

III.

THE OCHILTREE FLAG. BY THE REV. G. AIRD SIM, F.S.A. SCOT.

In 1930 an interesting addition to the seventeenth-century Scottish flags in the Museum of this Society was presented by the late Rev. John Warrick, Minister of the Crichton Memorial Church, Cumnock.

This is a flag bearing the name of the parish of Ochiltree, which adjoins Cumnock. It has also on it various inscriptions and designs, and the date 1689.

It appears to be made of good, well-woven linen, and measures 6 feet in breadth and 5 feet 4 inches in height. Considering its age and the vicissitudes through which it has passed, it is in a fair state of preservation.

On the dexter side, at the top corner, is the Scottish national ensign, a white St Andrew's cross on a blue field. To the right of this is depicted an open book with red sides. The book bears on its two open pages the inscription DEVS EST SEMPER IDEM, one-half of each word on the one page, and the second half of each word on the other page.

On the sinister side of the flag is painted the monogram W.R., with a crown between the first and second letter, and the national thistle-emblem below.

Immediately under the blue field of the St Andrew's cross in the upper left-hand corner is the word OVCHILTRIE.

The lower part of the flag bears the inscription in two lines :

FOR · GOD · THE · COVENANTED · PRESBYTERIAN ·
REFORMATION · CROVN · AND · COUNTRIE · 1689.

The provenance of this flag is interesting. The district of its origin is in that part of Scotland where those who adhered most earnestly to the National Covenant of 1638 were a strong element in the population. Various parishes in that area sent contingents of men to fight on the Covenanting side, and these appear to have had a local banner of their own. Some of the Covenanters' flags were captured, and burned by the common hangman at Edinburgh, after the Battle of Bothwell Brig. But some of their local flags are still in existence, such as those of the parishes of East Monkland, Fenwick, Avendale, and Cumnock. The name of the parish is on each of these flags. This is the case also with the Ochiltree flag. It is, however, not quite in the same category as these. It does not belong to the actual period of the Covenanting struggle, but to the time of the Revolution, as may be seen from the crown with the royal initials W.R., and the date 1689, on the flag.

Part of its inscription—"For . . . the Covenanted Presbyterian Reformation"—shows, however, that the men who were to march under it were Covenanters, and the story of this is connected with the Barony of Ochiltree in 1689. It is recorded by an affectionate chronicler of the parish of Ochiltree, the late Alexander Murdoch, B.A., F.E.I.S., a native of the place, in his book, *Ochiltree: Its History and Reminiscences* (Paisley, Alexander Gardner, 1918).

In 1667 the Barony of Ochiltree was held by Sir John Cochrane, a son of the Earl of Dundonald. Sir John was an anti-Royalist and took part in an attempt to put the Duke of Monmouth on the throne. On account of this he had to flee to Holland. There he remained till 1685 when he joined the Marquis of Argyll's ill-fated expedition into Scotland against James VII. He does not appear to have distinguished himself in that rebellion, and on its collapse he fled to his own county of Ayrshire. There he was arrested, tried at Edinburgh, and condemned to death. But, according to the romantic story, the warrant for his execution was intercepted by his brave young daughter, Grizel Cochrane, who, disguised as a man, "held up" the messenger, seized his bag, and carried off the warrant, thus gaining time for intercessions to be made to the King on her father's behalf. At any rate, Sir John Cochrane was not put to death, but only suffered the forfeiture of his estate of Ochiltree. This, however, was restored to his son, William Cochrane, in 1686, and it may be supposed that Sir John lived quietly there till the Revolution, unmolested by the ruling powers, perhaps because of his family connection with Graham of Claverhouse, who was the husband of Sir John's niece, Jean Cochrane.

But changes were in the air, and the old laird of Ochiltree, a fisher in troubled waters, was watching for events. They came. In November 1688 Prince William of Orange landed in England, was joined by his supporters there, and received the throne ignobly deserted by his uncle, James VII. In April of the following year William and Mary accepted the "Claim of Right," presented to them by a Convention of the Scottish Estates and including a Presbyterian settlement of the Church of Scotland.

It was in the name of the Estates of Scotland that a proclamation was issued on 30th March 1689, calling together "the Militia on this side Tay and the Fencible Men in some Shires." The sympathies of Ayrshire were well known, and among those who received the summons appears the name of William Cochrane of Ochiltree.

According to the local story, however, it was his father, Sir John, who took the lead, had a banner made for the men of Ochiltree, and gathered them under its significant devices in the name of God, the

Covenant, and King William. When the troubles were over, and the fencible men disbanded, the flag was brought back to Ochiltree House, where it remained until it was removed or stolen by a servant, who gave it to a friend in the village. On one occasion, says the tradition, it was rescued just as it was on the point of being used as a winding-sheet. It next passed into the hands of Patrick Simson, schoolmaster of Ochiltree, who in 1818 placed it in the care of the superior of the village, Alexander Boswell of Auchinleck. It was borrowed by some political enthusiasts for the purpose of being carried in a procession in honour of the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832. It was not returned to the Boswells, and was lost to public sight and knowledge for a hundred years. Probably someone came across it in a private house, rescued it from neglect and destruction, and finally gave, or bequeathed, it to Mr Warrick, believing that a minister, who was himself a well-known antiquarian and full of Covenanting lore, would be its best custodian.

In his old age Mr Warrick gave this interesting relic to be added to the collection of similar flags in its present most appropriate resting-place, the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.