

**BELL THE CAT**  
**OR**  
**WHO DESTROYED THE SCOTTISH ABBEYS?**  
**DECLARATION OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE**

Extracted from Chapter IV of Bell The Cat  
By John Jamieson p. 31



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## **DECLARATION OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE**

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We did not choose to interrupt the narrative, and therefore did not give the Declaration of Scottish Independence. We give a portion of it now, not only because it is a document of great historic interest, but it is also an important part of our evidence, showing as it does, who were the responsible parties for the destruction of the Abbeys. It is a document written by earnest Catholics to their "most holy father," the people and its authors clearly point to English Catholics as the wreckers. "The insults which this prince, Edward I., has heaped upon us," Tytler reads in the Declaration, "the slaughters and devastations which he has committed; his imprisonment of prelates, his burning of monasteries, his spoliation and murder of priests, and the other enormities of which he has been guilty, can be rightly described, or even conceived, by none but eye-witnesses."

It was Edward II. who was the more immediate cause of the famous Declaration of Scottish Independence being sent by the Scots Parliament to Pope John XXII. This was one of the very few celebrated Roman Pontiffs, for it is solemnly recorded that he "ordered the bells to be tolled every evening for the Angelus." It must come as a shock of surprise in many to be told that this musical pope intrigued for years against the Northern Kingdom, and was most unfriendly towards Scotland, as was his predecessor, Clement V., whose legate in England, in February, 1306-7, at Carlisle, excommunicated Bruce and his adherents by book, bell, and candle. Pope John strongly supported the pretensions of the English king to the Scottish throne, and in doing so must be held as acquiescing in the wrecking of the churches and convents throughout the country, for it is impossible to suppose that he did not know the barbarous methods adopted by the Southern monarch in his mad efforts to subdue the Scots. Vanquished on the field of battle, Edward turned to his friend the pope, and was so successful in his efforts that the hidden but formidable power of Rome was thrown into the scales against Scotland, and of course, against King Robert Bruce.

It would appear, notwithstanding that the Scottish monarchs were great church builders, and liberally endowed numerous abbeys out of the national property, that neither William nor the three Alexander's, nor Bruce himself were recognised or "anointed" as kings of Scotland by the pope and his predecessors. The influence of England was all-powerful at the Papal Court; nevertheless King Robert sent ambassadors to Rome to enlighten the pontiff as to the real state of matters, and they appear to have convinced him of the invalidity of Edward's claim to be recognised as lord paramount in Scotland. But the pope who set the bells a-tolling every evening for the Angelus was a wordily wise man, and desirous to be on the winning side, he soon made it clear to the Scots that he regarded England as the stronger kingdom of the two. So he continued to back up Edward, and threaten Bruce.

The king was thus forced to fight not only England, but Rome also, and he did so with intrepidity, wisdom, and success. An emissary of the pope was refused admission to the kingdom, on the ground that his mission was to England, and he was told that England did not include Scotland. The priests fumed and threatened, but it

was of no use; into the kingdom he was not permitted to enter. Then Pope John sent two nuncios to Scotland, and they landed at Aberbrothock, in 1317. They brought with them an edict, commanding tht peace would be maintained between the warring powers for the space of two years, accompanied with the usual threat of excommunication to all and sundry were his orders not obeyed. The legates also brought letters addressed to "Robert Brus, governing in Scotland;" but the king refused to take them. He made his "sarcastical and resolute answer with a mild and pleasant countenance," says Lord Hailes. "There are many named Robert Bruce who shares in the government of Scotland," he informed the Italians. "Those letters may be for some of them. They are not addressed to me, the King of Scotland. That is my title; under no other do I receive letters." The nuncios first tried apologies, and these failing to influence the king, they attempted to intimidate him by threats. The letters were returned unopened, and a respectful message was forwarded to the pontiff that no attention could be paid either to the enjoined truce or to the threat of excommunication until he addressed himself directly and correctly to the King of Scotland. The pope confessed that the message astounded him. Needless, he again attempted, in the interest of England, to coerce the Bruce. Three years later he sent another legate, commanding tht Edward II. of England was to be recognised as lord paramount of Scotland, and if he was not, he again threatened excommunication against Bruce and the whole nation! He also summoned "the noble man, Robert de Brus, governing in the kingdom of Scotland" (*nobilem virum; Robertum de Brus, regnum Scotiae guber-nantem*), to appear with the prelates of Scotland at the Papal Court at Avignon. The king paid not heed to either the pope's threat or summons. Instead, he summoned the Estates of Scotland to meet at Aberbrothock on the 6th day of April 1320.

### KING ROBERT THE BRUCE



It was during the sitting of Parliament under the presidency of the king himself, that the DECLARATION OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE was drawn up, and, with a letter, sent to Pope John. The effect of the spirited document was instantaneous, John Hill Burton describing the result as "astounding." To receive such a manuscript, written in better Latin than either he or his nuncios could show were it to save their lives, and from a "semi-barbarous" people, rather upset the wily Cohors pope. But he had the good sense to accept the inevitable, on the principle that what cannot be cured must be endured. His frequent and vexatious fulminations against King Robert and his people immediately ceased, and instead he set to work to convert the King of England to his new views ! Writing to Edward, he said; - "Our earnest desires are for reconciliation and peace [?], and you well know that our bull, issued for attaining these objects, will never be received in Scotland, if we address it to Robert de Brus under any other appellation but that of King." Edward was enraged furious; he sent an angry letter to the pope, denouncing and condemning his bestowal of the title of king upon Robert Bruce.

This famous Declaration is, for heroic patriotism and style, one of the most remarkable State papers of mediæval times. Though a lay document, the Declaration is believed to be the work of Bernard de Linton, Abbot of Arbroath, and Chancellor of Scotland. He was present at the Battle of Bannockburn, and he and King Robert were close friends. "The dignity and terseness of the original Latin, the stately reverence and firm resolution expressed in the document, with the curious care of the literary artist, and the watchful restraint of the far-seeing man of affairs, all betray the hand of the scholar, poet, and statesman who sat at King Robert's right hand." No translation, "continues our anonymous author, "can convey fully the character of this famous Declaration; but the spirit of it is presented with admirable faithfulness in a free rendering first published at the time of the Revolution, in 1688." From this translation the following excerpt is taken. It is the essential part of the Declaration, that which follows on the sort preamble about the antiquity of Scotland, in which, in opening their letter the Scots, after presenting the name of the barons present, disposed of the fabulous genealogies recited by the English as carrying back the subjection of Scotland to the Trojan line of succession! There is a bit of extravagance in the first clause of the first sentence which follows but let it pass: -

"Upon the weighty consideration of these things, our most holy fathers, your predecessors, did with many great and singular favours and privileges fence and secure this kingdom and people as being the peculiar charge and care of the brother of St. Peter; so that our nation hath hitherto lived in freedom and quietness under their protection, till the magnificent King Edward, father to the present King of England, did, under the colour of friendship and alliance, or confederacies, with innumerable oppressions, infest us, who minded no fraud or deceit, at a time when we were without a king or head, and when the people were unacquainted with warres and invasions. It is impossible for any whose own experience hath not informed him, to describe, or fully to understand the injuries, blood, and violence, the depredations and fire, the imprisonments of prelates, the burning, slaughter, and robberies committed upon holy persons and religious houses, and a vast number of other barbarities, which that king execute on this people without sparing of any sex or age, religion, or order of men whatsoever.



## DECLARATION OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE



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"But at length it pleased God, who only can heal after wounds, to restore us to libertie from these innumerable calamities, by our most serene Prince and Lord Robert, who, for the delivering of his people and his own rightful inheritance from the enemies' hand, did, like another Joshua or Maccabeus, most cheerfully undergo all maner of toyle, fatigue, hardship, and hazard. The divine Providence, the right of succession by the laws and customs of the kingdom (which we will defend till death), and the due and lawful consent and assent of all the people, made him our king and prince. To him we are obliged and resolved to adhere in all things, both on account of his right and his own merit, as being the person who hath restored the people's safety, to defence of their liberties.

But after all, if this prince shall leave these principles he hath so nobly pursued, and consent that we or our kingdom be subjected to the king or people of England, we will immediately endeavour to expel him as our enemy, and as the subverter both of his own and our rights, and will make another king who will defend our liberties; for so along as there shall but one hundred of us remain alive, we will never give consent to subject ourselves to the dominion of the English. For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honour, but it is liberty alone that we fight and contend for, which no honest man will lose but with his life.

"For these reasons, most reverend father and lord, we do, with most earnest prayers, from our bended knees and hearts, beg and entreat your Holyness that you may be pleased, with a sincere and cordial piety, to consider that with Him whose vicar on earth you are there is no respect nor distinction of Jew or Greek, Scots nor English and that with a tender and fatherly eye you may look upon the calamities and straits

brought upon us and the Church of God by the English; and that you may admonish and exhort the King of England (who may well rest satisfied with his own possessions, since the kingdom of old used to be sufficient for seven or more kings), to suffer us to live at peace in that narrow spot of Scotland, beyond which we have no habitation, since we desire nothing but our own, and we, on our part, as far as we are able with respect to our own condition, shall effectually agree to him in everything that may procure our quiet.

"It is your concernment, most holy father, to interpose in this, when you see how far the violence and barbarities of the pagans is let loose to rage against Christendom for punishing of the sins of the Christians, and how much they daily encroach upon the Christian territories. And it is our interest to notice, that there be no ground given for reflecting on your memory, if you should suffer any part of the Church to come under a scandal or eclipse (which we pray God may prevent) during your times.

"Let it therefore please your Holyness to exhort the Christian princes not to make the warres between them and their neighbours a pretext for not going to the relief of the Holy Land since that is not the true cause of the impediment; the truer ground of it is that they have a much nearer prospect of advantage, and far less opposition, in the subduing of their weaker neighbours. And God (who is ignorant of nothing) knows with how much cheerfulness both our king and we would go thither, if the King of England would leave us in peace, and we do hereby testify and declare it to the Vicar of Christ, and to all Christendom.

"But if your Holyness shall be too credulous, of the English misrepresentations, and not give firm credit to what we have said, nor desist to favour the English to our destruction, we must believe that the Most High will lay to your charge all the blood, loss of souls, and other calamities that shall follow on either hand betwixt us and them.

"Your Holyness, in granting our just desires, will oblige us in every case, where our duty shall require it, to endeavour your satisfaction, as becomes the obedient sons of the Vicar of Christ.

"We commit the defence of our cause to Him who is the Sovereign King and Judge; we cast the burden of our cares upon Him, and hope for such an issue as may give strength and courage to us, and bring our enemies to nothing.

"The most high God long preserve your Serenity and Holyness to His Holy Church."

The names of the barons attached to the document are: - Duncan, Earl of Fife; Randolph, Earl of Moray; Patrick de Dunbar, Earl of March; Malice, Earl of Strathearn; Malcolm, Earl of Lennox; William, Earl of Ross; Magnus, Earl of Caithness and Orkney; William, Earl of Sutherland; Walter, the Steward of Scotland; William de Soulis, Butler of Scotland; James Lord of Douglas; Roger de Mowbray; David, Lord of Brechin; David de Graham; Ingleram d'Umfraville; John of Menteith, Custos of the Comitatus of Menteith; Alexander Fraser; Gilbert de Hay, Constable of Scotland; Robert de Keith, Marishal of Scotland; Henry de St. Clair, John de Graham, David de Lyndesay, William Oliphant, Patrick de Graham, John de Fendon, William de Abernethy, David de Wemyss, William de Montfitchet, Fergus de Ardrossan, Eustace de Maxwell, William de Ramsay, William de Monte Alto, Allan de Murray, Donald Campbell, John Cambroun, Reginald Cheyne, Alexander de Seton, Andrew de Lascelyne, Alexander de Straton.

## KING ROBERT THE BRUCE



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It will be observed that the Declaration attributes to the pope much of Scotland's miseries and long-continued sufferings, because of his favouring the English, and points to grave responsibilities in the future should he continue to favour the pretensions of Edward. The document corroborates what we have ventured to say in the text. We also remarked that Pope John was a worldly-wise man. He was all that, and more. The son of a decent French cobbler, from this humble position he gradually raised himself until he got perched on one of the highest pinnacles of earthly glory. His leading weakness was his "unconscientious venality," and had Bruce only sent a bag of gold instead of a letter his embassies would have been more successful. When he died, he left the enormous sum of three hundred millions of livres in his coffers. Some years before his death he issued a bull, in which he authorised the anointing of the king. This was all that was wanting, in that age, satisfy Western Europe that the Scottish crown was not tributary but independent.

The pope's edict came too late for the Bruce, but his successors on the throne, at their coronation, had the benefit of "unction" marred, however, by having to take an oath, required by the bull, to root out all heresies from their dominions. Pope John was condemned as a heretic by Benedict XII., and by Adrian VI. And Maimbourg, in his book, entitled *Prerogatives of the Church of Rome*, chap. xvi., clearly demonstrates that he was a genuine heretic. And yet he continued pope for seventeen years, from 1316 to 1334. the Catholics tell some wonderful stories about this pope and the Virgin Mary. They are to be found in London edition, A.D. 1868. The book bears the approval of both the late cardinals Wiseman and Manning, and five, if not six, popes have also endorsed them, so that the tales must be true. Certain Catholics may deny their truth, but we fear they are in a fair way of being regarded as heretics. We may give one of the stories. The teaching of the Papal Church concerning the scapular

dates from the fourteen century, and it arose in this way. An apparition of the Virgin to Pope John was reported, and it was said tht the ghost intimated to him tht if any person, who from tht time wore he scapular went to purgatory, "she herself, would descend and free them on the Saturday following heir death." .....

## POPE JOHN 1316-1334



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## DUNFERMLINE

This abbey maybe said to haves been begun with the erection of the Old Abbey Church, founded by Malcolm Canmore abut 1071. We need not enter into details, but it may be stated tht the church and monastic buildings were again and again extended and enlarged under successive monarchs, until, under Alexander III.,,, the abbey became one of the largest in Scotland. Of such dimensions was this great convent of the Benedictines, that it is said three kings with their retinues could have been lodged within its strong walls without in any way interfering with the regular routine of the institution. The Scottish Parliament frequently held its sittings within the great hall. This magnificent abbey reached the height of its splendour and greatness under Alexander. It was destroyed by Edward I. He too up his quarters in the monastery in November, 1303, and remained there during the winter. He and his nobles had enjoyed the hospitality of the monks for three months, and he rewarded them when he left in February by setting fire to their house, and also the palace. He spared the Abbey Church, both East and West, but all else pertaining to the convent was wrecked.



Having command of great wealth, the monks set to the work of restoration. In this they were helped by King Robert Bruce, who did much to restore the monastery, and although it never attained to its former magnificence, it continued to be a great institution. Following the ecclesiastical policy of David, Dunfermline had usurped the place of Iona in the affections of the king and the nobility, and became the depository of the dust of the noble departed, to whom splendid monuments had been set up in the interior. Bruce himself lay there, and "the Shrine of St. Margaret" became ever more and more enriched, till it looked more akin to a heathen temple than the Christian fane.

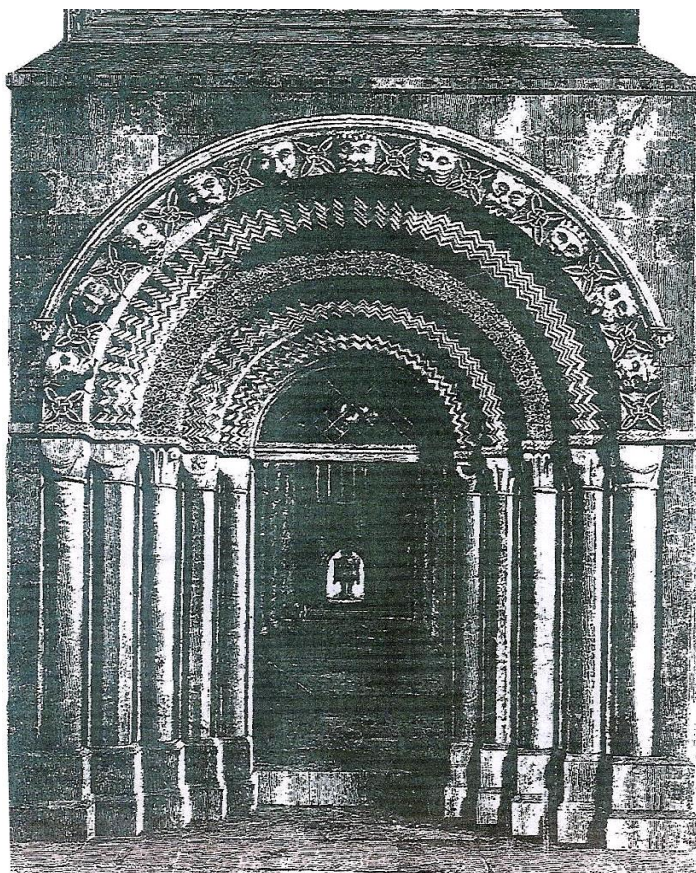
Of all the immense structures which went to make up the Abbey of Dunfermline, there remains the nave, which with its double row of five grand pillars, and arches, is allowed to be one of the finest specimens of a Norman interior in the kingdom; the ruins of the refectory and of the palace. The main western doorway, a spacious portal of five recessed arches, is preserved entire, and is of interest, partly owing to the elaborate ornaments of the arches, and partly to the twelve grotesque faces alternating with carved floral designs on the outer arch.

The Destruction of the Choir.

The Reformation is held responsible for many things with which it had little, if anything, to do, and it is blamed for the destruction of the Old Eastern Church, or Choir, of Dunfermline, a modern edifice taking its place in the first quarter of last century. This portion of the great Abbey Church was wrecked in 1560. Not only were the monuments over the tombs removed and broken, the sacred images smashed to pieces and burned, but, so it is said the great building itself was "pulled down" by the mob. If so, these people would be Roman Catholics - enraged Catholics, whose long pent-up passions and hatred of the priests, now that the power of the monks was broken, and found vent, and not being able to punish individuals, put out their vengeance upon inanimate objects, sacred, as they thought, to the priests. But how any mob, Catholic or Protestant, with only crowbars and hammers to work with, could do so in a few hours, on walls four or more feet thick, is not easy to conceive. The tale appears to be founded on a statement made by the English Ambassador. Writing to Cecil on the 29th of September, 1559, Sadler, in concerning the arming of the Lords of the Congregation (and his information on the matter is from his spy), says: - "He (the spy) told us also that they had suppressed the abbeyes of Paisley, Kilwinning, and Dunfermline, and burned all the images, idols, and Popish stuff in the same." It will be observed that the responsibility for the transaction is placed on the Lords of the Congregation; also, that nothing is said about the destruction of the church.

It would, therefore, seem that while the Reformers turned out the monks, "purged" the church and burned the ecclesiastical paraphernalia, they did not damage the building. The choir of Dunfermline church may have received damage from the "mob" after the messengers of the Associated Lords had finished their commission; but the story of its demolition is at variance with the action taken by the General Assembly in 1573 and 1588, to which we shall immediately refer.

## DUNFERMLINE ABBEY NAVE GREAT WESTERN DOOR



Engraved by John Johnstone Edinburgh -West Door (Restored)

## DUNFERMLINE THE PRESBYTERIANS SAVE THE NAVE.

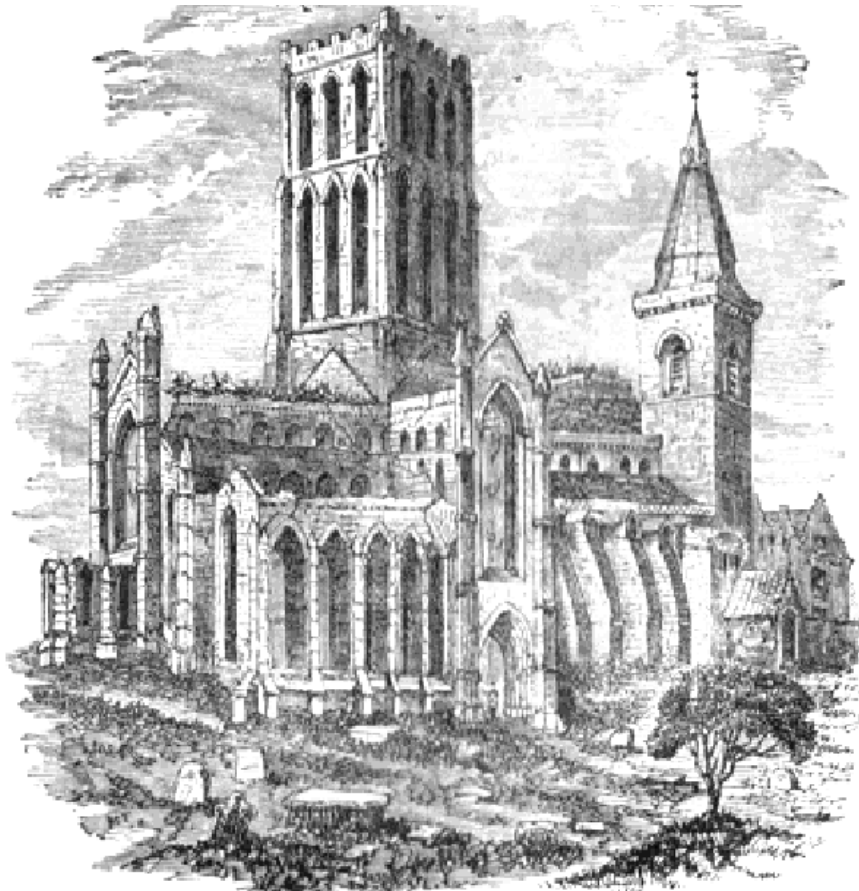
The Reformers fitted up the nave, and used it as a Presbyterian place of worship in 1563. The General Assembly, at their meeting in 1573, had the matter of the repair of the Abbey Church of Dunfermline before them; and again, in 1588, the Assembly appealed to King James VI., to avert the ruin which threatened, among many others, the same great edifice. The Reformers did not encourage the wrecking of kirks; on the contrary, they did all in their power to preserve them, doing their utmost in a turbulent and transitional period, during the fall of a great politico-religious system, to preserve the parish kirks from destruction. Queen Mary, King James, and those nobles who seized upon the landed property of the Church, were the responsible parties who allowed Dunfermline Abbey, as well as many another, to become a common quarry - which it continued to be till 1818 - and not the Reformers.

It is curious to note that Sir Walter Scott, charmed with its beauty, was tempted to ask, and obtained, a piece of mediæval work of oak in the roof, and it now adorns the ceiling of Abbotsford. The oak pulpit of the old church was also handed over to him, and may be seen in the hall of the same house. Nobody seems inclined to blame Sir Walter for doing so - not even Lockhart, his biographer, who however, can denounce the Reformers for their treatment of the abbeys - yet poor, ignorant peasants and town labourers are called all sorts of names, from rogue to iconoclast, for doing something very similar.

### ITS GREAT WEALTH.

Dunfermline was a wealthy abbey. Its Chartulary shows that it possessed five-and forty estates in the old county of Fife, besides those in ten other counties. If not the actual proprietor, it was the superior of the towns of Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, and Musselburgh. It owned thirty-seven kirks, with the lands, pertinents, and teinds attached to them. And it had no end of privileges, such as a right to take from the king's forests all the wood it required for fuel; a right to half the skins and fat of all animals killed at festivals between Forth and Tay, and so on. After passing through various hands, the temporalities were granted by the crown to Sir Alexander Seton, a Papist.

### RUINS OF THE ABBEY CHOIR



c. A.D. 1670 (From Old Sketches and Plans.)

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