

# KING ROBERT THE BRUCE



## DECLARATION OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE Dated 6 April 1320 at Arbroath



... 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 that 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.

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 vexations 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.

"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 that 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 chearfulness both our king and we would go thither, if the King of England would leave us in peace and we do hereby testifie 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 Sovereigne 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.