

*ROBERT PITCAIRN*  
*COMMENDATOR OF DUNFERMLINE ABBEY*  
*AT THE TIME OF THE*  
*REFORMATION*



# Robert Pitcairn

Commendator of *Dunfermline Abbey*, *Legate*  
and *Secretary of State* in the minority of  
*King James VI of Scotland.*

ISBN 978-1-909634-27-5

By

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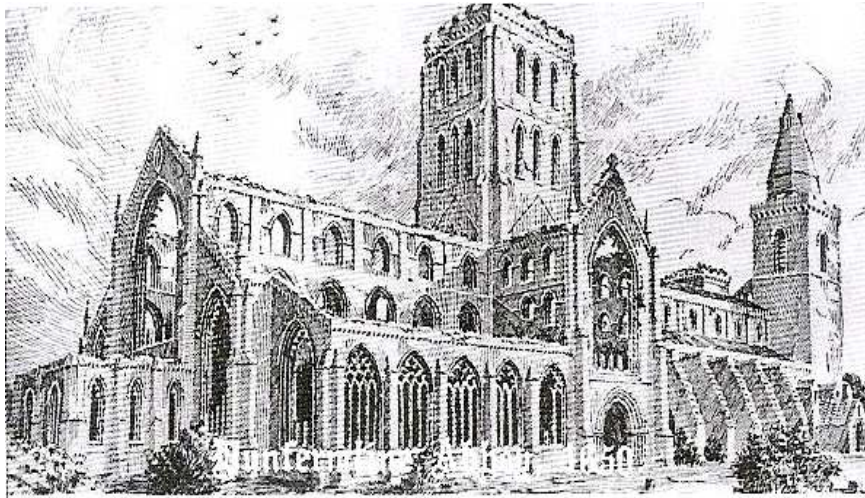
## CHAPTER 1

### THE REFORMATION: ARCHDEACON ST ANDREWS:

Towards the end of July 1560 George Durie, Abbot of Dunfermline, sixty-four years of age, went privily over the water from Fife and sought refuge in the Castle of Dunbar. It was then held by French soldiers who were soon to go home in consequence of a peace signed between the Catholic (and French) party and the Protestant (and English) party in that period of Scottish Civil War.

A messenger at arms was seeking him with a summons from the Protestant Lords to compeer before the Council to answer accusations laid against him for his behaviour in Fife. He promised to attend Parliament and purge himself of all charges.

The Reformation was in his eyes a calamity. Four months previously 'the whole Lords and barons that were on this side of the Forth passed to Stirling and be the way kest down the Abbey of Dunfermline - damaging the monastery and tearing forth the images and altars from the Church. He had now left Fife *'rather for his own suspicions than anything intended against him'*.



Ruins of Dunfermline Abbey.

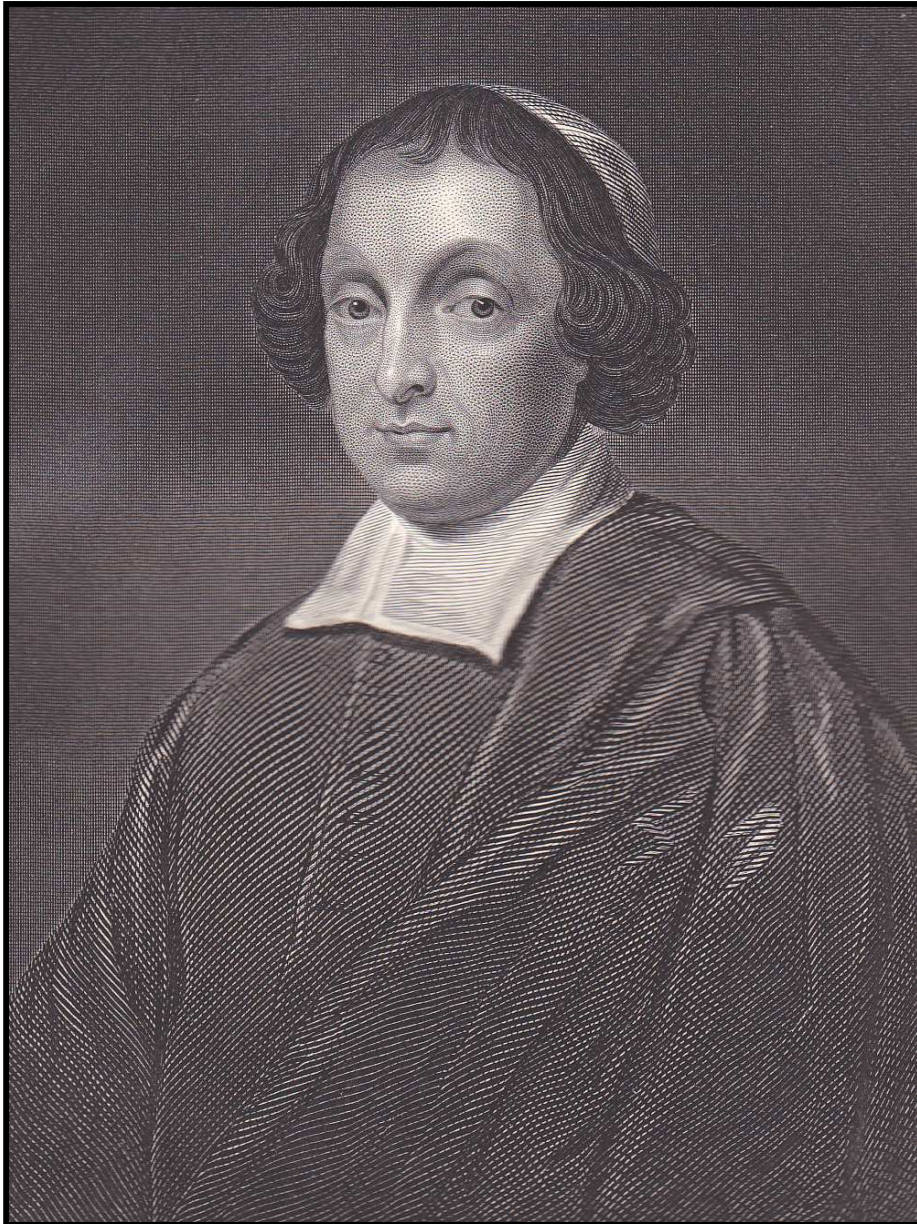
He was greatly offended with the inhabitants of Kirkcaldy, a town of his own (being within his ecclesiastical and regality jurisdiction), who had

turned out two pieces of ordnance against him when they heard he was coming with so great a train as five or six score horsemen. Wherefore he came to Dunbar;- but he had taken steps to entrust the abbacy to his nephew Robert Pitcairn as his Commissioner and Commendator.

George Durie may have reflected that things were sadly altered since his earlier days when his uncle Archbishop James Beaton, and later his cousin Cardinal Beaton with whom he was associated, had exercised almost sovereign powers in the government of the country, and Church and State were as one. For in the reigns of James IV and James V that remarkable man James Beaton, Archbishop of St Andrews, sixth son of a Fifeshire laird, attained the highest position in Scotland in Church and State and in opulence. A man of many talents and of not a few faults, he excelled his contemporaries in energy and in pursuit of ambitions without regard to the pastoral vocation of churchmen or the true and abiding interests of the Church and the spiritual wants of its people. Prior to his death in 1539 he had amongst other family provisions placed two of his nephews as Abbots of the two richest monasteries in the country. David Beaton, son of a brother and the future Archbishop of St Andrews and Cardinal, having been made Abbot of Arbroath, and George Durie, son of a sister, Abbot of Dunfermline.

On 5 December 1560 King Francis of France, the first husband of Mary Queen of Scots died. Consequently, it is said George Durie, Abbot of Dunfermline, and the Earl of Eglinton were sent on 29 January 1561 to France by the Catholic Lords. In France the Abbot accompanied Mary when she paid some of her visits of leave-taking.

Mary being in Paris on 20 March 1561, it is recorded that the Archbishop of Glasgow (the esteemed James Beaton, nephew of the late Cardinal) and the Abbot of Dunfermline accompanied her to Rheims. This James Beaton had shared with the Catholic party the hardships of the siege of Leith by the Protestant party, and on the death of the Queen Regent he went with the French soldiers to France. On account of the Reformation neither of these prelates returned to Scotland. A beautiful illuminated MS bible in the Advocates' Library, for which John Ruskin provided a case, is said to have been carried from Dunfermline Abbey to France at the Reformation. A coffer containing some sacred relics of St Margaret was taken away and after being kept in George Durie's mansion house in Dunfermline Parish was eventually conveyed to the Scots College at Douay.



Cardinal Beaton

*David Beaton (1494-1546) became Abbot of Arbroath in 1523, Bishop of Mirepoix in 1537, Archbishop of St Andrews and Cardinal in 1530. In 1543 he was appointed Chancellor of Scotland, but in 1546 he was assassinated. He was bulwark of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, and of the alliance with France, a statesman of remarkable courage and ability, but the laxity of his private life was remarkable even in a loose age, and his fame as a statesman is stained by his cruelty to the Reformers.(Scotland by R. Mackie)*

George Durie until his death remained Abbot of Dunfermline, and his name appears in Charters until 1564 in this year John Knox heard rumours that the mass would be set up as the Bishop of Glasgow and the Abbot of Dunfermline were to come as Ambassadors followed by Bothwell with power. His successor in Dunfermline Abbey was, as already mentioned, his nephew Robert Pitcairn, who in various Charters granted by the Monastery until the end of 1567 is described as Archdeacon of St Andrews and Commendator-designate of Dunfermline having a commission to grant feus etc from George principal Commendator then staying in France during his absence out of Scotland.

By 1569 Pitcairn is called Commendator. In fact, however, it is now known from the Calendar of State Papers that George Durie was still alive in France in 1570. Robert Pitcairn's appointment was patrimonial and political rather than religious, as the Reformation had deprived the monastery of any acknowledged religious existence.

He had no pastoral office. He was Commendator of Dunfermline Abbey although often by courtesy referred to as Abbot or Lord Dunfermline. Like his uncle, he was also Archdeacon of St Andrews, and retained that office along with his office of Commendator. Usually a Commendator at that period was a layman, with no duty but that of consuming the revenues. Dunfermline Abbey was exceptional in having one who had been bred to the Church.

There can be little doubt that it was by friendly arrangement with the approval of Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, that Robert Pitcairn was appointed successor to his uncle, Abbot George Durie, on the Abbot's departure to France. An Abbey could have an Abbot and a Commendator at the same time.

In April 1563 a Tack of the office of bailiary of the Regality of Dunfermline in favour of David Durie of that ilk runs in the following style:-  
*'George be the Grace of God commendator of the Abbey of Dunfermlyng and Mayster Robert Pytcairne our successor to the same and convent thereof chaptourlie gedtherit. . . .'*

Lord James Stewart, half-brother of Mary Queen of Scots, afterwards the Regent Earl of Moray, was Prior of St Andrews. Probably Robert Pitcairn, Archdeacon of St Andrews, was known to the future Regent at the time of

his appointment to Dunfermline Abbey, when presumably he must have been acceptable to the Protestant party. Pitscottie names the Abbot of Dunfermline as one of the Fife men who joined the Lords of the Congregation in 1559. He may possibly have meant Robert Pitcairn, who was known as Abbot by the time the passage was written.

Born in 1520, Robert Pitcairn was a son of David Pitcairn of Forthir Ramsay in the Barony of Airdre near Crail and of Elizabeth Durie his wife. A student of St Salvator College in the University of St Andrews, he graduated there in 1539. In the previous year he may have been a spectator at the wedding of James V. Well grounded in the Canon Law, he may have proceeded to the Scots College, Paris, as was usual in the case of young Scots men who aspired to future office in Church or State.

For example, Lord James Stewart, the future Earl of Moray, who was Pitcairn's junior by about ten years, after education at St Leonards, St Andrews, went to the College de Presle at Paris. It is regrettable that so little is known of Pitcairn's youth. There was a leaven of Protestantism in St Andrews University. On the other hand, he had ties of kinship with Cardinal Beaton.

If he was not abroad, Pitcairn may have been present at the battle of Pinkie in 1547. Many churchmen were there, as they were strongly against England and Tudor cruelty and protestantism. His uncle, Abbot Durie was one of the advisers of the Regent Arran at the time of Pinkie, and had much responsibility for that battle, in which many kirkmen fought under the banner of the Abbot of Dunfermline.

Robert Pitcairn would become an ecclesiastical lawyer. He evidently purchased the lands of Forthir from his parents in 1552, under reservation of their own liferent in certain parts, a common form of family arrangement then. In all probability we may suppose that he entered the service of the diocese of St Andrews while Cardinal David Beaton was Archbishop, and possibly he may have been in St Andrews when George Wishart was burnt and when David Beaton was killed; but the Archbishop of St Andrews at the time of his appointment to Dunfermline Abbey was John Hamilton, natural son of the Earl of Arran. The Ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archbishop included two Arch-deaconries viz.: - (1) St Andrews for North of the Forth,

being most of Fifeshire and Stirlingshire and large parts of Forfar and Kincardine and a portion of Perthshire, and (2) Lothian for South of the Forth, namely most part of the Lothians and Berwickshire and embracing the town of Edinburgh.

The Archdeaconry of St Andrews held by Robert Pitcairn contained five Deaneries:- Forthir (north part of Fife) with 25 parishes, Fife 28 parishes, Gowrie 21, Angus 40, and Mearns 15. Prior to the Reformation the respective Deans had rule over the clerics attached to those parishes, and the Archdeacon was their superior possessing jurisdiction delegated to him from the Archbishop. From 1560, however, the protestant General Assembly attended to the arrangements and provisions for the spiritual needs of the parishes.

Throughout his district the Archdeacon of St Andrews was, under the Archbishop, head of the Spiritual Courts for administration of justice and for consistorial matters. Questions which were '*civil and profane*' and not '*ecclesiastical*' were dealt with by the lay civil courts and crimes by the criminal courts; but many litigations took place in the Church Courts before the Ecclesiastical Judge, who was known as the '*Official*' and exercised his juridical powers by delegation from the Archbishop and the Archdeacon. In matters of family relationships marriages, births, Wills, Executries etc., the jurisdiction was with the Spiritual Courts, under judges and administrators who were called Commissaries and were in general likewise subordinate to the Archdeacon. Protestant Commissary Courts were set up in 1563, after which Robert Pitcairn as Archdeacon would have no part in them. As a landlord or feudal superior the Archbishop also had a Regality Court for civil and criminal justice over his vassals.

In a document signed by him at St Andrews on 14 October 1563, Pitcairn is designed as Commendator and Archdeacon and as patron of the chaplaincy of St Catherine in the metropolitan church of St Andrews.

At Dunfermline on 24 March 1566 Robert Pitcairn, Archdeacon of St Andrews, with consent of John Archbishop and the Commendators and Convent of St Andrews, gave a Feu Charter to John Pitcairn, his brother, of the Archdeacon's inns or lodging (the old inns or archdeacon's lodging) in the Northern neighbourhood of the City of St Andrews, annual feu duty payable £4.

Even more extensive than the Regality of St Andrews was the Regality jurisdiction of Dunfermline Abbey. This Regality of course continued to exist after the Reformation. It belonged to Robert Pitcairn for life.

Including a large part of Fifeshire, it extended into the Shires of Clackmannan, Linlithgow and Midlothian (Inveresk, Musselburgh, Carberry etc.) It even applied to portions of Elgin and Ross.

Pitcairn was thus a man of law and an administrator, accustomed to responsibility. He was a man of position in the country. His future career shows him to have been employed on public and state business as a man of affairs rather than as man of feudal power or political influence. Incidentally he also held the office of Rector of Strabrok, i.e. Uphall, in the Archbishopric of St Andrews, Deaconry of Linlithgow. As we do not hear of him in this appointment until 1570, we may assume that it was a sinecure entitling him to draw the teinds of the Parish, out of one-third of which a modest provision would be made for the Parish Minister.

When Robert Pitcairn was 22 years of age King James V died at Falkland near Pitcairn's home, leaving Mary an infant seven days old. Three years later George Wishart was burnt at St Andrews for heresy, and next year Cardinal Beaton was murdered in St Andrews Castle. Invasion of Scotland by English forces, in league with the protestant party, reached the Lothians and the Firth of Tay, and led the Queen Regent, mother of Mary Queen of Scots, to bring in French assistance. Peace ensued from 1550 to 1554. John Knox visited Scotland in 1555-6 for some months and the Protestant party grew, among those who were politically assertive. It included the future Regents Moray, Mar and Morton. John Knox returned permanently in May 1559. The Secretary Maitland of Lethington joined '*the Congregation*'.

As protestantism was becoming more wide-spread, Archbishop Hamilton in August 1552 had caused to be printed at St Andrews a Catechism which was written simply in the Scottish dialect and had been approved by the Provincial Synod at Edinburgh. It was issued to be put in the hands of the Clergymen throughout the Kingdom for their own instruction and that of their flocks.

The issue of the Catechism and Archbishop Hamilton's activities at the time were a praiseworthy attempt at reform within the old Church, but good as they were, they were too late and proved ineffectual. It is a reasonable assumption that Robert Pitcairn may have had some minor part in these matters, especially as they were not the work of the Archbishop, a relatively ignorant Churchman, but of his subordinates in his name. Churchmen were losing their influence. The old Ecclesiastical Council of 1559, dealing with the subject of inward reform of the Church, rose on 10 April never to meet

again. In their own interests many young Abbots and Priors went over to the Protestants. Revolutionary measures were required to satisfy the new spiritual teachers of the people.



James V

*James V., b. 10 April 1512, who was cut off in the flower of his age. He died 13-14 December 1542 in the thirty first year of his age, and the twenty-ninth of his reign, having m. Madeline of Valois, with no issue and then on 12 Jun 1538 Mary of Guise (widow) they had one surviving legitimate child, Mary, his successor, and six natural children, among whom was James, afterwards the celebrated Regent Moray.*

After Queen Mary's mother as Regent outlawed Protestant preachers, the party took to arms. Bothwell assisted her, and she brought in against her Protestant subjects French troops who harried Fife and were assaulted by English and Scots at Leith, with the result that a treaty was made at Edinburgh on 6 July 1560.

The mother of Mary Queen of Scots had died on 9 June 1560; and in August of that year the Estates passed legislation completing the Reformation in Scotland, without any very marked support from the Nation at large at the time and without effective opposition from the prelates present, who were in a hopeless minority. Apparently Robert Pitcairn was present at the meeting of the Estates and was for the affirmative. It was carried with strong support from the lairds and magistrates.

Herein, particularly with reference to the Union of the Crowns, lay the seed of Mary's misfortunes. She was a Catholic Queen of a people mostly, and officially, Protestant. At the Reformation protestantism appeared to its adherents to be '*under the immediate eye of Heaven*'. The antagonism between Catholicism and Protestantism permeated the articulate National life, affecting all public men's thoughts and views and all politics and statesmanship national and international. Protagonists could not be sufficiently indifferent to be tolerant. Protestantism and the approaching union of the Crowns of England and Scotland were so important as to absorb attention to the extent of obsession and pre-occupation, whereby men overlooked the ethic of their religion and the social peace and order which are among the principal objects of politics. These considerations, along with the traditional turbulence of factions of the ruling class in Scotland and the anticipatory exercise by England of a predominal partnership in the prospective union of the two Kingdoms, created a situation wherein the inevitable occurrences of selfishness or folly which in calmer times might have produced the usual interesting human comedy did in that period produce lamentable human tragedy.

Queen Mary returned from France to Scotland in August 1561. She visited Dunfermline in June next year in the course of a progress to Alloa and Stirling. Robert Pitcairn would be in attendance upon her during her stay in Dunfermline.





Mary Queen of Scots.

*Born 7th or 8th December, 1542; began to reign 14th December, 1542; went to France August 1548; married (1) Francis, the Dauphin of France, 24th April 1558; became Queen of France 10th July, 1559, and Queen-Dowager of France 5th December, 1560. Returned to Scotland 19th August, 1561; married (2) Henry Lord Darnley, 29th July, 1565, and (3) James Earl of Bothwell, 15th May, 1567. Abdicated 24th July 1567; fled to England 16th May, 1568; beheaded at Fotheringay 8th February, 1587. (Scotland by R.L. Mackie)*

In 1562 an Act was passed for upholding and repairing Parish Churches; and in 1560 David Ferguson had come to Dunfermline as Protestant Minister of Dunfermline Abbey Church, being the Church of the town and parish. His advice may have lain behind an action raised before the Privy Council at Stirling on 13 September 1563 at the instance of the inhabitants of Dunfermline town and parish mentioning that the Abbots of Dunfermline

had always maintained the walls and roof of the church and the Sacristans, as vicars of said Church, had upheld the glass windows but now the church and its windows were in disrepair. It may be observed that, apart from any damage done at the Reformation, the effect of the Wars to which Scotland had been subjected would be to render structural renewals difficult of punctual and economical accomplishment, and that this litigation against Robert Pitcairn and the Abbey Chamberlain and vicar was of the nature of a test case to determine whether the pre-Reformation liabilities still applied now that the church was protestant. If the object of the action had simply been to obtain fulfilment of a known legal obligation it would have been taken in the Court of Session, but it was taken in the Privy Council where theoretically the Sovereign with the advice of the Lords gave rulings which the subjects must obey. In the Privy Council the Crown could administer abstract justice by its innate prerogative. Obviously the Abbey Chamberlain desired to have authority before expending Abbey money on the protestant church repairs, and Robert Pitcairn the Commendator had no objection - but he was not a free agent as Abbot Durie was still alive. To John Boswal, bailie, and William Wilson, treasurer, appeared for the town, and Alan Cowtis, Chamberlane of the Abbey, and William Lumsdane, Sacristane, but Robert Pitcairn, Commendator, although cited, did not compear. He and his Chamberlain were decerned to do the necessary structural repairs and he and the Sacristane to repair and uphold the glass windows. It is understood that some minor repairs were then done: but in February 1588 the General Assembly were still describing the state of certain Kirks, including Dunfermline, as ruinous and requiring hasty repair.

Some years afterwards structural repairs were executed by William Shaw, the King's Master of Works, and later for King James and his Queen by Alexander Seton, first Lord Dunfermline.

By obtaining the office of Commendator of Dunfermline Abbey, Robert Pitcairn of course acquired a position of lordly rank with an establishment, and an income for life in the rents, teinds and feu duties of the lands and superiorities belonging to the Abbey subject to any contribution that may have been sent to Abbot Durie while he lived.

In illustration, it may be noted that as late as 1581 the General Assembly still complained that Commendators and others, provided of old under the name of ecclesiastical, bruiks (enjoys) the rents and revenues of the Kirks without exercising any spiritual function thereof or recognising the true

Kirk, devouring the patrimony of them and diminishing the rents of their benefices and therefore they should be cited before the General Assembly, of which however Robert Pitcairn was never a member although he may have attended as a Lord of Council. In accordance with the policy of the government, steps were taken to give the tenants and occupiers of Dunfermline Abbey lands security of tenure, as is shown by the following letter dated 18 July 1563 addressed by Mary Queen of Scots from Dumbarton (where she was in the course of a visit which embraced Glasgow, Hamilton, Inverary and Dunoon) to Robert Pitcairn, Commendator, and his Conventual Brethern:-

“For as mikil as we have thocht it expedient for divers ressonable causs and considerations moving us agreeable to this present tyme that all and sundrie the temporall lands pertaining to the said abbacy be set in feu farm be zou with ane consent to our weil belovit dalie servitour Maister Robert Richardson Prior of Sanct Marie Ilk, his airs and assignais for payment zearlie of the malis ferme and dewties usit and wont conteint in you rentall, with augmentation as efferis, quhilk be and done salle be na hort nor prejudice to your said place, nor zeat to the tenantis of the ground be ressoun we have takin order with him on their behalffis, Quairfor ze sall not failzie with diligence to extract the said infeffments off feu ferme to be maid to the said Maister Robert Richardson as said is, as ze will expect our speciall thankis. For we have given command to the berar to declair to you our mynd in their behalffis at mair lentht, quhom to ze sall giff credett as to ourself.”

As Robert Richardson, a substantial citizen of Edinburgh, was the Queen's Treasurer, the conveyances in his favour were presumably to secure the benefit of any increment value in the Abbey land rights to the Royal finances or to pay off some of the Crown's indebtedness to him. Three comprehensive Charters in his favour were granted by the Commendator and brethren signed at Dunfermline on 22 July 1563, the first applicable to the Musselburgh lands, the second to those in the district of Dunfermline, and the third to the whole other lands belonging to the Abbey. Richardson was Treasurer from 1558 until his death in 1571.

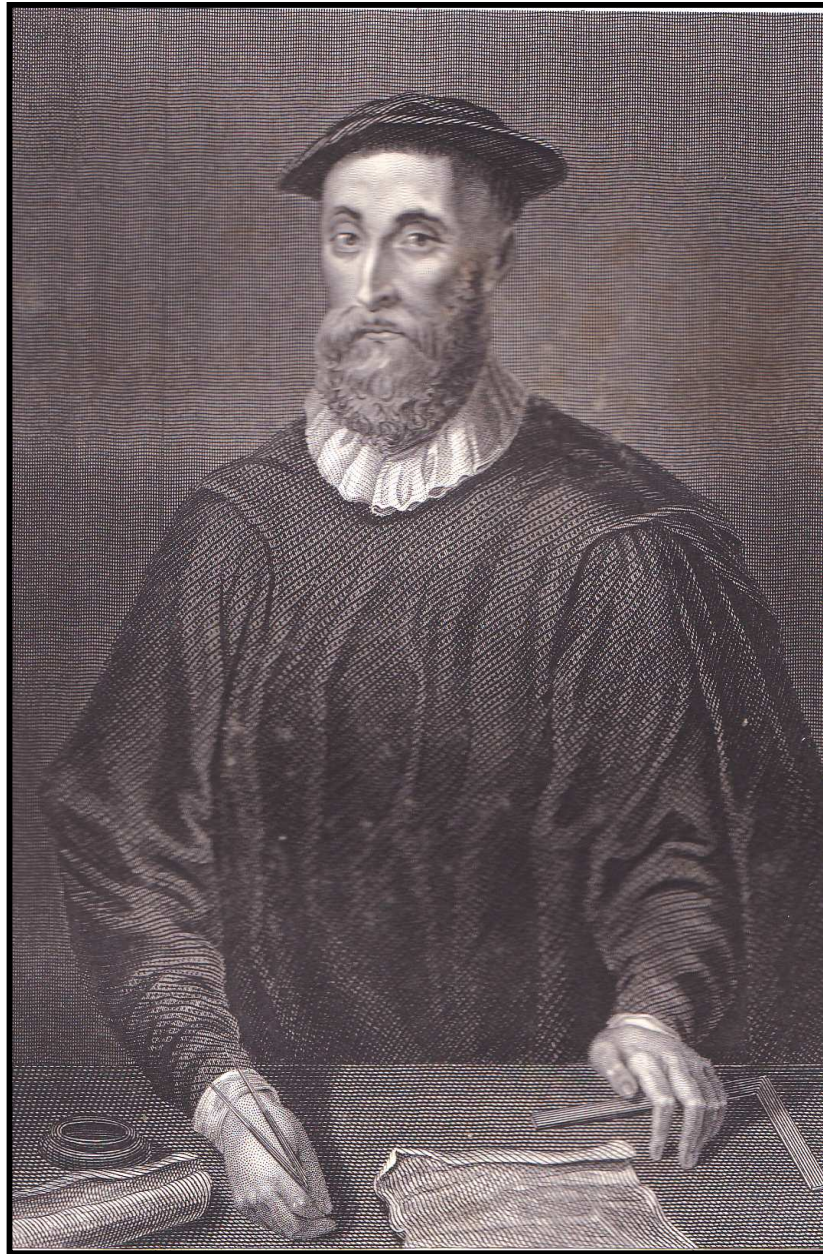
The Commendator of Dunfermline would frequently reside in Edinburgh. A reference to Robert Pitcairn is in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials I. p 436 of date 30 October 1563, when Dene John Durie, Monk in Dunfermline, (1) was accused and repledged to Dunfermline Regality Court, for convocation of 24 persons '*bodin in feir of were*' (armed as for war) who upon 24 July under silence of night had set upon David Murray in Kerse and Anthony Rutherford (2) upon the High Street of Edinburgh where they were gang and to their beds to the Chamber of the young Abbot of Dunfermline (3) in sober and quiet manner. Among the assailants, who did the two victims serious bodily harm, or art and part with them, were two brothers of Mowbray of Burnboagall, two Bertranes, (4) two Thomsons, sons of Edinburgh citizens, and Thomas Henderson, Master of the Fence School.



Residence of Robert Pitcairn while in Edinburgh, afterwards John Knox House

- NOTES** 1) John Durie embraced the Protestant faith this year. He was an eminent divine who became successively Minister of Leith, Edinburgh and Montrose. Andrew Lang describes him as turbulent. It may be mentioned that by a deed dated at Dunfermline 16 July 1577 Robert, Commendator, and Convent gave to John Durie and Josua Durie his son for life a yearly pension of £66.13.4 in place of his portion habit silver and other duties aucht to him out of the Abbey before the dispersion of the brethren thereof.
- 2) Murray and Rutherford were evidently Assistants to Robert Pitcairn. The latter sometimes signed documents as witness to his signature. In 1566 Anthony Rutherford in return for payment of a yearly feu duty received from the Commendator and Monastery a Charter of some acres to the South and North of Dunfermline out of Elimozinary lands. He was a Notary, and occupier of a house in Dunfermline, in Maygate near the Abbey.
- 3) The chamber or house of Robert Pitcairn was in Bell's Wynd. The house, which his predecessor Abbot Durie had occupied was now the manse of John Knox.
- 4) The Mowbrays and Bertanes were cousins, being descendants of the Bartons, the loyal and famous family of Shippers. The heir of Robert Barton, Comptroller and Treasurer in the reign of James V, took his wife's name of Mowbray on marrying the heiress of that ancient house. Possibly the Thomsons were also kinsmen as Robert Barton's grand-daughter married Thomas Thomson who was a man of good practice and repute as an "ypothecair" in Edinburgh. Robert Barton in his time had business dealings with the Thomson family in connection with the catering for the Royal household. The Bertranes (Bartons) were still largely engaged in foreign commerce chiefly between Leith and the Continent. One of them was distinguished for bravery as a soldier in France.





JOHN KNOX

*John Knox (1505-1572) first gained fame as a preacher of the Reformed doctrine in 1546, when he joined the murderers of Beaton in St Andrews Castle. He was captured and sent to the galleys in France, but was released in 1549 and came to England where he was appointed a royal chaplain. On the accession of Mary Tudor he fled to the Continent. In 1554 he met Calvin at Geneva. He became successively pastor of the English Church at Frankfort-on-Main and pastor of the English Church in Geneva, and in 1559 returned to Scotland. His History of the Reformation was not published till twelve years after his death. (Scotland, by R.L. Mackie)*

## **CHAPTER 11**

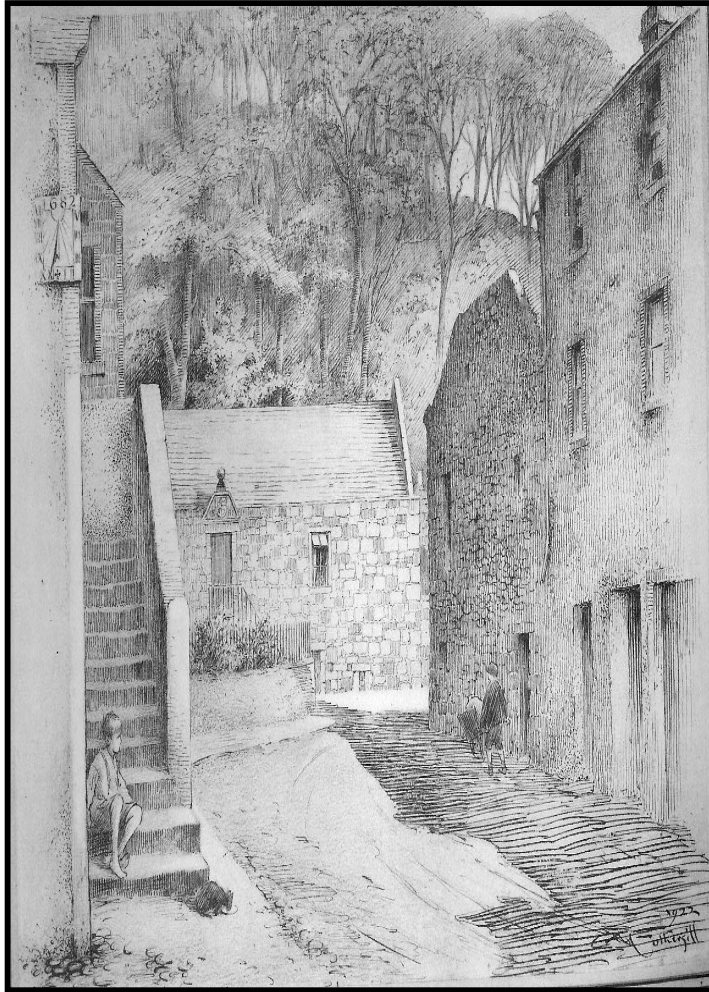
### **PUBLIC LIFE IN TIME OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS 1561-67**

The Commendator of Dunfermline Abbey, having a seat in Parliament as one of the Lords, could be chosen to the Queen's Council. Queen Mary made visits to St Andrews in the spring of 1562-3-4-5, when it is almost certain that Robert Pitcairn as Archdeacon would occasionally be in her presence. For two years after Mary's return to Scotland, the Estates did not meet, until May 1563 when Pitcairn apparently attended and presumably would be present at the opening of the Parliament and at the banquet given by the Queen at Holyrood.

Pitcairn was at a meeting of the Nobility and Barons at Stirling on 15 May 1565 when the Queen was present and her marriage with Darnley was approved. In the Register of the Privy Council of date 19 July 1565 Robert Pitcairn appears as one of the Lords of Council, but not as an ordinary member. This seems to be his first recorded attendance in Council, and it was as one of the extraordinary members to take into consideration a declaration by the Earl of Moray as to a conspiracy against his life at Perth.

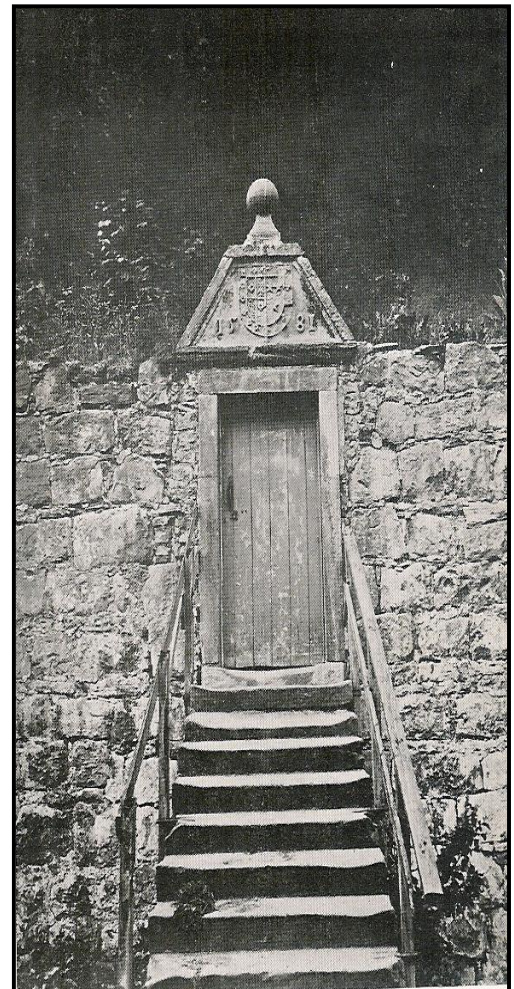
By now, Mary had become friendly with Rizzio; and her natural brother Lord James Earl of Moray and some of the Protestant Lords were at enmity with her, having come to realise that Darnley was the hope of the English Catholics. Moray had left the Court. At the meeting on 19 July, the Queen being present, assurance of life was given to the Earl of Moray that he might come to the Queen's Majesty. As matters developed, however, in August 1565 Moray was denounced rebel. Mary gathered her forces, and soon Moray and his associates at that time were driven to England. Morton and Lethington were amongst those who remained with the Queen, as also was Pitcairn, apparently, being named in March 1566 one of the Lords of the Articles to prepare the Statute of Treason against Moray and others.

On 19 October 1565 when persons were appointed to the keeping of the havens against the rebels, Robert Pitcairn was nominated, for Limekilns and North Queensferry with the bounds adjacent, to keep watch and search ships and boats, arrest suspect person etc. The Bailies and Abbot of Dunfermline were required on 31 October to make sure watch. On 5 December the Abbot of Dunfermline was convened to a Parliament.



The King's Cellar Limekilns with the Arms of Robert Pitcairn, above the doorway.

The Arms of Robert Pitcairn and Euphemia Murray, at Limkilns.



The Minutes of the Privy Council may not be complete, but Robert Pitcairn's name does not appear on the Sederunt again until 21 August 1567 when Moray and his adherents were back and in power. In the early years of Mary's reign, those who were about her failed to reciprocate her personal tolerance and good nature, and to give her the undivided loyalty obtain a good husband, or the protective and gentle treatment due to a lady; but throughout the troubles associated with the name of Rizzio, Darnley and Bothwell, Pitcairn may have been mostly in Dunfermline attending to the business of the Abbey possessions, or if at Court, staying in Edinburgh or Stirling, he may have been acting in some minor capacity. Years afterwards Queen Mary affirmed that he was a creature of Morton's, made by Morton<sup>1</sup> who was her Chancellor from 1563 after the extirpation of Huntly until the Rizzio murder. It is said that Pitcairn was one of the Lords who met in the Queen's apartments on the day after the murder of Rizzio, March 1566.



J. Opie. R.A..

C. Greatbach.

#### THE MURDER OF DAVID RIZZIO.

<sup>1</sup> James Douglas, who by marriage acquired the title of Earl of Morton. He was one of Mary's worst enemies.

In December 1566 Archbishop Hamilton baptised Queen Mary's infant son James at Stirling, the last Roman Catholic ceremony of State. Mary did her best to dispense Royal hospitality and to ensure ceremonial and entertainment worthy of the occasion, of the country, and of the noble guests, including representatives from the Courts of other countries. The child was carried between two rows of Barons and gentlemen. The clergy included an Archbishop, three Bishops, a Prior and various Deans and Archdeacons. Robert Pitcairn was there. The Earl of Moray had returned to the political scene after the death of Rizzio. Morton was pardoned after the christening. Pitcairn was not one of his associates then.

Robert Pitcairn, Archdeacon of St Andrews, was named one of the Lords of Exchequer to audit the Accounts of Sir William Murray of Tullibardine as Comptroller for 1565 and 1567. At intervals until 1580 he was one of the yearly Auditors.

On 10 February 1567 (eleven months after Rizzio) Darnley was murdered. In April, before the Lord Justice General, the Earl of Argyle, a trial took place of the Earl of Bothwell accused of the murder. He is said to have brought 4,000 followers to Edinburgh. Some authorities affirm and others deny that four assessors were appointed to advise in the trial, namely Robert Pitcairn, James Magill, Lindsay, and Henry Balnaves, who were all inclined to the pro-English anti-Bothwell party. Bothwell was acquitted because no evidence was led against him. About that time, Lords Argyle, Athol, Morton and Mar had resorted to Stirling where they entered into a Bond of Mutual Defence, They brought in Kirkcaldy of Grange and the most part of Fife. On 15 May 1567 Mary married Bothwell; a month later she surrendered to the Protestant Lords at Carberry, being not yet twenty five years of age.

As is well known, after the murder of Darnley Sir William Murray of Tullibardine, Comptroller of Scotland 1566 to 1583, and a brother-in-law of the Regent Moray, became a prominent opponent of Bothwell and the Queen. He was a Confederate Lord. His brother James Murray of Perdewis, Dunfermline, who had for long been at enmity with Bothwell was on 14 March 1567 proclaimed guilty of treason for having (in advertence to the murder of Darnley) devised and caused to be set up certain painted papers

upon the Tolbooth door of Edinburgh tending to Her Majesty's defamation. It is related that Queen Mary sent for David Ferguson, Minister of Dunfermline, to enquire about Murray's authorship and in reply to her questioning he had to confess that he had never heard Murray speak well of Bothwell. At Carberry Hill Sir William and his brother were with the Lords against the Queen and Bothwell. When challenge was made to settle the dispute by single combat James Murray was one who accepted it and when Bothwell refused because James was not his equal in rank it is said that Sir William offered to fight the Earl, as did Grange and Lindsay. Afterwards Sir William went with Grange's ships in pursuit of Bothwell.

He was one of those who asked Regent Moray to be gentle with Queen Mary and were in favour of her release. It can scarcely be doubted that Robert Pitcairn was associated with the Murrays, who were strong supporters of the Reformation. Years afterwards, he married Tullibardine's daughter: and quite manifestly he became supporter of the Earl of Moray who with John Knox has been credited with doing most to ensure the success of the Scottish Reformation, albeit to modern minds their methods were not admirable.

During many years Sir William Murray's duties as Comptroller and Robert Pitcairn's duties as Secretary made them colleagues. The Comptroller received the Sovereign's rentals, Burgh maills and customs levied on merchandise, and he disbursed the Royal household expenses.

In July 1567, after Queen Mary had gone into captivity, the Commendator of Dunfermline was appointed a Lord of the Articles in the Scottish Parliament. This was the Committee elected at each Parliament to prepare the Bills which were submitted to the full Parliament at its last day of sitting. Later, after Pitcairn became Secretary he would be a Lord of the Articles in each Parliament. He signed the Bond of Association at Edinburgh after the resignation of Queen Mary who was captive in Loch-Leven Castle.

On 29 July 1567 Pitcairn attended at Stirling in the Parish Kirk the coronation of King James VI, who was then thirteen months old. John Knox preached. Immediately afterwards Pitcairn was present at a Parliament held in Edinburgh. The future Regent Moray who had been on a visit to France since March returned to Scotland in August 1567.

It will be noticed that any superficial sketch of public events as a background to Robert Pitcairn's life must suffer from omissions and oversimplification.

## CHAPTER III

### JAMES VI – THE REGENCIES 1567-78

#### (a) Moray – 1567-70



The Earl of Moray

*James Stewart, Earl of Moray (1533-1570), was an illegitimate son of James V, who made him Prior of St Andrews in 1538. He joined the Lords of the Congregation in 1559 and negotiated the Treaty of Berwick with England in 1560. He was created Earl of Moray by Mary in 1562, but became estranged from her after her marriage with Darnley. He fled to France after the murder of Darnley, but he returned to Scotland after Mary's abdication and accepted the regency. He was assassinated on 23rd January 1570.*

On 22 August 1567 Pitcairn was present as one of the Lords of Council when James Earl of Moray accepted the Regency, a letter from Queen Mary dated at Lochleven 23rd July having been read. On 4 December the Lords of Secret Council and others, including Robert Pitcairn, signed an Act of Council against Queen Mary in relation to her being imprisoned in Lochleven.



Loch Leven

On 15 December 1567 Pitcairn's name is at the head of fourteen Abbots on the Rolls of Parliament when the Reformed Church was legally recognised as the only National Church, and the Acts of 1560 were confirmed.

Calderwood declares that Sir William Murray was one of those instrumental in Queen Mary's escape from Lochleven. More people were cognisant about her escape than was formerly thought; but, however that may be, Robert Pitcairn was with the Regent Moray, Morton, Glencairn, Mar and others at a meeting of the Privy Council held at Glasgow on 3 May 1568. As Queen Mary had escaped the previous day from Lochleven and gone to Hamilton where people were resorting to her, they ordered letters to be directed charging all subjects '*bodin in feir of weir*' to come to the Lord Regent at Glasgow.

Pitcairn's titular superior, John Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, adhered to Queen Mary's cause. He had assisted her escape from Lochleven, and bore her company to the fatal field of Langside. Pitcairn was in the battle of Langside on the side of the Protestant Lords. Mary having fled to England, Archbishop Hamilton afterwards took refuge in Dumbarton Castle. Robert Pitcairn was one of the Lords at a meeting in Edinburgh on 1 July 1568 when a charge was made against John Archbishop of St Andrews, and some other Bishops, and on non-compearance they were put to the horn (outlawed). Pitcairn however was in England when the Archbishop was put to death, in old enmity, by the Regent Lennox, on 6 April 1571 after the capture of Dumbarton Castle. We do not know of any participation by Pitcairn in Regent Moray's punitive measures in the Summer of 1568.

On 2 June 1568 Robert Pitcairn was appointed to be a Judge in the Court of Session. Presumably he became a Lord of Session by nomination from Regent Moray on the recommendation of Morton as Lord Chancellor. Possibly this was a reward for his support, and to retain him. Being a Queen herself, Elizabeth Tudor disliked traitors, and although Scottish protestant traitors might be useful to her politics as devised by Cecil, she was embarrassed to recognise them publicly. As Pitcairn had not been a participant in the disgraceful treacheries and crimes with which Mary Queen of Scots was so cruelly beset in her Court life, he was 'ane honourable man whom the Protestant Lords could suitably send as their Legate to the English Court. On this high mission he was to be increasingly employed during the Regencies.

After 21 September that year, there was no meeting of the Scottish Privy Council for some months because the Regent and other members departed to England for great and weighty matters concerning the state of the King's Majesty and common weal of this country and they returned not until 1 February 1569. Robert Pitcairn was one of those who thus accompanied the Regent Moray to York as Commissioners to confer with Queen Elizabeth's advisers as to the reasons for the revolt against Queen Mary, whose representatives also attended the meeting. It was fruitless. At Westminster, whither they proceeded, Regent Moray, Morton, Patrick Lindsay and Pitcairn on 26 November signed a protest against any inquiry being made into the character or conduct of Queen Mary because such would necessarily tend to her dishonour and prove them exceedingly ungrateful.

In result, however, and against the better judgement of some of them, the Regent and those with him, who went on to Hampton Court, were forced to lodge their accusation against Mary with the English Council. Their purpose had been defined to be to declare the true causes whereby divers of the Scottish Nobility, while Queen Mary yet possessed the Crown, took arms, whereon followed her detaining and sequestration for a time. In that connection, on 10 December 1568, Moray, Morton, the Bishop of Orkney, Robert Dunfermline, and Patrick Lindsay avowed that the casket letters were in Queen Mary's handwriting, a statement which is by no means generally respected today, and the question still remains precisely what letters were covered by the deposition.

The state in which the Lords travelled is indicated by the accommodation required for them. The Regent had 100 horse, and his five companions had 100 horse amongst them.

It should be remembered that Queen Mary was made a captive in England by Queen Elizabeth and her advisers. The Scottish Lords were not directly responsible for her being in prison. By reason of the unfavourable outcome for Queen Mary and the unpopular subservience to England, the breach between Regent Moray and Kirkcaldy of Grange and Maitland of Lethington developed. Grange was Commander of Edinburgh Castle and he managed to get Lethington developed. Grange was Commander of Edinburgh Castle and he managed to get Lethington inside. In June and July 1569 we find the Regent holding Councils at Inverness, Elgin, Aberdeen and Dundee at which the Commendator of Dunfermline was one of the Lords present. James Melville says the Regent was at the head of a strong force and imposed fines on opponents. Pitcairn was also present at a Convention in Perth on 28 July 1569 which accepted a report of the negotiations with the Queen of England. Two days later the Conventions heard a communication from her and decided that they would not have Mary back to rule over them but would consider her settling among them as a private person. On 30 July Lord Boyd produced a procuratory from Queen Mary desiring a divorce from Bothwell (probably to be free to marry the Duke of Norfolk). Pitcairn was one of the majority who voted against it, although Sir William Murray voted for it. Those who supported the invalidation of Mary's marriage to Bothwell hoped to facilitate her release and reinstatement.

In September 1569 the Council sent Robert Pitcairn, 'a man of equal wisdom and fidelity' to carry their answer to and to confer on proposed

Articles with Queen Elizabeth and her advisers, whose countenance the Regent had obtained tardily. It is thought that confidentially he was to tell what the Lords knew about negotiations regarding Queen Mary's proposed marriage to Norfolk and its implications.

In a letter to the Earl of Moray dated 23 October, Elizabeth stated that she had heard the Commendator of Dunfermline but finds no clear resolution on their answer and requests to be further satisfied. The Regent's instructions for this embassy dated 5 October were in conformity with the meetings in the previous year, and stated objections to any proposal that Queen Mary should be released or that she and her son should jointly rule. The Regent was travelling farther apart from Kirkcaldy and Maitland. Pitcairn passed through Berwick on 5 November on his homeward journey, bearing a Pass (still preserved in Pitfirrane Writs) by Queen Elizabeth for the Lord of Dunfermline and his suite dated 24 October 1569.

It would seem that Halkett of Pitfirrane as his principal vassal for a part of his lands was the leader of Pitcairn's retinue. The Pitfirrane writs also include a pass by Queen Elizabeth for Lord Dunfermline and suite dated 1 May 1570 and one by the Earl of Sussex dated at Berwick 7 May 1570 when Robert Pitcairn went on embassy again as aftermentioned.

Pitcairn was promoted to be Secretary of State on the deprivation of the brilliant Maitland of Lethington. As Secretary he was virtually always present at the meetings of the Privy Council, which corresponded to what is now called the Government of the day. The Secretary had a Depute in the office of Scribe and Clerk to the Privy Council. Pitcairn continued in the office of Secretary under the successive regencies of Lennox, Mar, and Morton and for a few years thereafter. His name is frequently found as a Witness to Crown Charters. He must have had some influence in the promotions of courtiers and the distribution of Royal favours, and much responsibility for the conduct of negotiations with England and foreign governments and with the politically powerful Scotsmen, and for the business of Parliament and Council.

The official evidence of the documentary work attended to by the Secretary was the use of the King's signet, a seal which had come to be under the authority of the Privy Council. Whereas Morton as Chancellor

was president of the Council with a general control of the judiciary and Crown vassalage and had charge of the great seal and responsibility for his staff's performance of the important legal and administrative work which was done in Chancery forms and by Royal Charters or feudal grants or writs usually in Latin, the Secretary was responsible for the execution by his Deputes of the clerical work of the Privy Council and had charge of the legal and administrative work and correspondence done under the King's signet where the Sovereign moved in his own affairs or intervened in the maintenance of justice, the documents usually being in the vernacular.

Thus for one thing, complaints and summonses in the Privy Council and the Court of Session were taken out through the Secretary's office under the signet; and his Clerks, of whom there were 38 in Pitcairn's time, who attended to this branch of the business, were the predecessors of the Writers to the Signet in Edinburgh. All the Clerks of the Secretary were nominated by him, and their duties were various and not confined to the business of Council and Session.

Meantime a virtual state of minor Civil War persisted with French ships reported to be lying off Dumbarton and English ships to be sent.

On 23 January 1570 the Regent Moray was shot in Linlithgow by a nephew of Archbishop Hamilton. As the head of the house of Hamilton was next in succession to the throne, his people disliked Moray as Regent. Moreover they were attached to Queen Mary, and the memory of Langside rankled.



Passport of Robert Pitcairn

### **(b) Lennox 1570-71**

The death of Moray gave Maitland an opportunity of resuming active public life.

In token of his temporary restoration, on 14 February 1570 the Lords, of whom Pitcairn was one, acquitted him of guilt in the murder of Darnley. Maitland, however, was opposed to Lennox receiving the position of Regent: he wanted Queen Mary back under suitable guarantees, and his purpose was reconciliation to this end.

In May 1570 Pitcairn was again sent to England, as the Lords desired Elizabeth's open declaration of maintenance of the King (i.e. their government in name of the child James) and of the common religion.

He had applied for a safe conduct for himself and twenty in train with bag and baggage. On the 16 of that month he wrote to Cecil announcing his arrival at London with instructions from the Nobles of Scotland and requesting an interview.

He was to declare the state of matters to Elizabeth, seek her support against the common enemies and receive her advice as to the appointment of a new Regent. On 20 May he wrote from Kingston to Cecil reminding him of the anxiety of the Lords for some certain resolution in the matters committed to him and of the necessity, of paying the £2,000 owing to the 200 harquebussiers who had served Regent Moray. The Lords desired to know from Elizabeth her pleasure about the future government of the realm.

There was trouble and much difference of opinion following on Regent Moray's death, and the Protestant Lords had not the means of combating their enemies without some assistance from Elizabeth. They needed money for the '*wageing*' of 500 horsemen and 1000 footmen, '*harquebuseris*'.

In a letter of 23 May 1570 the captive Queen Mary expresses to Queen Elizabeth her fears, with reference to Robert Pitcairn, '*that to these my just requests the coming of him who calls himself Abbot of Dunfermline may be very contrary, but I beg you to weigh their sufficiency and what a traitor merits coming from the side of a small number of perjured villains*'. It was very hard; but Mary was not to be the last to discover that a relatively small number of determined men can effect much in a revolution.

At this juncture Abbot George Durie showed himself to be still alive and still a supporter of his Queen and of the old faith.

On 12 June 1570 the laird of Craigmillar wrote to Cecil from Paris that the old Abbot of Dunfermline was coming home, being written for by his friends to take the lewm<sup>1</sup> from the young man who was lately Imbastur in England for the King. Previously on 30 April the Bishop of Ross, as Queen Mary's representative, had informed Cecil that the old Abbot of Dunfermline had written to him to procure a conduct to pass through England to Scotland with six horses bag and baggage.

The sad fact is that Queen Mary never had a good prospect of release from her captivity: but if she ever nearly had a chance, it was at the time of the Earl of Moray's death and in the succeeding months. Whatever Pitcairn and his principals might have desired, Cecil was master of her fate; and whatever the feelings of Cecil the man may have been, Cecil the statesman foresaw that the Sovereign of the United Kingdom of England and Scotland must be a protestant. Young James must be brought up a protestant free from the influence of his mother.

By this time the Earl of Lennox, father of Darnley and grandfather of James VI. was coming from England to Scotland to be Regent. In returning from Berwick, where he had met Lennox, James Melville met the Abbot of Dunfermline sent by the King's Lords to England and to meet Lennox in his passing by, which Pitcairn did, and carried the confidence of Lennox to Cecil. Melville's impression, as recollected in his old age, was that Pitcairn's chief commission was to desire the Queen of England to deliver the Queen of Scots to be kept by the King's Lords here at home.

It had been their attitude that she might return to Scotland to remain there honourably and quietly, but terms could not be arranged with Elizabeth who required the occupation of certain Castles in Scotland. Pitcairn by 31 May 1570 received a Passport from Queen Elizabeth, who had secretly opened her mind to him, authorising his return to Scotland. In a letter she certified that Pitcairn had diligently solicited the expedition of his charge and the preservation of amity between England and Scotland. There was some indefinite hankering by a minority in the Country after a compromise whereby Queen Mary and her son might have joint government. Meantime, with the assent of the Protestant Lords, English forces were carrying out

<sup>1</sup> Expose him for a scamp.

opposition to Queen Mary's supporters on the borders, and Scotland had the humiliation of an English army destroying the palace and town of Hamilton in the course of the military campaign which was assisted by the King's Lords.

Pitcairn, in London, was kept informed by Morton, in order that he might tell Elizabeth, how on Morton's showing, the people of Scotland were supporting the King's party. Concentration of attention on Kirkcaldy and Maitland tends to obscure the fact that the King's Lords had many powerful opponents at this period.

Their opposition was understandable but the return of Mary out of the hands of her English captors to her Scottish sovereignty was incapable of arrangement.

On 17 July 1570 the Earl of Lennox was appointed Regent at a meeting of the Lords of Privy Council (of whom Pitcairn was one) and others of the Nobility, Estates and Barons and Commissioners of Burghs.

This event confirmed Maitland in his withdrawal, and left Robert Pitcairn to continue as Secretary of State, although Maitland never gave up his claim to be secretary for life. Kirkcaldy of Grange was also with the Queen's party, as the Regent's party did not desire ever to have Queen Mary in Scotland.

In October the Abbot of Dunfermline (i.e. Pitcairn) is mentioned as being at Leith with the Regent's supporters as against the Queen's party in Edinburgh Castle. On 2 November 1570 Randolph asked Sussex for a safe-conduct and licence for post horses for the Lord of Dunfermline as he was being sent by Regent Lennox, notwithstanding Queen Mary's objections, again to commune with Queen Elizabeth, who for the sake of peace in Scotland was still toying with the idea of restoring Queen Mary on terms. Pitcairn carried with him the Regent's replies to Elizabeth's 34 articles.

Elizabeth spoke soothingly to him, but desired to see his more influential colleagues authorised to confer. He returned with a letter from her dated 7 December 1570, which, according to Buchanan's History, was on the subject of the restitution of Mary Queen of Scots and ended with: - "*and considering the good opinion Her Majesty hath conceived of the discretion and sincerity of the said Abbot Pitcairn she wishes him to be present with such as come for that purpose*".

Next month the Earl of Morton and the Clerk Register were joined with the Commendator of Dunfermline, Secretary, as Commissioners evidently along with other three Lords for conference and to treat with the English Queen upon the weighty affairs of the Kingdom of Scotland. They left on 5 February, a taxation of £12,000 having been voted for the expenses of the embassy. It is common knowledge that Elizabeth respected Morton's ability. They could not accept her proposals for '*a good agreement to be made*' for peace with the Queen's party and conditions for Mary's return to Scotland. A Memorandum was drawn up by Pitcairn in response to Elizabeth's desire to receive reasons for their conduct during the past years. To inform Elizabeth about the troubles in Scotland there is a letter from the Earl of Lennox dated at Edinburgh 22 January 1571 addressed to Lord Robert Pitcairn, Commendator of Dunfermline, Secretary of State, Ambassador from Scotland to the Court of Queen Elizabeth. The Scottish Commissioners had meetings with Elizabeth and her advisers from time to time and matters dragged on until on 8 April they received her permission to return home as Queen Mary had told Elizabeth that she would not recognise any agreement with the rebel Lords. A state of sporadic civil war continued, the headquarters of the Regent's party being in Leith while the Queen's party held Edinburgh Castle.

It is a minor historical curiosity, characteristic of the times, that a breach of the peace and assault in a Dunfermline Street, disposed of on the spot by the Provost John Wemyss of Pittencreeff, should have had a sequel which led to the whole matter engaging the attention of such eminent men as John Knox the great reformer, and Cecil, the famous Elizabethan statesmen.

John Kirkcaldy, a cousin of Sir William Kirkcaldy of Grange, on citation by the laird of Durie as Bailie of the Regality, went alone and unarmed to attend a Justice Court at Dunfermline on 11 December 1570 as one of the assize for the trial of certain persons accused of a slaughter: but George and Lowry Durie, brothers to the laird of Durie<sup>1</sup> with a servant Henry Seaton and accomplices attacked him without provocation as he was passing to the Kirk of Dunfermline... and the said George '*tucke him with his steekit neive (clenched fist) upon the face... as if he had been... ignoble, and they drew their swords and would have slain him wer not the Provost of Dunfermline come and put them fra him, upon auld feud*' ...

<sup>1</sup> And therefore all sons of Abbot George Dury.

Shortly afterwards Henry Seaton came to Edinburgh, and so mocked the servants of Grange that Grange sent some of them to Leith when he was embarking to return to Fife *'to have dung him with ane battone'* to recompense the shameful cuffing and misusing of his kinsman. Unfortunately however, Seaton was killed, and one of Grange's men was arrested. As the Regent's people were about to execute this man, Grange with an armed party went from Edinburgh Castle to the Tolbooth one dark evening and took him forth of their hands.

Next Sunday John Knox spoke *'ignominiously'* of Grange in his sermon, and thereupon Grange wrote a complaint to the Kirk Session of Edinburgh, and a letter to Cecil narrating the whole affair and soliciting Cecil's influence with the Regent's party, who might take action against him for this prison-breaking as for treason, a capital charge.

In both his letters Grange mentions the feud between the Duries and him and his friends for twenty years in respect of injuries done by the Duries *'besides the suspicion that that house was the occasion of my guidshire's death who lost his life and heritage for the love he bore to have these two realms in amity, as also when they rewrit the Court they took our lands and possessions'*.

In writing to Cecil, Grange adds that *'Robert Pitcairn now resident in England can testify that some of them had declared that there was to be no malice borne to me'*. Kirkcaldy was a brother-in-law of Robert and James Melville. His guidshire (father-in-law) was Sir Robert Melville of Raith. Pitcairn's uncle Abbot Durie had been the chief instigator of his execution in 1548 for treason as being privy to the murder of Cardinal Beaton, and being a protestant and pro-English. Abbot Durie was a cousin of the Cardinal, Kirkcaldy was one of his slayers. In Kirkcaldy's letter to Cecil he might well use Pitcairn's name because Dunfermline Regality Court was Pitcairn's Court and the Provost of Dunfermline was yearly chosen at the Burgh Head Court by his approval.

The capture of Dumbarton Castle from Queen Mary's supporters on 1 April 1571 strengthened the government of Regent Lennox and dimmed Queen Mary's prospects. There were attempts at temporary truces in the civil strife.

Secretary Pitcairn was with the Regent at Stirling during the Summer, and as one of the Clergy he attended a Parliament at Edinburgh on 28 August 1571 when forfeitures were pronounced against Hamiltons, Huntly, Grange and others. Thereafter Regent Lennox was killed at Stirling on 4 September in a bungled coup d'état by the Queen's Lords whose leaders did not intend his death, but Lord Claud Hamilton was there with reckless subordinates, and it was only five months since the cruel hanging of Archbishop Hamilton after Dumbarton.



Dunbarton Castle

*The castle is situated on a rock of basalt, 240 feet high. From the earliest times it has been a fortress; in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries it was of the greatest importance, for it guarded the alternative route by sea to France, and when the North Sea was commanded by the English, fleet its retention by the Scots was absolutely essential if communication with France was to be maintained. The existing buildings are of no great antiquity or architectural merit. Dumbarton is one of the four national fortresses in which by the terms of the Treaty of Union a garrison must be maintained.*

### **(c) Mar 1571-72**

The Earl of Mar was made Regent, but Edinburgh Castle was still holding out for the Queen's party. Pitcairn as one of the Regents' party was at Leith; and in November 1571 Morton, he and the Clerk Register were appointed Commissioners to meet Lord Hunsdon at Berwick with request for money for soldiers' pay and other 500 soldiers to be sent until the English forces came. On 5 December they made a report of their proceedings with Lord Hunsdon, Governor of Berwick, with which they felt satisfied. They had been at Berwick by 22 November to confer regarding the possibility of peace with the defenders of Edinburgh Castle and of quieting the troubles and the need for soldiers from England and money for action against the Castle. The English government had announced that all hope of Queen Mary's return to power must be considered at an end.

In the end of January Elizabeth was desiring Lethington and Dunfermline to agree about the Secretaryship, the former to give up but the latter might yield some of the profits to him. It was thought that Morton, Lindsay, Dunfermline and Magill and others would never agree with the other party '*as they have reaped the profit of forfeitures and enjoy their opponents' lands goods and offices*'.

On 13 Janry 1572 David Ferguson, Minister of Dunfermline, preached his famous sermon at Leith before Regent Mar and the Nobility, at the time of the General Assembly. In the course of his sermon he said - '*For this day Christ is specilzelt amang us quhil yt quhilk (while that which) aucht to mantene the ministerie of the Kirk and the poor is given to profane men, flattereris in Court, ruffianes, and hyrelingis: the pure (poor) in the meane tyme oppressit with hounger, the Kirkis and tempilis decaying for laik of ministeris and uphalding, and the schuilis utterlie neglectit and oversene. Ar not thir thingis so?*' There is practically no doubt that Robert Pitcairn was one of the congregation who heard that sermon. It was not aimed at him personally or particularly.

The Dunfermline Abbey lands rights had been conveyed to Richardson, the Royal Treasurer, under Queen Mary's letter from Dumbarton in 1563; but ten days after the sermon the Commissioners of the Kirk assigned half to the King's house and half to the Ministerie of the wheat barley etc derivable as '*the thirds*' out of the annual fruits (or rents payable in kind) of Dunfermline Abbey.

Concurrently Pitcairn was on Committee of Parliament on the affairs of the Church from 1571 to 1578 when the Second Book of Discipline was prepared. The struggle between Crown and Kirk lay in the future.

The General Assembly had well-founded complaint about appropriation of the Church property and the hardships of Parish Ministers.

On 1st February 1572, the Earl of Mar being Regent, took place the Concordat of Leith between a Committee of six from the Convention of Protestant Clergy and a Committee of six from the Privy council, of whom Robert Pitcairn was one, whereby, although the Ministers got little more than scant satisfaction, ecclesiastical policy was framed which preserved the titles of Archbishop, Bishop, Abbot and Prior but endeavoured to ensure that Church benefices when vacant should not be filled until suitable provision was made for the Ministers. Morton, who had previously procured the Archbishopric of Glasgow, took advantage of this Concordat by appointing to vacancies his own nominees, as pensioners, the main part of the income of the benefices going to himself. In 1575 on that footing he appointed Patrick Adamson as Archbishop of St Andrews. It is only fair to add that apparently much of the money was used to provide the sinews of war: but simony became general.

Within a few years Rev. Andrew Melville was to raise the question of the scriptural authority for Episcopacy, and the General Assembly demanded abolition of Episcopacy and titles in 1578.

Presbyteries began to be established in 1581. Thus satisfactory opportunity never occurred for uniformity of Church government throughout the United Kingdom.

Pitcairn was still at Leith with the others while fighting took place with the Queen's party holding Edinburgh Castle, with whom Pitcairn unsuccessfully negotiated. In April 1572 he was one of a Committee to whom Regent Mar referred Articles from Queen Elizabeth for reconciliation between the Queen's party and the King's party. Morton, Ruthven, Dunfermline and Magill were authorised to have daily conference with the Castle party but they were described as '*hinderers*'.

On 28 Oct 1572, the day on which the Regent Mar died, notes were given to Killigrew, the English ambassador, at Edinburgh, by Robert Pitcairn in name of the Regent and Lord Morton, as to the future Government of Scotland, custody of Edinburgh Castle etc.

There was no mercy now for poor Queen Mary in all this. The Regent's Lords had refused to take her from Queen Elizabeth and bring her to trial. Morton had ravaged the lands of her party. On 3 November 1572 a Conference of the King's party and Queen's party took place at Perth, Robert Pitcairn being one of those present, but it did not lead to anything.



**(d) Morton 1572-78**



Earl of Morton

*James Douglas, fourth Earl of Morton, was one of the original Lords of the Congregation. He became Lord Chancellor in 1563, and was a party to the murder of Rizzio; on Mary's abdication he became a member of the Council of Regency. Though he was the Regent Mary's chief adviser and though he virtually controlled Scotland after Moray's death he did not become Regent till 1572. He was driven from office in 1578, but regained his position a few months later. In 1581, however, he was accused of being responsible for the murder of Darnley and was executed.*

After a Convention and a Parliament both attended by Pitcairn, on 24 November 1572 in Edinburgh Morton was appointed Regent. On the same day John Knox died.

At Perth on 23 February 1573 Secretary Pitcairn was a Commissioner on the pacification to end the Civil War as involving the Earl of Huntly and the Hamiltons. Parties were to accept the government of the Regent.

Kirkcaldy of Grange and Maitland of Lethington, who would not accept it, were weakened as a party. In April 1573 the Regent Morton procured the surrender of Edinburgh Castle with the help of English artillery. Maitland died, and the valiant Kirkcaldy was executed. In youth he had escaped from Mont St Michael but now he could not escape from the implacable James Douglas, Earl of Morton, and his clamant supporters.

Robert Melville, from the Castle, was examined 19 October before the Commendator of Dunfermline and others.

On 13 October 1573, before the Regent and Lords Secret Council, including Robert Pitcairn, was brought the testimony by John Henderson, Master of the Grammar School (within the Abbey) Dunfermline, against David Ferguson, Minister, and John Douglas, (Prior) Archbishop of St Andrews (a nominee of the Regent Morton holding the Archbishopric for him in consideration of a yearly pension), because David Ferguson by the Archbishop's command had charged John Henderson to abstain from all further teaching within the said school in time coming. Henderson denied the jurisdiction of the Minister and Archbishop to suspend him, the Abbot of Dunfermline being patron from whom he and his predecessors held office. This plea was upheld, and the Archbishop and Minister were discharged of so proceeding. The schoolmaster also denied any doubt about his religious persuasion: but the interest of the case lies in the evidence it affords that the school referred to was the Grammar School for the boys of Dunfermline provided in pre-Reformation days by the Monastery for the town and not merely a school inside the Monastery for the instruction of novices. The description in the report of the School as being within' the Abbey need not deter us. In the Latin documents of the period the word 'infra' was used as denoting within' or 'below' or 'at' or 'near', as circumstances required.

In March 1574 Rev. John Davidson had to appear before the Regent and Council to answer for political opinions he had expressed in a book of which he was author. Robert Pitcairn became his surety. John Davidson was sometimes described as being a '*servitor*' of the Commendator.

In 1575-6 Mr George Young, servant to the Lord Abbot of Dunfermline, was with consent of the General Assembly employed by Bassandyne & Arbuthnot, printers, in correcting the proof sheets of the first edition of the Geneva translation of the English bible ever printed in Scotland.

In June 1574 Robert Pitcairn's name is included in a list of persons recommended by the Regent as suitable to receive English pensions.

By September 1575 Killigrew, the English Ambassador, was dealing with questions propounded to him by Pitcairn and Magill, and in the same month Secretary Pitcairn was adviser to Morton and Patrick Lindsay as Commissioners meeting at Foulden with English Commissioners for settlement of disorders on the borders.

In 1577, at the age of 57, Robert Pitcairn married Euphame Murray, relict of Robert Stewart of Rosyth, the laird whose burial in Dunfermline Abbey Kirk was the subject of censure, at the instance of Rev. David Ferguson, in the General Assembly in April 1577 as the Assembly were rightly against burials in Churches. Euphame was daughter of Sir William Murray of Tullibardine and thus a niece of James Murray of Perdewis, Dunfermline.

After Robert Pitcairn's death she married Sir Patrick Gray of Invergowrie in 1589 and she survived until 1596.

A statement in Calderwood's History gives a probably erroneous impression of something clandestine about Robert Pitcairn's marriage. James Blaikwood, Reader at Saline near Dunfermline, was condemned by the General Assembly for celebrating the marriage without testimonial of the Minister of the Parish where they made residence. Such a testimonial was not a legal prerequisite to a valid marriage and Mr Blaikwood may have thought that it was scarcely necessary in the case of such well-known persons, or he may simply have been ignorant that the General Assembly on 27 December 1565 had made an act regarding it. The General Assembly was then a comparatively small body seeking to establish its existence.

Such cases were characteristic of the times, and it was also characteristic of the times that a man would marry in his old age and that a widow would

marry again shortly after her husband's death. If she possessed property, she might have to find a new husband in self-protection.

There is only tradition for it, but it is generally believed that Robert Pitcairn frequently resided in the House known for centuries as the Abbot's House in Maygate, Dunfermline, adjoining the Abbey, and that he built it or reconstructed it. The well-known inscription over the door is: -

Sen vord is thrall and thocht is free  
Keip veill thy tonge I counsell the.

Abbot Pitcairn House

Kirkcaldy of Grange said: *-The manner of their proceeding in the Reformation is this. They pull down all manner of Friaries and some Abbeyes which willingly receive not the Reformation'.*

Thus the Abbot's House, if, as some think, it had been a Friars' house, may have required reconstruction. On the one hand, some people surmise that the Abbot's house in Maygate was the Abbot's residence from early times. On the other hand, the traditional association of Robert Pitcairn with the building and occupancy of it is so strong as to lend weight to the possibility that before the Reformation, while the Monastery was still in active existence, the Abbot, when in Dunfermline, lived in the Palace, which, during the reigns of the Stewart Kings, apparently received only intermittent visits from Royalty. After King James VI became a family man, the Palace in Dunfermline came to be regarded by him as his family home, but by that time he had acquired the Abbey and its possessions.

From Yester Writs 705, 762, 765 and 1163 there is some reason to think that the title to the subjects then ruinous and occupied by Anthony Rutherford, a servitor of Abbot Pitcairn, and since known as the Abbot's House, was at the time of the Reformation vested in the name of Sir John Boiswell, Sacrist and Monk of the Monastery, by licence of Abbot Durie although contrary to monastic vow. In 1561 he gifted them to his cousin, whose family in 1570 sold them to James Murray of Perdewis, who repaired or rebuilt the house. James Murray was an old friend of Robert Pitcairn and uncle of Pitcairn's wife. It is possible that when in Dunfermline previous to his marriage, Robert Pitcairn may have been accommodated in rooms in the Palace, but that, from his marriage the Dunfermline home of his wife and himself may have been this house, occupied by them under arrangement with James Murray. By the description in the writs these subjects on the South side of Maygate were bounded on the South by the kirkyard as at present and on the East by a road passing under the wall of the Monastery. Such a road existed at this point until it was closed in 1790.

As a judge in the Court of Session and a member of the Privy Council, and as Secretary, Pitcairn must, most of his time have resided in his house in Edinburgh subject to absences when on embassy or when the Court was at Stirling or elsewhere. He was regarded as domiciled in Edinburgh at the date of his death.

In regard to the condition of Dunfermline Abbey buildings, one notes that in 1577 a resignation of certain lands into the hands of the Commendator for new infeftment took place in the Inner Hall of the Monastery. Monks remained in residence after the Reformation.



**Dunfermline Abbey.**

## CHAPTER IV

### AFTER THE REGENCIES - JAMES VI

#### TO THE RAID OF RUTHVEN 1578-82

Throughout the spring of 1578 Pitcairn, the Secretary, and Tullibardine, the Comptroller, were associated with other nobles, including Athol and Argyll and Alexander Erskine, Master of Mar, in a growing intrigue against Morton. They could never have done without Morton's resoluteness but they could now do without his selfish ruthlessness. Robert Pitcairn was one of the Lords present at a meeting in the end of February 1578, the boy King presiding, when Morton found it necessary to resign. Pitcairn was one of the twelve Lords to whom affairs were then committed. Shortly, however, Morton outwitted his opponents and came back for a time. The year was one of anxiety for the young King. Civil war was narrowly averted. By 26 April he was taken from the custody of Alexander Erskine and given to the new Earl of Mar for retention in Stirling Castle, with the secret connivance of Morton. There exists a letter from Stirling dated 28 April 1578 sent to the Laird of Craigmillar desiring his attendance with retainers. It is signed by R Dunfermline, Newbotle, Athole, Caithness, and Herries. Fortunately King James liked the young Earl of Mar. Morton joined him by 28 May. A new Council was formed. Morton was sworn in again, to have the foremost place although no longer Regent. Pitcairn was one of the new Council. He voted in the majority for Morton's reinstatement: and he was one of the Scottish Lords noted by the English Ambassador as '*bein content*'.

The Lords by 26 July again constituted a new Council, Robert Pitcairn being retained as Secretary, although he was in England on embassy at that date. On 28 July 1578 a letter was sent to the Laird of Pitfirrane, Dunfermline, from King James, then a youth, desiring the laird to attend him with his friends, servants and dependents at Stirling in array of war, as some of the Nobility and others were convening in arms apparently to trouble the present estate. The letter was signed by James and countersigned by George Buchanan, Keeper of the Privy Seal. Similar letters were sent to others.



QUEEN ELIZABETH

The hostile parties had resorted to arms, and the forces did not disperse until after 13th August 1578 when a reconciliation was effected.

Meantime at a meeting of the Privy Council at Stirling on 17 June 1578, the King and Morton being present, Robert Pitcairn, Secretary, in respect of his ability and experience, was sent as Ambassador to the Queen of England as his *Hieness*<sup>1</sup> had promised, to give thanks for her favour and goodwill in his younger age, to intimate that the King had taken the government into his own hands, to confirm and renew peace and amity, to declare justice in the marches, to show His Majesty's good mind to the English, to crave his right of succession to the *Lox* lands in England, and enquire about his grand- mother's Will, and to make a further league for mutual defence, for life. Some of the Lords protested against this embassy, but by next month we find the *Abbot of Dunfermline*<sup>1</sup> lodging at Ware. The Lord Mayor of London had to find lodging for him and his train. On 25 July he had an audience first with Queen Elizabeth and then with her Council. Thereafter he followed the Queen's Court into Essex and was at Court on 28 July and in the afternoon conferred with Elizabeth and her Council; and he was to be at the Court next day after dinner to receive his dispatch and take leave of Her Majesty, which he did, speaking with the Council and then with the Queen. His departure was from Audley End. Postes were required for certain gentlemen of his train. On 26 August Pitcairn reported the result to the King and Council at Stirling and resumed place as Secretary. It was recorded *ad perpetuam rei memoriam*<sup>1</sup> that he had truly honestly and diligently performed and discharged his charge.

From 22 to 29 December 1578 a Conference was held at Stirling Castle 'in the outer high chamber direct above the King's inner hall' by Commissioners of Kirk and State, including Robert Dunfermline, in regard to the policy of the Kirk: but this conference was a device by the Lords of the Articles for shelving most of the Second Book of Discipline which had been approved by the General Assembly in April 1578, thus balancing the civil jurisdiction against the spiritual.

In 1579-80 Pitcairn was much occupied in dealing with Queen Elizabeth's representatives regarding Border Causes.

<sup>1</sup> To the perpetual recollection of this matter.

In March 1580 he is noted as being of great credit with the Privy Council and as one of those who had been recommended by Morton for a pension from England. Tullibardine and he were thought to be still friends and allies of Morton, but by 28 April he was one of the Lords who again complained to the King against Morton. Meantime he was writing to England warning them that there was danger to the peace of the realm on the part of the favourite Lennox and requesting money from Queen Elizabeth to be bestowed on King James, who needs trusty Counsellors about him and a guard for his person. These several topics could not receive attention. By May, rumour had it that Dunfermline and Tullibardine and others were to be removed and Morton to be given the chief place: that Dunfermline was ingratiating himself with the favourite Lennox. He retained his office, but he was not one of those on the trial of Morton.

By the end of 1580 Morton's ascendancy was over and James VI, aged 14, continued nominally acting as King. The date of Morton's execution was 2 June 1581.

In the following month Pitcairn was a member of a commission to hear and report to the King upon the suit of Sir James Balfour, the famous lawyer and infamous politician who had inside knowledge of many of the plots, including the murder of Darnley, for being accessory to which Morton had now been condemned.

In 1574 Robert Pitcairn as Commendator of Dunfermline Abbey gave over the Musselburgh territory thereof to Earl Morton, who thus apparently acquired the heritable office of Bailie of the Regality of Dunfermline in so far as applicable to the Abbot's jurisdiction South of the Forth: with the emoluments attached thereto. After his execution, King on 3rd June 1581 signed a document presenting John Pitcairn to that office.

The efficacy of many such grants depended upon the permanency of the party in power at the time.

On 15 November 1580 the Commendator and Council appointed David Durie who previously had a Tack to the office of Bailie of the Regality, presumably North of the Forth, which he held until 1596 he resigned it into the hands of Ann Queen of James VI for new provision to be made to Alexander Seton, who became Lord Dunfermline.

The Musselburgh part of the Abbey possessions was reserved and became the property of Sir John Maitland of Thirlestane, Vice-Chancellor, who succeeded Robert Pitcairn as Secretary.

In 1579 Robert Pitcairn was one of the Lords Privy Council before whom Rev. David Ferguson appeared upon a complaint by Alexander Stevin, Reader at Beath, to the effect that as Commissioner for the Kirk in West Fife he had deposed Stevin and had threatened to communicate him for subscribing papers relating to some lands belonging to the Abbey of Dunfermline as one of the Convent thereof. Ferguson pleaded that it was a Church matter and that the Privy Council were incompetent judges: but it was decided that the matter was civil, and that Stevin should be reinstated.

This action, like the actions as to the Church repairs and the Grammar School, may be regarded as a test case to procure an authoritative ruling about the position of parties under the change of Church to protestantism. Pitcairn was a member of David Fergusson's flock, having a 'heigh seat in Dunfermline Church, as Rev. Mr Webster has mentioned in his recent book.

In August 1579 Robert Pitcairn, designed as Moderator of Dunfermline, Secretary, and Archdeacon of St Andrews, Conservator of the Privileges of the University of St Andrews, was one of the Commissioners on the subject of Reformation of the Universities moved to the King and Council by the General Assembly, with special reference to St Andrews. Pitcairn had a voice in the appointment of Professor St Andrews. The University of St Andrews was reorganised. Andrew Wille, who was Principal of Glasgow College, became Principal of Mary's in St Andrews in 1580. At Aberdeen University also, reforms were soon afterwards introduced.

In 1579 Pitcairn was one of the King's Commissioners for sighting the Lennox family papers. King James was always vainly seeking his paternal fortune.

Chosen by the Huntly side, in April 1580, Robert Pitcairn was one of the Arbiters between the families and adherents of Gordon and Forbes, for settlement of a long-standing feud.

In October of the same year, Morton and he signed a warrant for the trial of Arthur Hamilton of Bothwellhaugh, for the murder of Regent Moray, but evidently they had not got hold of the guilty man.

In March 1581 Pitcairn was one of the Lords who became Cautioners to the Town Council of Edinburgh for repayment of 1000 merks (£6,666.13.4) advanced by the Council to the King's finances. His name is attached to the Confession of Faith subscribed by King and his household at Edinburgh 28 January 1581.

On 16 June 1582 he was one of the Assessors with the Lord Justice General in the trial of George Hume of Spott who was accused of art and part in the murder of Darnley but was acquitted.

## CHAPTER V

### RAID OF RUTHVEN

In Sept 1579 Esme Stuart d'Aubigny had landed in Scotland. He was a cousin of Darnley, King James's late father; he was an attractive false man, and soon became a great favourite with James, who made him Duke of Lennox and gave him the rich Abbey of Arbroath. The undisclosed aim of this man was to restore Queen Mary and the Catholic religion, but after the Raid of Ruthven, about to be mentioned, he went to France and shortly died.

James Stewart, Captain of the Guard, another favourite, was made Earl of Arran. Concurrently with his promotion, to the displeasure of Regent Morton, the Lords, including Robert Pitcairn, on 24 September 1581 advised the King to appoint a Lord High Chamberlain with 24 gentlemen in the Chamber. The King appointed Arran.

Eventually, to rescue King James from the influence of these two favourites and because of the Ministers' fears of a Jesuit plot as exposed by Rev. John Durie, a number of the Lords, of whom Robert Pitcairn was one, signed a secret Bond and thereafter in August 1582 and held the King at Ruthven Castle near Perth, a seat of the Earl of Gowrie, where he had been hunting. This was called the Raid of Ruthven and was approved by the preachers. The young King had intended going to Dundee, and the Lords were to present a Petition to him there, but they heard that his favourites were about to join him. James was at Stirling, then at

Holyrood and at Falkland but he felt himself to be under restraint. Robert Pitcairn remained Secretary and Tullibardine Comptroller, and in April 1583 Pitcairn was one of the Assessors to the Treasury. The Ruthven Lords held power for about ten months. They needed money but Queen Elizabeth did not contribute. They had a meeting with the Ministers in Edinburgh on 17 December, Pitcairn being one of the Lords present. James, aged 17, shook himself free from them about the end of June 1583 by going with Colonel William Stewart, the Captain of his guard, from Falkland to St Andrews Castle. He had been in Dunfermline before going to Falkland. Most of the authors of the Ruthven Raid were discountenanced by him and soon fled out of the country. The Commendator of Dunfermline, as Secretary, appears to have been residing at Lochleven while the King was at Falkland. The castle there belonged to the Crown. The laird of Lochleven was one of the Ruthven raiders.

Pitcairn was thus one of the first of the Lords to come to the King at St Andrews.

Sir James Melville says: - 'The said Abbot behaved himself with great dissimulation extolling His Majesty's enterprise..though he was a special doer for the contrary party..... He ever ~~appeared~~ <sup>endeavoured</sup> to favour the King's intention and his crafty counsel was followe

Thus he remained on the King's Council and continued to attend until 23 August 1583 when his attendances ceased and John Maitland was made Secretary in succession to him. The last entry of his name in the Sederunt of the Court of Session is on 24 July 1583. Stewart, the so-called Earl of Arran, had re-appeared at Court and dominated James for the next two years, a period of revenge upon Arran's opponents and also of high-handed measures against Presbyterianism.

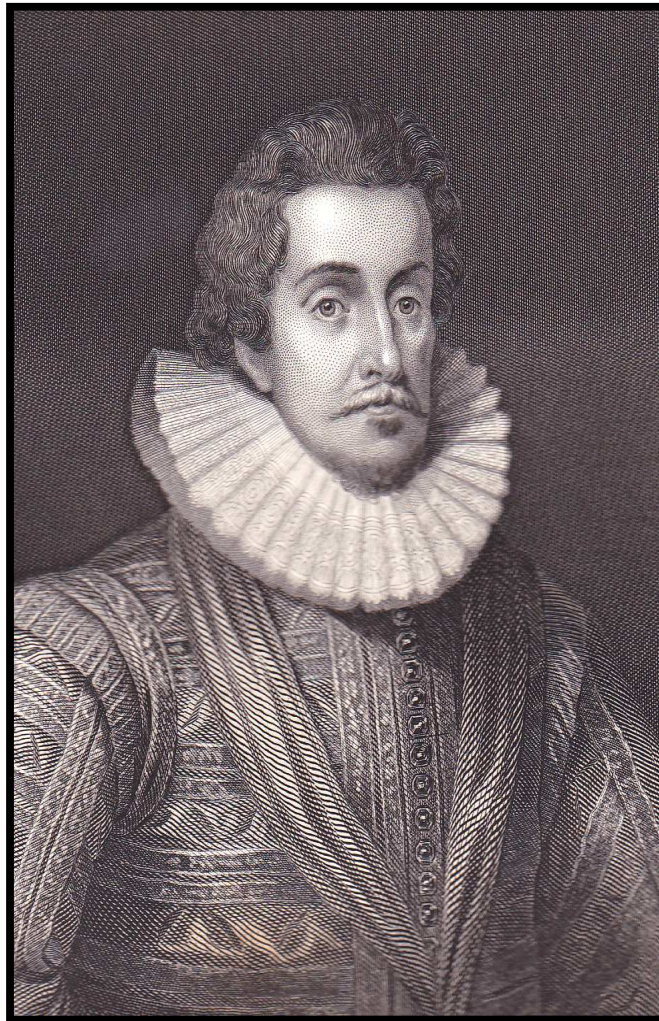
In an enthusiasm inspired by John Durie, the Church had regarded the Raid of Ruthven as a rescue of protestantism from no ordinary danger, but the harmony between Church and State had been short-lived.

Queen Elizabeth was displeased because King James did not reconcile the Lords of the Ruthven Raid. Walsyngham told James that, when he had their company, those who were about him were the best and most religious sort of the Nobility. Sir James Melville refused to accept from King James the office of Secretary, as James had promised to him that the Ruthven Raid Lords would not be forfeited.



## CHAPTER VI

### 1583-84 JAMES VI AFTER THE RAID OF RUTHVEN THE THIRTY PIECES OF GOLD; THE COMMENDATOR'S LAST DAYS



JAMES VI

*Born 19th Jun, 1566; became King 24th July, 1567; assumed the government 8th March, 1578; married Anne of Denmark 24th November, 1589; became King of Great Britain and Ireland 24th March, 1603; died 27th March, 1625.*

Five days after the reappearance at Court of the Earl of Arran, namely on 8 August 1583, the English Ambassador to London from Edinburgh that a purse of gold was given by the Comdator of Dunfermline to Colonel Stewart to procure favour for the King. Stewart gave the gold, thirty £4 pieces, to the King and the King commanded them to be given to the guards, who bored holes and wore pieces in their hats, in the fields as the King passed to Falkland. A story is told by Sir James Melville. It was part of King James's grievance that at the Raid of Ruthven he had been parted from his guard.

Three years previously, on account of rumours, and fears by James of kidnapping, a guard was appointed under command of Captain James Stewart of Ochiltree brother-in-law of John Knokle had seen service in France, Sweden and Russia and was to have murdered over the King, who, as already stated, made him Earl of Arran. By January 1583 he was succeeded as Captain of the King's guard by Colonel William Stewart (later Lord Pittenweem), likewise a soldier of fortune who had served abroad. He it was who got James out of the hands of the Ruthvards by taking him from Falkland to St Andrews on 27 June 1583. Naturally, James liked him, and Pitcairn cultivated him. They and others were in bond against Arran. In 1583 the King was extremely impecunious. He was owing arrears of pay to his domestic servants and was existing on a very low scale. Gowrie as Treasurer had a claim against the Crown for £50,000 advanced out of his own resources. A convention in April agreed to a levy of £100,000 for James to pay his debts, but restricted it to £20,000. James got from England two chains of gold worth £200 and £333:6:8 and 2000 marks made available to the King through Colonel Stewart to account of to His Majesty might give for the expenses of the guard. The pay of the guard being in arrear, Pitcairn by request, or on his own initiative, in August advanced the thirty coins foresaid out of his own repository. The coins may already have been bored and strung on to a chain while in his possession, as was common. The members of the guard may have been required to exhibit the coins on their hats to show the King that the money had duly reached them.

Having been concerned in the Raid of Ruthven, Robert Pitcairn by 8 August 1583 was apprehensive of imprisonment and his life. He knew Colonel Stewart's influence with the King and the King's need for money to pay his guard. The King was reported as giving very good countenance.

By 27 August, however, four days after Pitcairn's last attendance in the Privy Council, the English Ambassador is found reporting that Dunfermline has been taken by the guard, under Colonel Stewart at command of the King, and committed to Ward in the Castle of Lochleven on a charge of sundry treasons against the King's person and estate.

On 19 September 1583 Sir Francis Walsyngham, at the desire of Dunfermline, writes to King James begging his discharge from imprisonment in consideration of his long and faithful services and as the moistness of the place where he is affects his health, he being weak with age; and by 4 October James replies from Falkland that he has set the Abbot of Dunfermline at liberty according to his request. He was released on his own caution. Calderwood says the date was 23 September and that this freedom was conditional upon his remaining in Dunfermline and five or six miles about it under pain of £10,000. If such condition was imposed, it was soon relaxed, as Robert Pitcairn was a witness to Crown Charters signed at Stirling on 28 October and at Holyrood on 23 November 1583 and 10 January and 4 and 19 March 1584. It was said that he had confessed all the secrets of the action of Ruthven.

On 20 October Bowes reported him as continuing quietly at home. Pitcairn certainly was under a cloud. Spottiswoode says he fled to England and then returned to Dunfermline. The visit to England must have been about December 1583, because by 11 January 1584 the English Ambassador here could report that Dunfermline had returned to Court and was graciously entertained by the King. Obviously he was only doing some routine duties.

On 5 April 1584 there is an entry instructing the customs on coal bought from Sir George Halkett of Pitfirrane and exported from Limekilns to be paid to the tacksman of Customs or to Robert Commendator of Dunfermline.

The trouble was not over, however. Gowrie was beheaded on 2 May 1584. James would not now require to repay him his large over-expended balance; but Gowrie had been implicated in some further plotting.

Rev. Andrew Melville and other Ministers fled to Berwick at this time on account of difference with the King about the respective jurisdictions of the Civil and Church Courts, but Pitcairn was now beyond having any part in such affairs.

The position of Robert Pitcairn now was that the treason charge arising out of his participation in the Raid of Ruthven still hung over his head. King

James's resentment smouldered and could quickly flare into flame by his own reflections or at the instigation of his favorites. Pitcairn had done no wrong. The activities to which he had been employed were for the King's own good and for the better government of the Country as well as for protestantism, but it was easy to have him charged, convicted and executed for treason. James, as already noted, was in need of money and his adviser Colonel Stewart, who was befriending Pitcairn and was himself successfully pursuing a promising career, was one of the aspirants to get something substantial out of Dunfermline Abbey. Moreover the French Agent in Scotland professed to Queen Mary that he had obtained from James a promise of the death of Pitcairn, who had been opponent for so many years at the Court of Queen Elizabeth and had been active with the English Ambassador in Scotland in frustrating French endeavors with her cognisance which are associated with the name of the Earl of Holt for the conversion of her son and the securing of the Kingdom to the Catholic interests. In the whole circumstances Pitcairn could be the victim of something in the nature of blackmail.

According to the correspondence of the English Embassy, Colonel Stewart was professing great friendship to Pitcairn and was looking to be rewarded, but Dunfermline's friends were persuaded that he would not dismember his Abbey.

Before delivery of the Abbot, Dunfermline's brother had promised money to Colonel Stewart but now (11 October 1583) he would not pay and Dunfermline may be brought into new troubles. The Colonel had sought for a large portion of the Abbey but the Abbot preferred to stand to his trial and not purchase his release so dearly.

Lady Ferniehairst wrote to Queen Mary on 22 Oct 1583 that Dunfermline was at liberty by Colonel Stewart's name for 10,000 merks he had paid to the said Colonel and should entertain 'men of war for the King'.

By 11 January 1584 Bowes learned that Colonel Stewart was not feeling satisfied by Dunfermline for befriending him.

On 5 April he said that Crawford had taken Dunfermline and his cause into his defence, otherwise Dunfermline had been urged to have followed others and to have sought foreign nations.

Charge was given for apprehension of Dunfermline by 15 June 1584 notwithstanding that he had licence to depart from the country; and being forewarned of the intent of the advisers whom he knew to aim at his life, he embarked secretly at Burntisland and having the wind fair-departed towards the low countries, preventing his enemies who the same day had procured order for his stay and committing.

The next note is that *'upon the 12 September 1584 the Abbot of Dunfermline came out of Flanders sick, with the Colonel's wife; he obtained licence to remain in Limekilns'*. Evidently Col. Stewart first wife, Eric widow of the Count Manderscheidt, was coming from the Netherlands to Scotland to join her husband and accompanied Robert Pitcairn on his homeward voyage. She received conjoined rights with her husband in some Crown Charter during the ensuing few years but she did not live long. Pitcairn's own wife may have remained in Scotland to look after their interests, especially as there was quite a scramble for his Abbacy and possessions. She had properties of her own and a family by her first husband. Limekilns and Gellet in Dunfermline Parish belonged to him, apparently with a manor place. The initials of Robert Pitcairn and his wife Euphemia Murray are on his coat of arms on the building now known as Old Vault at Limekilns.<sup>1</sup>

He died on 18 October 1584 and was buried in Dunfermline Abbey.

During Pitcairn's lifetime the new Arran, the King's favourite, had promised the Commendatorship to the ruthless Master of Gray who had won the King's favour. He received it.

In 1585, according to an English agent, there was a prospect that the corpse of Dunfermline would be taken up and forfeited at the next Parliament, but this barbarous practice was not followed in his case. The object of the procedure would have been to forfeit his means and estate to the King (and his favourites).

It is interesting to remark that the uncle of Robert Pitcairn's wife, James Murray of Perdewis, who is also buried in Dunfermline Abbey, was forfeited on 22 August 1584 for his share in the Raid of Ruthven, but the sentence remained inoperative on account of the fall from power of the Earl of Arran. Sir William Murray of Tullibardine had predeceased.

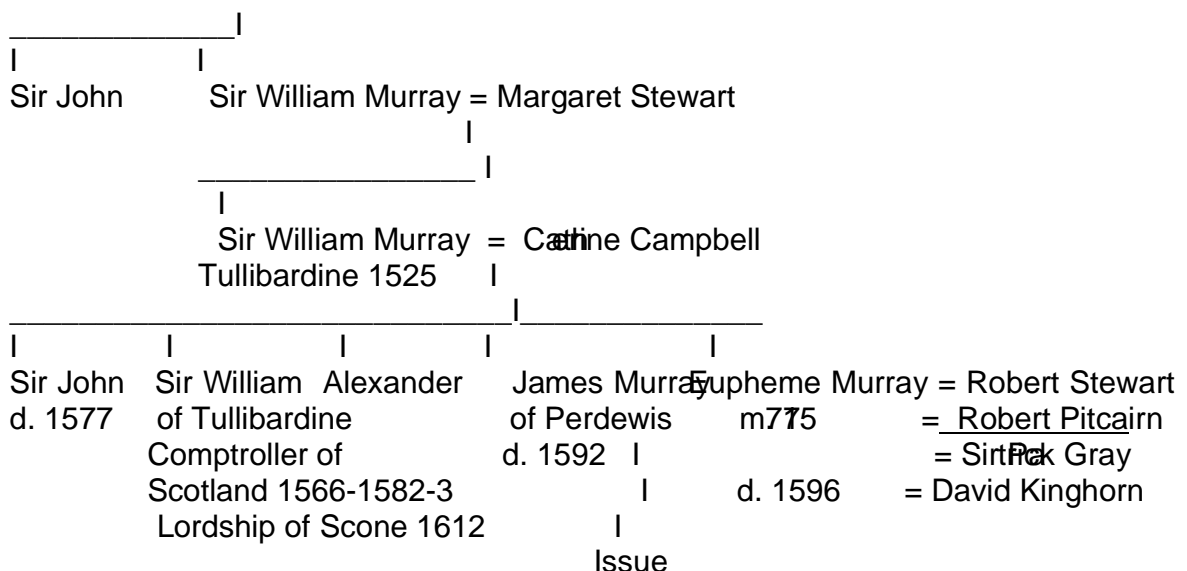
<sup>1</sup> Now known as the King's cellar.

Robert Pitcairn died childless and intestate. His executrix was Agnes Pitcairn, his eldest brother's daughter, wife of John Phin, a burghess of Burntisland. The net total amount of his moveable estate was nearly £17,000. His servant John Davidson had in his hands about £400 in money, also 'silver work to a considerable value, and his clothes etc valued at £200. It appears that his household furniture may have been deemed to belong to his wife.

By far the most part of his fortune consisted of rents and teinds outstanding due by Dunfermline Abbey tenants and others. His widow received one half and his next-of-kin the other half. His outstanding debts consisted of £15 owing to John Dickson, Apothecary, Edinburgh, for drugs etc. in the time of his sickness, and one year's wages to twelve servants most of whom were males, presumably including clerks.

The silver-work in his possession may have been gifts which, in accordance with Court etiquette, he would receive from Queen Elizabeth on leaving London at the conclusion of each of his missions.

Sir William Murray  
of Tullibardine I



## CHAPTER VII

### DUNFERMLINE ABBEY

To the end of Robert Pitcairn's life, the old Monastery of Dunfermline still existed to some extent. As Commendator he compounded with the members for portion and petie commonis at £50 Scots per annum with 20/- for coals and continued occupation of chamber and yard.

In January 1584, for example he signed a document at Dunfermline with consent of the Convent and signed by seven members thereof.

On 11 April 1584 the Privy Council ordered six members of the Monastery to sign a Tack which the Commendator had signed in favour of certain kindly tenants, i.e. members of the families who according to the Abbey Rental had possessed their lands from of old without title-deeds. In 1585 there was a gift under the Privy Seal to John Gib, one of the varlets of the King's Chamber, of the office of Keeper of our place and yairds of Dunfermline as possessed by Robert Pitcairn and the late monks, except the yairds possessed by the monks presently in life;

On 11th December 1584 there is a narrative that on the death of Robert Pitcairn the King resolved to apply the fruits of Dunfermline Abbey to the support of his own house and estate and appointed John Fenton, Comptroller Clerk, as yconomus and Chamberlain of the Abbey as to two thirds and the Collector General as to one third.

The young James VI seems to have bitterly remembered that in 1578 Pitcairn was one of Morton's Lords concerned with having James taken out of the Castle of Stirling from the care of his guardian the Master of Mar, because soon after Pitcairn's death, on a recital of his having been suspected of that treasonable fact and other treasons thereafter (i.e. Raid of Ruthven presumably) and of his having made many fraudulent and unprofitable dispositions of the fruits and rents etc of the Abbey, His Majesty revoked all gifts tacks and feus made since 26 April 1578 with certain exceptions. This revocation was confirmed by the Privy Council on 11 December 1584. In the Register of the Privy Council of date 22 March 1585 is an entry that the rents of Dunfermline Abbey are to the King's use but all the late

Commendator's benefices have been dilapidated through certain gifts pensions and monks portions. There is exaggeration here.

In obedience to Queen Mary, Pitcairn had given Richardson, her Treasurer, the feu rights of Abbey lands. Rev. Dr Chalmers, the gifted and accurate local historian of Dunfermline, says that within ten years from Queen Mary's letter from Dumbarton of 18 July 1563 (hereinbefore noticed) about three fourths of the whole Abbey lands including most of the lands in Dunfermline Parish had been conveyed by Charters to the original tenants in accordance with the arrangement effected with her Treasurer.

These original tenants were not all tillers of the soil. Some of them were the local gentry. The old possessors and their lawyers knew their rights. As one example, we have a Minute of the Privy Council dated at Dalkeith 21 June 1581 as to a Complaint by 140 '*poor*' inhabitants of the towns of Inveresk Montounhall and Smeton to the effect that they and their predecessors had breeikit joicil their lands haldin of the Abbots of Dunfermline and rentallit by them for certain rents contained in the Abbey Rentals, and that Richardson had obtained a feu at the desire of Queen Mary on condition tht he should not heighten their rents or remove any of the auld tenants, but he was trying to increase their rents. Again on 1 July 1581 the Privy Council had a Complaint that some members of the Convent were refusing to delaying to sign Charters to kindly tenants which had already been signed by Robert Pitcairn and other members.

Dunfermline Abbey possessions eventually reached Anne, the Queen of James VI, substantially full; but certainly Robert Pitcairn had made some alienations including a Tack to his brother John for nineteen years of certain Teinds at an annual rent of £74 and his same brother had conveyances of Limekilns, Gellet, Masterton, Roscobie and Collier row Mill at annual feu duties. These subjects had been acquired by Robert Pitcairn in his own right from Richardson, the Queens Treasurer, for certain great sums of money paid and disbursed by the Commendator to Richardson and his niece.

On 6 July 1585 some tenants and feuars of Dunfermline Abbey had been '*charged*' by William, Commendator of Pittenweem (i.e. William Stewart formerly designed Colonel and Captain of the King's Guard), to pay their duties to him for crop 1584. They brought a Complaint before the Privy Council that they had already paid to David Durie of that ilk, heritable Bailie

of Dunfermline, but William Stewart successfully persuaded that the benefice had previously fallen vacant by the death of Commendator Pitcairn on 25 April<sup>1</sup> 1584 and he had obtained a gift thereof from the King. This must have been a gift for crop 1584 only. On 19 September 1583 the English Ambassador was reporting from Edinburgh to London that Stewart was to have Dunfermline.

From the time of Queen Mary's letter written in 1563 from Dumbarton to Robert Pitcairn, Commendator, it is evident that a long-term policy of the Crown was to obtain the benefit of the wealth of Dunfermline Abbey to the Crown, but things might be done when favourable political parties were in power. For example, in January 1583 Robert Pitcairn, Commendator, complained to the Privy Council that for his long and true services to his Majesty since his coronation His Majesty lately had given advice of His Council gave to Henry Pitcairn, his brother's son, the Abbey of Dunfermline, reserving Robert's own liferent, but the Macer Master of the Great Seal refused to have the gift expedited.

The Lords ordered this to be done. The grant had been given on 26 December 1582 to Henry for his lifetime. This was during the ascendancy of the Ruthven Raiders. In 1585, Patrick, Master of Gray, received a Crown grant of the Abbacy, which on his disgrace in 1587 was given to the Earl of Huntly. In 1593 an Act of Parliament annexed Dunfermline Abbey to the King and on 7 March following there was a resignation of it to the Queen by Henry Pitcairn of that ilk, Commendator.

On 19 October 1584 George Young who had been Pitcairn's 'servitor', succeeded him as Archdeacon of St Andrews, receiving the benefice thereof for life with the land rights and the office and jurisdiction of Conservator of the Privileges of the University of St Andrews vacated by the death of Robert Pitcairn. As his document of appointment is dated the day after Pitcairn's death, it must have been prepared and ready for use at that time. In the end of 1589 George Young was one of James' ambassadors to Oslo, Norway, on his marriage with Anne of Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> Should be October.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION & EPITAPH

Especially considering the fervour of Scots for informational independence, their long struggle against England, and their sufferings at the hands of the English, Robert Pitcairn did not tread a path of orthodoxy throughout his career of diplomatic negotiations in which the Scottish government sought help from Queen Elizabeth and placated her and her royal advisers, but the obstinacies were not all on one side as the Scots representatives were not surrendering their own or any essential Scottish interests. In the difficult circumstances, both parties had throughout in view a twofold object of establishment of protestantism and the impending union of the Crowns of England and Scotland. This is their defence and duty has to judge.

They were callous as to Mary Queen of Scots whom they may well have apprehended that her release might mean complete war in Scotland, with the overthrow of protestantism, and a major rebellion in England against Elizabeth's protestant government.

Pitcairn did not live to see the union of the crowns accomplished, nor was he ever to know of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, but in regard to his native land he did not fail in the traditional patriotism of the Scottish clergy. The Lords, of whom Pitcairn was one, were rebels against Queen Mary. They might have found some basis of accommodation with her after Bothwell was got rid of.

To what degree if any they were to blame for themselves assuming the government, once that government was established, Robert Pitcairn was a valuable public servant during the minority of James VI.

Queen Mary writing from her captivity to Queen Elizabeth stated that Pitcairn married another man's wife and that he was a vicious man.

She must have been speaking from hearsay, however, for there is a vituperative sentence containing a statement that in his life Pitcairn kept another man's wife. As such inexcusable conduct is not rare, it may be true that he thus followed the bad example of his uncle and of his late Archbishops. If the accusation is false, he was only suffering the gross slander which persons outrageously uttered about their opponents in those days.

Again in criticising Robert Pitcairn to Queen Elizabeth, as she was entitled to do, Queen Mary stated that he was crafty and 'and to serve all changes and turns'. On another occasion she described him as a man of great trust or honesty. If he was, as has been said by several, a careerist, he can stand no comparison in that respect with some of his meteoric contemporaries.

He retained his office as Secretary throughout four regencies, not by place-hunting, because not only was an appointment at those times deemed to be for life, but also while there were successive Regents there were no changes of Government involving change of office holders like him. A competent Secretary soon becomes indispensable. When there was a change of government after James's escape from the Ruthven raid, Pitcairn lost his Secretaryship, which he evidently loved as a influential position and vainly tried to retain. He was becoming old and weak.

No doubt as Secretary he drew certain emoluments and certain profits from the fees payable into his Department after remunerating the staff.

No doubt political jobbery, if any, could be done, but nothing is known of Pitcairn taking advantage of his position to extort bribes from suppliants or to receive Crown grants of lands, or escheat gifts from the spoils of the Church at large.

Halkett of Pitfirrane was a Crown vassal but some of his lands were held of Dunfermline Abbey. On Patrick Halkett's death in 1573 succeeded by his son George, Robert Pitcairn received a Crown gift of the heir's casualty of marriage, which he conveyed over to the heirs. It is possible that the fruits of office were not of prime importance to him. Possessed of a rich Abbey benefice, he had ample means and no compelling need to enter public life although it was to be expected that a man in his position would do his part in National affairs. He must have been ever busy throughout what was in his period a long life, and it is indicative of some physical courage and endurance that he undertook so many long venturesome and difficult journeys to London, the results of which could not always be very encouraging to him, beyond that he was personally treated with friendliness.

Later generations of Dunfermline parishioners have taken only a tepid interest in the memory of this Abbot who was a protestant commendator, in this minor historical figure so elusively ambassadorial and secretarial, or in his tombstone in the North aisle of their old Church with its Latin inscription characterised by Dr Chalmers, a former Parish Minister, as more laudatory than just and withal heathenish. The following is his translation: -

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On the whole it is a thoughtful composition as applicable to the man commemorated. The authoress of *‘History of the Fife Pitcairns’*, among much valuable and interesting information, has considerably given the following alternative version: -

*‘Here lies in a humble tomb Robert Pitcairn the hope and stay of his country whom virtue, gravity of a noble breast, and faith with true piety adorn. After various changes in life he passed in spirit into a better world his mortal remains being left behind.’*

Consideration of the events of Pitcairn’s closing years dispels any impression that he was a justly disgraced man before he died. To believe that he had deservedly fallen into dishonor because he was condemned by James VI it is necessary to assume that James was then a King mature in

years and in Royal honour and justice, whereas in fact he was an immature Lennox and Stewart, continually in want of money, handicapped by his essential loneliness and by his peculiar upbringing, character, and position, distracted by polemics, troubled by the restless intrigues of his mother and her friends and by the counter measurers of Queen Elizabeth, rendered suspicious by the turbulence of factions with their plots and counter plots, and under the influence of upstart favourites who were longing for Pitcairn's possessions.

George Buchanan described the Commendator as a man of wisdom and integrity.

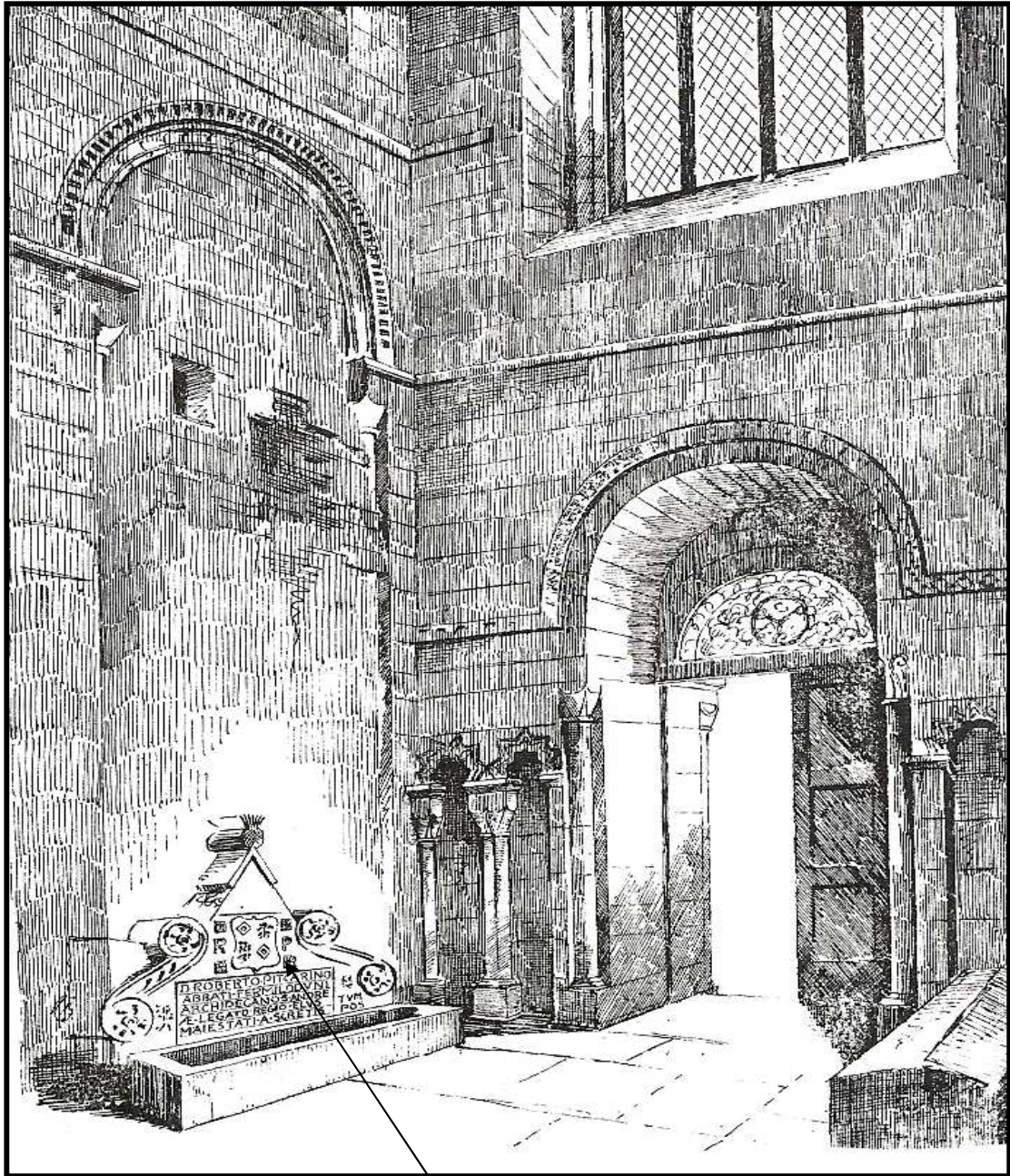
He was esteemed by Queen Elizabeth's statesmen. The burghers of Dunfermline were content with their '*Abbot*' and had no differences with him about their choice of Provost. There is some evidence that he was personally a kindly man in whom people could confide.

Pitcairn in the circumstances of his time maintained the traditional part of the Churchman and the Civil Service in the government of Scotland.

In his last year he suffered imprisonment and banishment for his share in the Raid of Ruthven, which, as James himself at first admitted, was '*good service*' to the Crown and country. But ultimately the question of the justice or otherwise of Pitcairn's treatment at the hands of King James and his confidants is of minor importance, the major position being that the politicians who ruled Scotland in James's minority, although using his name, were rebels against his mother Mary Queen of Scots, the last of the old Royal Stewart line. It is unnecessary to assume that their intentions were otherwise than good and patriotic and religious, or that they could reasonably have done other than they did, or that they were not approved by public opinion or that their strifes did harm to the people generally or that their government was not beneficial.

On all such points opinions may be much in their favour. They acted, as men do, in accordance with the intelligence and methods of their time: but the fact remains that they drove Mary from her Kingdom and seized and held the government themselves. Whether they were justified in their actions or not, they were bound to accept the consequences, immediate or remote. They had set up James. Some of them had a responsibility for his parents' marriage and therefore for his heredity. His environment was much

what they had made it. In any event they had upset the state, and we see that, one after the other, the Protestant Lords came in the end to suffer what was in store for them. Robert Pitcairn was a moderate man and a man of constancy in the public service he escaped the extreme fate of his more prominent colleagues.



Abbot Pitcairn's tomb in Dunfermline Abbey



Dunfermline Abbey Nave

Tomb of Robert Pitcairn moved to above fireplace.

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