

V.

TRACES OF THE CULTUS OF ST FERGUS IN SCOTLAND. By J. M. MACKINLAY, M.A., F.S.A. (LOND. & SCOT.).

We cannot be on terms of intimacy with St Fergus as with St. Columba, the former having had no Cumine or Adamnan to supply particulars regarding his daily life. There are, however, some biographical details on record, and it may be interesting to connect these with the traces of his *cultus* in Scotland. For such details we are largely indebted to the lections given in the *Breviarium Aberdonense* under the Saint's festival day—the 17th of November.² If we discount the miraculous element in these lections we find his story verified, as Bishop Forbes indicates, "in almost every point by the dedications of the several churches of his foundation."³

Our saint, who was also known as Fergusianus and Fergustus, is believed by Skene to have belonged to the race² of the Scottish Picts,⁴

¹ *Loc. cit.*

² *Pars Estiv.*, fol. 164.

³ *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, s.v. *Fergus*.

⁴ *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 232 n.

though he was for several years a bishop in Ireland. In the *Martyrology of Donegal*,¹ under 8th September, we find the entry "Fergus Cruithneach," *i.e.* Fergus the Pict, who is evidently our saint, notwithstanding the difference of his day in the Calendar.

The *Aberdeen Breviary* begins its narrative with an allusion to the residence of St Fergus in Ireland, and then states that, having taken with him a few presbyters and clerics ("paucis secum assumptis presbyteris et clericis"), he crossed to the western parts of Scotland and to the confines of Strogeth, where he led with them a solitary life and laid the foundations of three churches. Next he went to Cathania, *i.e.* Caithness, and there devoted himself to the conversion of the barbarous natives. After that he settled for a time in Buchan, at a place called Lungley, where he built a basilica which, the writer of the *Breviary* tells his readers, was still in existence, dedicated in honour of St Fergus.

The remainder of the narrative regarding the saint, as given in the *Breviary*, is thus summarised by Bishop Forbes:—"Then, moved by the Holy Spirit, he came to Glamis, where he consecrated a tabernacle for the God of Jacob, and where, full of years, he presigned the day of his death, and, slightly bowing his head, slept in the Lord. His bones, as time passed, became a blessing to the neighbourhood, and a pious abbot of Scone placed the sacred relics in marble, and carried off his head with all due honour to his monastery, where many miracles were performed." A woman with a tumour on her head was restored to health. At Lungley some sick persons keeping vigil in the church beheld a reverend figure in pontificals preparing to celebrate the divine mysteries, which speedily vanished away. On another occasion his bacul, thrown into the waves, caused a storm to cease."²

The question arises, when did St Fergus flourish? Adam King makes him belong to the late fifth and early sixth century. In his Calendar he has this entry under 17th November: "S. Fergus, Bishop and Confessor in Scotland, patron of Glamis under King Conranus A.D. 505."

¹ Page 239.

² *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 356.

This date is adopted by the Rev. Robert Owen in his *Sanctorale Catholicum*.¹ In the Calendars of Thomas Dempster and David Camerarius we hear more about Conranus and our saint. Dempster has this entry: "November XVII. In Glammes Fergusi pontificis et patroni, qui Conrano regi æquitatis amorem persuasit," and Camerarius this: "18 Die (November). Sanctus Fergusius Episcopus et Confessor. Magno fuit in honore apud Conranum Regem."² Conranus, called by Wyntoun Conrane and Gowran,³ is said by him to have reigned from A.D. 501 to 533 or 534, and to have been a son of Dongard, otherwise Domangart, and a grandson of Fergus, son of Ere. The last-mentioned brought a colony of Scots from the north of Ireland and settled in Southern Argyll in the end of the fifth century. Wyntoun, however, by a mistake in chronology, makes him reign from A.D. 403 to 419 over what is proleptically styled "the realme of Scotland."⁴

There is, however, reason to believe that St Fergus flourished at a considerably later date than the one just mentioned. In A.D. 721 a council was held at Rome under Pope Gregory II., to settle the affairs of the Church, particularly with a view to putting a stop to irregular marriages. Skene remarks: "We find that among the bishops who were present and signed the canons is 'Fergus the Pict, a bishop of Ireland,' who is no doubt our Fergus before he passed over to Pictland in Britain, which appears to have been his native country; and his appearance at the Council of Rome shows that he belonged to the party who had conformed to the Roman Church."⁵ The following, as quoted by Haddan and Stubbs, is the declaration made by Fergus the Bishop at the Council in question: "Fergustus Episcopus Scotiæ Pictus huic constituto a nobis promulgato subscripsi."⁶ Haddan and Stubbs think that Fergus,

¹ Page 451.

² *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, pp. 219, 242.

³ Gabran is another form of the name. For its variants, v. Skene's *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, p. 461.

⁴ *The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* (The Historians of Scotland), vol. i. p. 214.

⁵ *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. pp. 232-3.

⁶ *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. ii. part i. p. 7.

though a bishop, was without a diocese—a very reasonable opinion, considering the number of the districts which he evangelised and their separation from one another.

Let us now glance at the traces of St Fergus to be found at Strogeth and the other localities named in the *Aberdeen Breviary*, as cited above.

1. Strogeth is the place now known as Strageath in Muthill parish in Upper Strathearn. There seems to be no trace in local topography of St Fergus himself; but St Patrick, to whom, as we have seen, he dedicated three churches in the district, is represented by such names as Dalpatrick, *i.e.* St Patrick's field—a farm on the other side of the Earn from Strageath—and Dalpatrick ford in the river. These churches were respectively at Strageath, Blairinroar or Blairinroan, and Struthill, all in Muthill parish. At Blairinroar and Struthill there is, or was, a St Patrick's Well; and, as the late Rev. Dr Rankin tells us, some cot-houses at the former place still go by the name of St Patrick's. The site of the ancient church there cannot now be identified, though its foundations were visible in 1837.¹ Regarding the other two places, Dr Rankin says:—"At Struthill both chapel walls and ancient burial-ground remained till about fifty years ago, when they were shamefully turned—the one into dyke material, and the consecrated soil and remains into top-dressing for corn land. The sacred well was also run off into a drain, and the site marked by a modern cattle trough. The burial-ground at Strageath is still in use, but the corner stones of the old church have been abstracted for use in neighbouring buildings."² During the early years of last century the memory of St Patrick was cherished in the district. Writing in 1837, the author of the article on Muthill in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*³ remarks: "The inhabitants, until very lately, held his memory in so high veneration that on his day neither the clap of the mill was heard, nor the plough seen to move in the furrow."

¹ *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Perth, p. 313).

² *Chronicles of Strathearn*, pp. 39, 40.

³ Perth, p. 313.

2. *Cathania or Caithness*.—The *Breviary* supplies no information of a topographical kind regarding St Fergus's work among the heathen inhabitants of Caithness; but two places, viz., Halkirk and Wick, seem of old to have been associated with his *cultus*. The Church of Halkirk, according to Cosmo Innes, was originally the chapel belonging to the bishop's residence there, and was, he thinks, dedicated either to St Catherine or St Fergus.¹ The writer of the article on Halkirk parish in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*² is more definite. According to him, the parish was anciently known as St Fergus. Wick at any rate was connected with our saint. Its pre-Reformation church, which is believed to have stood near the eastern end of the town, at a place called Mount Halie, was dedicated to him. A stone image of St Fergus stood in the burgh till 1613, but was then destroyed by the Rev. Dr Richard Merchiston of Bower, who was noted for his zeal in abolishing Popish survivals.³

Another stone image at Wick was believed in modern times to represent St Fergus. It is thus referred to in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*:⁴ "An old image of St Fergus, habited in a monkish dress and standing on some sort of animal, which formerly lay in the church, has now been placed in the jail. Its features are altogether effaced." Dr Joseph Anderson gives quite a different explanation of the effigy. He says:—"The headless image, said to be that of St Fergus, which was long preserved in the courtyard of the county jail at Wick, is a sepulchral effigy of sandstone, many centuries later than the time of St Fergus, and probably lay over the tomb of some local magnate in the old Church of Wick." Dr Anderson adds: "I saw it in August last in the workshop of a local sculptor having a head fitted to it." A well at

¹ *O.P.S.*, vol. ii. p. 758.

² Caithness, p. 68.

³ It is said that the inhabitants were so enraged at this that they drowned the minister in the river of Wick when he was returning home. The report was spread abroad that St Fergus himself did the drowning, having been seen astride of the minister and holding him down in the water.—Calder's *History of Caithness*, pp. 186-7.

⁴ Caithness, p. 142.

Wick was named after our saint ; and a local fair, held on or about the 24th of November, is still known as Fergusmas.¹

3. *Lungley in Buchan*.—Our saint, as stated in the *Breviary*, settled for a time at Lungley, where he built a basilica. This name appears also as Langley and Longley, but has been superseded since 1616 by St Fergus, applied to a village and coast parish of north-east Aberdeenshire.² Its earlier name was Inverugie, *i.e.* the confluence of the Ugie, which flows into the sea between this parish and that of Peterhead. The following topographical facts are given by the Rev. Dr Pratt :—“Five miles from Peterhead we come upon the *New Village of St Fergus*, and at about a quarter of a mile to the left on an eminence the *Kirk* and the *Old Village* are seen peering out among clumps of trees. The church, previous to 1616, stood in the old churchyard near the sea-shore, still used as the burial-ground of the parish, and about two miles eastward from the present edifice.” Dr Pratt adds :—“The old churchyard is a retired and solitary spot in the midst of ‘those pleasant and extensive downs called the Links of St Fergus.’ There are still to be seen fragments of the font and some pieces of rude sculpture which had belonged to the old church. Part of the south wall to the height of several feet still remains, but completely covered outside by the accumulated soil. The area of the church, which is still traceable, shows it to have been a long narrow building.”³ This church was evidently the one mentioned in the *Aberdeen Breviary* as still in existence, *i.e.* in the early years of the sixteenth century,—the successor, it is to be presumed, of our saint’s basilica, not the basilica itself, as stated in the *Breviary*.

¹ *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Caithness, p. 176).

² The Rev. Dr Pratt remarks :—“The parish of St Fergus, though locally situated in the county of Aberdeen, is, by a feudal peculiarity, reckoned to be in Banffshire, having, it is said, been annexed at a very early period to the latter county by an Act of the Legislature, obtained through the influence of the Cheynes, the hereditary sheriffs of Banff, who were naturally desirous to have their family domains within their own jurisdiction.”—*Buchan*, pp. 163-4.

³ *Buchan*, pp. 162-3. The Church of Inverugie was bestowed on Arbroath Abbey by Ralph de Neyon early in the thirteenth century ; *v. Trans. Buchan Field Club*, vol. i. p. 90.

4. *Glamis*.—The Forfarshire parish of Glamis seems to have been specially identified with St Fergus. In the *Aberdeen Breviary* the 17th November is given as the festival of St Fergusian, bishop and confessor—the distinguished patron of Glamis (“Sancti Fergusiani Epyscopi et confessoris patroni insignis de Glamis”); while in the *Martyrology of Aberdeen*, under date “XVIJ K^l Decembris,” we read: “On the same day in Scotland at Glamis, St Fergus, the bishop, flourishes” (“Eodem die in Scotia apud Glamis floret Fergusius episcopus Sanctus”).¹ The church dedicated by Bishop David de Bernham in 1242 was, according to Jervise,² cruciform in shape. Its south transept—the only portion remaining—now forms the burial aisle of the Earls of Strathmore. In the parish is a cave associated with St Fergus, and a spring bears his name. Regarding the latter, Mr A. J. Warden remarks: “A fine spring, rising from a rock a little below the church in the lower part of the den of Glamis, is still known as St Fergus’s Well. The fountain is within the grounds of Glamis Castle, and the Earl of Strathmore has formed a path leading to it, and provided the means for partaking of the cooling and refreshing water of the perennial spring.”³

Bishop Forbes mentions that the statement in the *Aberdeen Breviary* that an Abbot of Scone carried off St Fergus’s head to his monastery is confirmed by an entry in the *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer* regarding a silver case for it ordered by James IV.⁴ This entry, however, I have failed to find in the *Accounts* in question; but the following entry occurs under date 11th October 1504, “Item to the Kingis offerand to Sanct Fergus hede in Scone xiiijs.” Two years later, on the 27th September, the King made an additional offering of eighteen shillings.⁵ The Abbots of Scone were, *ex officio*, prebendaries of the Cathedral of Caithness. Was it some tradition of St Fergus’s work in

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 271.

² *Antiquities of Glamis*, p. 5, and *Epitaphs*, vol. i. p. 180.

³ *Angus*, vol. iii. pp. 306–307.

⁴ *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 337.

⁵ *Accounts*, vol. ii. p. 265; vol. iii. p. 283.

the North that induced this particular Abbot to treat with such respect the relics of our saint?

In an Inventory of books and other valuables belonging to the Cathedral Church of Aberdeen in 1464, the following occurs:—"Item brachium argenteum Sancti Fergusii cum ossibus ejusdem,"¹ *i.e.* the silver arm of St Fergus with the bones of the same. This was a reliquary in the form of an arm, and probably resembled one in the Church of Tongres in Belgium, of date *circa* 1300, representing the arm and hand of St Lawrence from the elbow upwards.² From a visitation of the Treasury of Aberdeen Cathedral in 1518 we learn that the reliquary containing the arm-bones of St Fergus was adorned with precious stones. In an Inventory of Cathedral valuables in the year 1549 the following entry occurs in what is certainly not Ciceronian Latin:—"Brachium diui Fergusiani argento co-opertum absque hostiolo cum aliquibus lapidibus sed quales ignoratur ponderis octodecim vnciarum cum dimediata creditur deuotione populi aut rectoris de Skeyne aut Dyise donatum."³ This entry may be thus translated:—"The arm of St Fergus covered with silver without the hostiolum (whatever that was), with certain stones, but of what kind is not known, of weight eighteen ounces and a half. It is believed to have been given by the devotion of the people or of the rector of Skene or of Dyce." That the rector of Dyce should have been interested in the *cultus* of our saint is not surprising; for the latter was patron of its church. Indeed, the parish of Dyce was formerly known as the Chapel of St Fergus, near Moss-Feetach.⁴

In the estuary of the South Esk, near Montrose, is Inchbrayoch, where once stood the Church of St Brioc. Dependent on the church were two chapels, said, according to Jervise, to have been dedicated to St Mary

¹ *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, vol. ii. p. 160.

² This reliquary is described and figured by Reusens in his *Éléments d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, vol. ii. p. 373. St Columba's hand was kept in a gold and silver reliquary. *Vide* Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. iii. p. 404.

³ *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, vol. ii. p. 182.

⁴ *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. xiii. p. 81.

and St Fergus.¹ "There was also S. Fergus' well, and in the old maps S. Fergus marked the burial-place of the Scotts of Ulishaven."²

The Inverness-shire parish of Dalarassie, now united to Moy, is thought by Shaw³ to be an altered form of Dale Fergusie, which he interprets as Fergus's Valley, though it ought rather to be Fergus's field, from Gaelic *Dail*, a field or portion of land. Jervise is inclined to accept Shaw's etymology, and to hold that St Fergus was the patron of the pre-Reformation church. In Kirkmichael parish, Banffshire, is Knockfergan, *i.e.* the hill of St Fergus, from Gaelic *Cnoc*, a hill. On its south-east side is Fergan Well, formerly much frequented for its supposed healing virtues. An annual fair, known as the Well Market, used to be held beside the spring. On one occasion a fight took place about a cheese, and in consequence the market was transferred to the neighbouring village of Tomintoul, where it continues to be held. The foundations of the booths for the sale of goods at the fair were visible till quite lately in the neighbourhood of the spring. According to a curious tradition, Fergan Well was once in Italy, but was miraculously transferred to its present site in the Highlands of Scotland. Does not this tradition point in a confused way to St Fergus's visit to Rome when he attended the Council there in 721? There is a Loch Fergus in Ayrshire, and there was another, now drained, in Kirkeudbrightshire; but probably neither derived its name from our saint. The Kirkeudbrightshire example, according to Sir Herbert Maxwell,⁴ recalls Fergus, Lord of Galloway in the twelfth century, who had a castle on an island in the lake.

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 459.

² *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, s.v. *Fergus*.

³ *Province of Moray*, p. 97.

⁴ *Studies in Galloway Topography*, p. 241.