

III.

POETICAL MAXIMS FROM A PAINTED ROOM IN THE OLD HOUSE AT CULROSS, CALLED "THE PALACE," WITH NOTICES OF THE HISTORY OF THE BUILDING AND ITS PROBABLE FOUNDER. BY A. JERVISE, ESQ., CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

Among the many objects of antiquarian interest of which the royal burgh of Culross is possessed, an old three-storey house with dormer windows, which stands near the middle of the town, is well worthy of attention. So far as I am aware, this house has hitherto escaped the notice of antiquarian and topographical writers.

It is still a substantial building, situated within a walled court, and the lower or ground-flat of the house is arched with stone. At some after period a range of building was added to the south-east corner, along the front of which there is a plain stone balcony, reached by a short stair; and by that means the older or main part of the house is now entered.

The apartments are numerous, and at the two different times I visited the place, which was during the summers of 1856 and 1857, the whole were used as lumber rooms; but these seemed to be nothing remarkable either in the construction or decoration of any part of the interior, except an attic room in the east end of the house. That apartment, which is 18 feet broad, and 20 feet long, is lighted from the south by two small windows; and the ceiling, which is bow-shaped, is lined with wood, as is also the ends of the room, and these being divided into *eighteen* distinct panels or compartments, are filled with as many curiously painted pictures, illustrative of morality and virtue, with appropriate and quaint maxims in verse.

These panels are separated from each other merely by a broad black painted belt; and the pictures, which display little artistic skill either in arrangement or execution, had perhaps been copied from old prints. The colouring, now much injured by damp, had always been flat, and the figures are ill drawn; still the inscriptions, which are painted in old English characters, are as beautifully executed as is the lettering upon some of the best stained-glass windows of past or present times.

In consequence of the house having been long neglected, damp is making sad inroads upon it, and ere long, the decorations of this chamber will be amongst the things that were. Indeed, the panelling is already broken in several parts, and the inscriptions being all more or less effaced, I had some difficulty in de-

ciphering those which follow. The Latin text or maxim is painted over the top of the different pictures, and the English couplet along the foot:—

"Constantia comes Victorie."

"He that doth kepe his constant course he winnis,
That wisched porte, where lasting loves beginnis."

"Patientia omnia Vincit."

"With pacience suffer still, and then we sail in fine,
Oure foes subdue, when they with shame sall pine."

"Sol non occidat super iracundiam vestram."

"Win . . . with love, subdueing zour rasche desyrs,
. . . . the saine go downe vpon zour years."

"Men's pleasures fond do promis only joyes,
Bot he that yeldes, at lengthe him selfe destroyes."

"Verbum emissum non est revocabile."

"And he whose tonge before his witt dothe runne,
Oft speikis too soone and greivs when he hes doon."

"Mihî pondera luxus."

"Then sen exces procuris oure spoile and paine,
The meane prefer before immoderate gaine."

" Amor move tormentum."

"When leave to love, or love as reasone will,
For lovers lewde do vainlie languishe still."

"Omnis caro"

"All flesh is grasse, and withereth lyk the haye,
And warneth ws how weill to live, bot not how long to waye.

"Although the world the verteous still despyse,
Yet vp aloft in spyte of them they ryse."

"Soli Deo gloria."

"Man of him self most waeke to good doeth live,
Bot God gives grace, to whome all glorie give."

"Res humane in summo delinant."

"This warneth all on fortunes whele that clime,
To beare in mynd how schort they have there tyme."

" . . . sua conscientia."

" The richteous ar lyk vnto the laurell tree,
The wicked lyk the blasted boughis that be."

" Thair children must with godliness and feare proceede,
To reverence yare parents, and help them if they nede."

This interesting "toun-mansion" of the olden time, although not mentioned in Slezer's short notice of the town of Culross, is, so far as I can judge from the situation and peculiar appearance of the house, represented in his view of that place, a little to the left of the middle of the print. The top stones of the dormer windows are triangular, and one of those of the painted attic room bears the date 1597, with the initials G. B., and the armorial bearings of the ancient family of Bruce, surmounted by the Scotch thistle.

In addition to the portion already noticed as having been added to the south-east corner of the *old* house, there was another and larger house of four storeys, with dormer windows, built to the north-east. This building is separated a few feet from the old house, and contains a large hall upon the second flat, in which, until within these few years, masonic and other convivial meetings were frequently held. The date, 1611, and the initials, S. G. B. (Sir George Bruce), are sculptured upon the top stones of two of the attic windows of this house. Taking those particulars into account, a few suggestions may be offered regarding the founder, and the history of these houses.

It may be mentioned that, in 1575, Colville, commendator of the Abbey of Culross, let the minerals belonging thereto, in the course of that year, to Sir George Bruce, third son of Sir Alexander Bruce of Blairhall; and, as a person called George Bruce, brother of Edward Bruce, Lord Kinloss (Blairhall's second son), is designed a "burgess of Culross," in a charter dated 1598, and resided at Culross until his death in 1625,¹ it is probable the houses in question were both erected by that individual.

Bruce having thus settled at Culross, carried on an extensive business there in coal mining, by which he amassed a large fortune; and being representative to Parliament for the burgh of Culross, and a treator for the Union, he was knighted by King James in 1604. He was subsequently designed "of Carnock," and was immediate ancestor of the Earls of Elgin. "Bruce wrought coal to a great extent, even under the sea, where it was shipped at a moat within sea mark; and when James VI. visited Scotland in 1617, it is said that having expressed a desire to see the collieries, he was conducted through them to the

¹ Douglas' Peerage, i., pp. 514-17.

moat, to the no small terror at finding himself in the midst of the sea, from which he was carried ashore in a pinnace, and sumptuously entertained by Sir George at" (say all writers) "the *Abbey* of Culross." It is further stated, that the room in the Abbey, in which King James is said to have been entertained, was long called "the king's room,"¹ and that he had previously invited those in his suit to accompany him to dinner "at a collier's house."

Although the "collier's house" is said to have been the Abbey by most, indeed, by all writers, a variety of circumstances conspire to throw doubt upon that point, and tend to favour the supposition, that the King had dined either in the house bearing the date of 1597, or in that dated 1611, rather than at the Abbey. Besides the former place having a better claim to the title given to it by the King, it does not appear that the Colvilles relinquished their interest in the Abbey and adjoining lands till some time subsequent to the date of King James' visit; and, although some accounts say that the Abbey-house was built by Lord Kinloss in 1590, there is nothing to prove that either he or his brother George had anything to do with the place until long afterwards. Others say the house was built about 200 years ago. It is certain that the Bruce family was then in possession of the Abbey and lands, &c.; and the style of the architecture of the house, as shown in Slezer's view (and in which it is represented as being in much the same style as it is at present), is quite the manner which prevailed towards the middle of the seventeenth century.

Tradition, to some extent, also favours the notion of the King having dined in one of these old houses; for, in the common language of the locality, the oldest one is called "the Palace," a title which it had perhaps received after the King's visit. The court in which these houses are situated also gets the name of "the Colonel's Close," a fact which I can only account for by supposing that the houses had been at one time the abode of one or other of the Colonels Erskine of Torry and Carnock, who were both great grandchildren of the presumed founder of the dwelling.²

Mr John Stuart added the following notices of a similar character :—

The subject touched upon in Mr Jervise's paper is one of considerable interest; and it might be useful to obtain a collection of the inscriptions on roofs and other parts of our old castles, with the view of illustrating the tastes

¹ Old Stat. Acct., vol. x., p. 145.

² Peerage, i., p. 518. The property was lately purchased by a carrier for a mere trifle.

and habits of thought which were fashionable at different times. There are very numerous examples in Scotland of such inscriptions, which perhaps may be divided into those of a scriptural and moral—a heraldic, a classical, and a quaint or witty character.

The old castle of Earlsball, near Leuchars in Fifeshire (begun in 1546 and finished in 1617), has a hall with a roof covered with paintings, in black and white only, combining a curious mixture of heraldry and the cardinal virtues, and of objects of natural history, with the names of the animals quaintly written below. On the old castle of Rosyth in Fifeshire (a work of the sixteenth century), near the door is the following inscription upon a stone, to which a bell-rope had been fixed:—

In dev tyme dra yes cord ye bel to clink,
Quhas merry voce warns to meat & drink.

Some of our old castles had the beams which supported the roof of the halls covered with scriptural texts—as at Tolquhon in Aberdeenshire, now ruined, and at the castle of Farne in Rutherglen in Lanarkshire. On the beams of the roof of some of the principal rooms of the latter are, or were, several lines in old English characters in the style of precepts—“Fair speech in presence, with good report in absence, and manners even to fellowship, obtains great reverence.” The addition of “written in 1325” (New Stat. Acc., vol. vi., p. 376) must be a late one. Some of the beams of the old castle of Inglismaldie, in Kincardineshire (built during the seventeenth century), were also inscribed with scriptural quotations. Until recently, when the house was put into a state of repair as a residence for the Earl of Kintore, these inscriptions were unknown, but unfortunately they were again covered up.

With those in the north I am more familiar. Thus, on the old Marischal College, part of which was made out of the older monastery of the Greyfriars, was this motto—“Thai haif said, Quhat say thay, Lat thame say.”

On the house of Forglen in Banffshire (now demolished) was the following inscription, probably of the end of the sixteenth century.—

Do veil and dovpt nocht
Althoch thov be spyit;
He is lytil gvid birth
That is nocht envyit.
Tak thov no tent
That everie man tels,
Gyve thov wald leive ondemit
Gang quhair na man dwels.

And below this—

God gyves and has nocht the les.

In the castle of Craigievar, erected in the early part of the seventeenth century, is a hall with a stuccoed roof divided into compartments, filled with medallions of celebrated men, with their names beneath—such as Josua Dux, Alexander Magnus, Hector Troi. On a stone in the window, “Lux mea Christus;” and on a round shield in the staircase, dated 1656, “Doe not vaken sleeping dogs.” Higher up the Don, the old Castle of Glenbucket has the date 1590, and the words—“Nothing on earth remainis bot fame.”

The garden walls of the old castle of Edzell in Forfarshire, erected by Sir David Lindsay about the middle of the sixteenth century, are ornamented with architectural decorations combining the heraldic with the classical and moral; the two latter comprising representations of the heathen deities, the sciences, and the theological and cardinal virtues.

The general tone of the inscriptions on houses in Edinburgh in the sixteenth century was religious. Thus in one in the Lawnmarket—“Blissit be the Lord in his giftis for noo and evir;” and another, “O Lord in the is al my traist.” In the High Street—“Faith in Crist onlie Savit;” and another there—“Quhat ewer me befall I thank the Lord of all, 1586.” And on an ancient doorway, foot of Horse Wynd, Cowgate—“Gif ve deed as ve sould, ve mycht haif as ve vald.”