occasioned its division among the respective tenants, who became heritable possessors "for payment of their ancient rent be way of few duties."

Towards the beginning of the present century a large portion of the land within the parish of Govan was held by a number of small proprietors of the name of *Rowan*, believed to have been the descendants of the Huguenot refugees, who, emigrating from Rouen, in Normandy, during the persecution, consequent on the revocation of the edict of Nantes, settled in this parish. So numerous, indeed, did these families become, that it was found necessary to distinguish their individual members by a kind of *soubriquet*, as appears from the records of the parish, where such entries may be found, as "John Rowan, son of John Rowan (Long John)," and the like.

At Polmadie, the name of a rivulet on the left bank of the Clyde (said to denote the Wolf's Burn), stood an hospital for the reception of destitute persons of both sexes. It was erected previous to 1249, and was dedicated to St John.

To the "Poor's House of Polmadie" were annexed the church and lands of

Strathblane, and the eastern half of the lands of Little Govan; the former belonging to it before the year 1316, and the latter being granted by Bishop John in 1320. The privileges which pertained to the hospital in the reign of Alexander III. were, in 1317, confirmed by King Robert Bruce. Vestiges of the hospital were traceable at the end of the last century, but these have now totally disappeared.

On the south bank of the Clyde, extending from the site of the old bridge of Glasgow on the west, to a rivulet called the Blind Burn on the east, is a portion of land known by the name of St Ninian's Croft. Here stood the leper hospital, founded in 1350 by Marjory Stewart, grand-daughter of King Robert II., and wife of Duncan Campbell of Lochaw, one of the progenitors of the family of Argyll. A plain, old-fashioned structure, situated close by the brink of the river, between the foot of Muirhead Street and Hospital Street, is understood to have been the lazar-house of St Ninians. In front of the building, the site of which is now occupied by power-loom factories, was placed a statue of the founder; but on the barony of Gorbals being transferred to the city of Glasgow, the ground on which the hospital was situated was feued to a Covenanter, who, possibly, deeming the statue a relic of Popery, proceeded to its removal.

Towards the beginning of the present century, close by the building referred to, large quantities of human bones and fragments of coffins were disinterred, plainly denoting the position of the leper's cemetery.

On the east side of the Main Street of Gorbals (nearly opposite to Malta Street) stood the mansion of Sir George Elphinstone of Blythswood, at one time Provost of Glasgow, and Lord Justice-Clerk of Scotland in the reign of Charles I. This magnificent structure, with its stately courtyard, commodious chambers, elaborately-carved ceilings, projecting turrets, and sculptured shields—having passed from the residence of a judge of the Supreme Court, and of a peer of the realm, to a prison-house for thieves, and latterly to the abode of the poor and wretched—has at length disappeared, with the exception of the chapel formerly attached to it, and in which, it is said, the remains of Elphinstone were deposited.

The chapel was rebuilt by Robert Douglas, Viscount Belhaven, who at the same time erected the square tower adjoining it. On a slab inserted into the front wall of the chapel, in high relief, is the sculptured coat of Douglas, being a man's heart ensigned with an imperial crown, within a double tressure, flowered and counter-flowered. In middle chief; a martlet, between two mullets, supported on the dexter by a naked savage holding a baton erected, and wreathed about the middle, and on the sinister by a lion crowned. Crest, on a

wreath (surmounting a defaced coronet), a Scots thistle. The legend cannot be deciphered.

The lands of Gorbals appear to have been acquired from Archbishop Boyd, by Sir George Elphinstone, in 1607. In four years afterwards Sir George obtained a charter of confirmation from James VI., when the lands were disjoined from the regality of Glasgow, and erected into a separate jurisdiction, called the Barony of Blythswood. On the death of Sir George the barony was acquired by his nephew Viscount Belhaven, by whom it was disposed in 1647 to the city and corporations of Glasgow. Within the ancient manor of Partick, a short distance west of the village, not many years since stood an uninteresting ruin, popularly regarded as a residence of the Archbishops of Glasgow, but which is certainly known to have been built by one of the Brothers Hutchison of Lambhill, who founded an hospital in Glasgow. That the Archbishop of Glasgow had a residence at Partick is sufficiently ascertained; the adjustment of a dispute between the Bishop and his Chapter, conducted at the manor-house of Partick, stands upon record.

Spanning the Kelvin, in the direction of north and south, opposite the centre of the old village, stands the bridge of Partick, now becoming an object of interest to the antiquary. Its arches—four in number, springing from the abutments at the height of a few feet from the surface of the river—each describe a half circle to the point where they merge into their opposite piers, which are supported on either side by three prism-shaped buttresses, reaching to a point on a line with the tops of the arches. Those on the east side of the bridge have been replaced by others of a more substantial form, to guard the structure from the effects of the periodical flooding of the river. At one end of the bridge is a cottage of hewn stone of the form of the letter T, probably the residence of the person who collected the pontage. Each of the gables is surmounted by the crow-steps, the prevailing fashion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Of this description are most of the cottages of the old villages of Govan and Partick, many of them bearing dates varying from 1590 to 1730. The Bridge, according to Crawford, in his "History of Renfrewshire," was built in 1577 (a great part of it, he says), by the famous Captain Crawford of Jordanhill (sixth son of Laurence Crawford of Kilbirnie), when he held the office of Provost of Glasgow. The arms of Captain Crawford being placed on it, as also his name, and the following inscription, viz. :—

" He that by labour does any honestie,  
The labour goes, the honour hydes with thee ;  
He that by treason does onie vice also,  
The shame remains, the pleasure soon agoes."

The arms, defaced and unintelligible, still remain—a quartered shield, ensigned with a *front-faced* helmet, and supported on either side by two grey-hounds, *collared*. The crest, an ermine (?) on a mural coronet.

Midway between the villages of Govan and Crossmyloof stands the Castle of Higgs, one of the ancient seats of the family of Pollock, connected with which there is no particular history. It was built in 1585, as appears from an inscription placed over one of the doors. Opposite the Ferryhouse is a tumulus known by the name of Doomster Hill, on the top of which has been formed a reservoir for an adjoining dyework. A few years ago, in deepening this reservoir, were discovered a few planks of black oak, and some fragments of bones.

An old flat tombstone, formerly standing in a field on the farm of Laigh Craigton, denoting the resting-place of a victim of the plague, and which had hitherto been respected, was lately removed. On the south bank of the river, immediately west of the point where it is joined by the Kelvin, on the opposite side, stood the old parish kirk of Govan, a structure of great antiquity, which was removed in 1762. The churchyard, which, there is reason to believe, had been the site of the dormitory of the early monastery, is retained within a wall, at an elevation of four or five feet above the surface of the adjacent ground. It is skirted by a double row of elms, and occupies in extent about two imperial acres. Various remains have been dug up in it from time to time; among others, fragments of hewn stones, as well as large blocks of whinstone, the latter presenting appearances of having been rounded by the action of waves, and to which mortar was sometimes found adhering. These would seem to indicate the remains of ancient foundations.

Within the parish of Govan, during the last few years, in the course of operations on the River Clyde, have been dug out various objects of archaeological interest. Whole trees of oak (black) from beneath the channel of the river, canoes (of which this Society has had an account), coins and medals; also a stone cross, measuring about two feet either way, having the appearance of age, but without symbol, inscription, or date. (One of the coins referred to—that of Constantius, son of Constantine—is now presented to the Society, see page 200). In 1832, several urns, containing fragments of bones and portions of hair, were found on the property of Gilmorehill. Some years since a number of the roots of fossil trees were discovered on the banks of the Kelvin. One of these is in the Museum of the Andersonian University, Glasgow.